

# THE POSTCOLONIAL JANE AUSTEN

EDITED BY YOU-ME PARK AND  
RAJESWARI SUNDER RAJAN

Postcolonial Literatures

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## The Postcolonial Jane Austen

Critics and students of Jane Austen's novels have long reflected upon her portrayals of the institution of marriage, the ideology of romantic relationships and the operation of the class system, but in recent years there has been an increased interest in the broader historical structure in which her work is embedded—a structure which includes colonialism and slavery.

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# **The Postcolonial Jane Austen**

**Edited by**

**You-me Park and  
Rajeswari Sunder Rajan**

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# Preface

This collection of essays on Jane Austen grows out of and exemplifies recent developments specifically in Austen criticism, but also in the institution of English literary studies as such, and more generally in contemporary cultural studies. The focus of the collection is on Austen viewed in light of postcolonial theory, as well as, reciprocally, upon postcolonial theory viewed in light of a certain 'Austen'. But first a preliminary note here about this project—about its conditions of possibility, and about its participants, intended to clarify 'why us?', in relation to Austen—equally, a question of 'why Austen?'

We, the editors of this volume, have worked so far largely in that growing and amorphous territory of contemporary 'cultural studies' that includes gender, postcolonial and regional (or 'area') studies. Yet our early training, up to and including graduate and doctoral studies, and even some first publications, were in British literary studies conventionally defined. Jane Austen, placed at the juncture of our different backgrounds in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literatures of Britain, was of interest to us both as a woman writer appearing in a key period of European political and imperial history, 1790 to 1820, and as the subject of several significant and remarkably interesting feminist, Marxist and postcolonial critical texts in recent times. The resurgence of popular interest in her work, as testified by a number of films in the 1990s based on her novels, was also an intriguing development in the phenomenon of 'Austen'.

If the entry of an Indian and a Korean woman into English literary studies is a function of our historical situation (a history explored at greater length in some of the essays in this volume), then our drift away into other fields of work was also enabled by the recent hospitality of disciplinary 'English' to these cognate academic areas.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly the volume began as something of a lark, as a response to the challenge of breaking into a field that is suspicious of both the credentials and the politics of non-native, non-English-speaking critics.<sup>2</sup> The establishment of English literary studies offers us legitimacy more grudgingly than do the area studies, gender, or postcolonial studies where we know our place, so to speak. But more seriously, our decision to 'return' to English literary studies was impelled by the desire to make sense of our intellectual histories and our association.

Our trajectories of travel brought us as graduate students to the United States. Within this broad familiar narrative, there are, inevitably, significant differences of detail. We have different forms of residence in the United States; and the interest we share, as Asian women, in English literature and postcolonial feminist cultural studies, is inflected differently by the obvious differences of the histories of India and Korea in relation to the West. If my connections with the English language and with English literature are defined by the intimacy of the colonial connection,<sup>3</sup> You-me's are those of the bi-lingual, bi-cultural comparatist grounded in her 'national' literature. If my politics grew out of a liberal feminist women's movement and activism within the profession of university teaching in Delhi, You-me's oppositional politics was located in Korean uprisings against US imperialism in the 1980s in Seoul. These differences have turned out to be the basis of a productive discussion about and around (in this instance) Austen and her work.

The point is not to reduce location to autobiography, but to view it in terms of a representative historical trajectory. If we wish to prevent the naturalization of our identity as Asian women in an 'alien' field, equally we must guard against exoticizing it. Our collaboration, with each other and with the contributors to this volume, is after all historically made possible by a contemporary postcolonial situation, one of whose aspects is precisely the internationalization of cultural production. This has meant the opening up of possibilities of academic collaboration across borders. The conditions of the international academic industry—publication, travel, professional diaspora, international conferences, new technologies of communication, and the institutionalization of postcolonial studies—have made it possible for us to identify and invite those from different places but shared interests to contribute to this volume. That they responded to our invitation is primarily a reflection of their friendship, and their trust in us who are not the 'natural' repositories of scholarship about our object of study; for both we are grateful. It is also a sign of the acceptance within the profession of the extension of the boundaries of the study of canonical writers that the new frameworks of cultural studies have made possible within the discipline of 'English', and it is this space that this volume occupies.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan  
New Delhi/Washington, DC

### Notes

- 1 As Arjun Appadurai observes about cultural studies today, 'In this postblur blur, it is crucial to note that the high ground has been seized by English literature (as a discipline) in particular and literary studies in general. This is the nexus where the word *theory*, a rather prosaic term in many fields for many centuries, suddenly took on the sexy ring of a trend.... Social scientists look on with bewilderment as their colleagues in English and comparative literature talk (and fight) about matters that,

until as recently as fifteen years ago, would have seemed about as relevant to English departments as, say, quantum mechanics' (Appadurai 1996:51).

- 2 F.R.Leavis's outburst is revealing. Speaking of the Ph.D. degree in the English school at Cambridge (Leavis is writing in the 1960s), he stipulates that Cambridge must maintain standards: the ideal student should be a 'First class tripos man' [sic]. Instead, he finds a 'besieging host, ever-increasing, of Indians, Africans, Commonwealth people in general, who aspire to become university teachers of English literature, and must therefore have a Ph.D.'—but who, he complains, cannot even pass an English Tripos! (Leavis 1969: 194–5).
- 3 I adapt the term from the title of Ashis Nandy's book on colonialism, *The Intimate Enemy*.

### References

- Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Leavis, F.R. (1969) *English Literature in Our Time and the University*, London: Chatto & Windus.
- Nandy, A. (1983) *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

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Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, for 'The Accomplished Sportswoman', from *The Sporting Magazine*, vol. 4 (June 1794), opposite p. 154 (reference shelfmark: Vet.A5 e875).

Molara Ogundipe for her poem, 'To a "Jane Austen" class at Ibadan University'.

# **Part I**

## **Introduction**

# 1

## Austen in the world

### Postcolonial mappings

*Rajeswari Sunder Rajan*

To view or, more actively to *set* Austen ‘in the world’, is, we maintain, a postcolonial enterprise. The essays in this volume are mappings of textual/cultural itineraries and destinations, to persist with the geographical metaphor. What are the ways in which Austen may be said to be ‘in the world’? Why is such a location ‘postcolonial’? This introductory essay sets out to place and circumscribe Austen criticism in an effort to track the reaches of postcolonial theory today. In that sense it is less about Austen than about a/(this) book about her. Austen is not treated here simply as an exemplary case, however. A historical and textual/‘literary’ Austen—and hence ways of understanding her work—is central to the project of this book. The essays are arranged in two parts, titled ‘Austen at home’, and ‘Austen abroad’, consciously echoing Edward Said’s argument that nineteenth-century English novelists shaped the ‘idea of England’ in ways that depended on the relationship between ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ (Said 1993:72). The extent to which this is so, and the simultaneous deconstruction of the division itself, is what the essays individually and together set out to establish.

A preliminary clarification about what is *not* intended by ‘postcolonial’ in our invocation of the term. Though politically informed criticism known in the academy by such identifying marks as ‘postcolonial’ (or feminist, minority, Marxist, queer, as the case may be) is often taken to indicate the special interests of its practitioners (women/non-white/working class/gay/lesbian)—and in the best situations tolerated within a (often repressive) liberal ideology of pluralism or multiculturalism—it is the contrary agenda of *universalizing* these concerns—of making it everybody’s business—that informs such work. Reading Austen postcolonially is not one critical ‘approach’ among others, uniquely propagated by ‘postcolonial’ critics, but rather, an inescapable historical imperative in our times. Postcolonial criticism calls for an engagement that is attentive to all forms of relations of domination. It traces these to the histories of colonialism and identifies their connections to and complicities with the present, in politics as in culture. If we recuperate and reinstall Austen in our world, it is also as an Austen for our times.

The postcolonial method, therefore, to put it simply, is to locate texts and criticism in time and place. The insistence upon this ‘worldliness’ of texts, Edward Said has passionately argued, is a way of recognizing that they are ‘always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society—in short, they are in the world, hence worldly’ (Said 1984:35). Following from this, criticism too will require the critic’s ‘worldly self-situating’ (15) and involve an active ‘engagement’ (35) with texts. This is a ‘secular’ criticism, secularism being yet another and related meaning of worldliness, for Said exemplified in Ernest Renan’s reduction of divine texts to ‘objects of historical materiality’ in the nineteenth century (46). This has been a crucial development for literary criticism, where there has been a comparable secularization of the ‘humanities’ and ‘literature’: from being the domain of universal and unquestioned values, they are now viewed as a site of contestation and struggle over meanings. For Austen studies, more specifically, ‘secularism’ also signals a historical moment and an authorial stance that reflect a significant disenchantment with the religious and its replacement by humanist values of the ‘self’, as my discussion of Lionel Trilling’s criticism of Austen, below, indicates (as also does Nalini Natarajan’s essay in this volume).

Austen studies has been politicized in the academy in ways that reflect this sense of the worldliness of texts. Two kinds of development may be identified: in literary criticism, the new kinds of questions posed to and by her novels; and in the institution of literary studies, the interrogation of ‘English’ conducted, specifically but not solely, within a postcolonial context. These developments in relation to Austen and her works are discussed in the first two parts of this introductory essay. The concluding section explores the concept of the ‘universal’ in relation to literature and culture (here represented by ‘Austen’), in the belief that this is a key postcolonial theoretical concern. These critical, institutional and theoretical questions together constitute the problematic—which we term postcolonial—within which Austen is viewed and presented in the essays in this volume.

The ‘alternative Austen’ that is offered in the pioneering critical work of the 1970s, I suggest here, is above all a worldly one in the several senses of the word: as representative of Lionel Trilling’s major modern *secular* value of ‘sincerity’; as partaking of the *economic* ‘dialectic of acquisition and representation’, and the ‘contests of money and power’ that Raymond Williams traces in the country-house poem and novel of the eighteenth century; and as the *historical* figure and product of the political controversies in England in the post-revolutionary decades that Marilyn Butler constructs.

Following this earlier work and building upon it, recent criticism of Austen’s novels locates them in a geographically expansive world, the world that European travel, exploration, commerce, military adventure and imperialism brought into being and redefined in terms of colonial relations of domination, raced, classed and gendered. The novels thus constitute a *colonial discourse*, not only by partaking in this changed world, but by actively marking its

transformation in these ways. Questions of gender posed within and against this nationalist-imperialist project have radically reevaluated the ‘domestic’ novel, the genres of manners and conduct, the meanings of ‘home’, femininity, women’s labour, marriage and alliance, and the tropes of place, travel, and mobility. In recent feminist criticism Jane Austen’s work is ‘in the world’ in this significant sense of interrogating the gendered *public-private* ascription of spheres of activity—which includes writing. Feminist criticism of this kind is not only produced within a postcolonial problematic, but radically reconfigures it in terms of its analysis of gender.

Austen’s texts are ‘in the world’ in a literal geographical sense as a consequence of contingent historical and institutional factors, primarily British colonialism and United States global hegemony. As a consequence of British colonialism, English literary studies was institutionalized in many distant parts of the world, providing a different—and frequently unsettling—context for the dissemination and recuperation of the ‘English book’. And in the new world order Austen represents Western cultural capital and hegemony in differently mediated ways. How has Austen been transposed into these different contexts? How does Western ‘culture’ resonate in the ‘Third World’? How does the historical method contend with—contesting or succumbing to—the forces of capital and cosmopolitanism? These are some of the questions engaged in the second part of this introduction.

And finally, in the concluding part of this essay, I interrogate the *universal*, offered as a description of the value of ‘great’ literature, its transcendence of the time and place of its origins. Postcolonial theory is above all marked by acute *angst* over a Western intellectual hegemony which masquerades as ‘universalism’. It has therefore been concerned to expose the forms of particularity and exclusion on which colonialism’s creation of the foundational categories of the ‘human’, the ‘civilized’, or the ‘universal’, has relied, and to denounce the ethnocentrism, the historical limits, the power-knowledge nexus, the depredations of Enlightenment reason, science and modernity upon the colonial world, and the continuing forms of Western cultural imperialism in a neo-colonial world order. Much of this work is clearly of a reactive order, much of it is marked by an impossible nostalgia for an imagined pre-colonial/indigenous cultural plenitude and authenticity, and much is animated by the desire to ‘provincialize Europe’. Austen, it seems to us, is a site for some reflexive takes upon these postcolonial positions. How may we deliberate upon universality, its possibility and its value, in the context of ‘literature’? Can we locate Austen’s texts in a historical context which is also a specific *cultural* context? What does such a reverse-anthropological project imply for postcolonialism’s methods of enquiry? In the following pages I pursue some of these enquiries in greater detail, as preparation for and introduction to the explorations undertaken by the essays.

## ‘Alternative’ Austen

### *Criticism in the 1970s*

An ‘alternative’ Austen has emerged and substantially taken shape in the work of a number of distinguished scholars since the 1970s. The question of her stature long settled, the new questions about Austen’s work relate to her historical location, her politics and, through these, her meanings for the present. This Austen, viewed in the expansive contexts of English Jacobinism, the anti-slavery campaigns, feminism, nationalism, imperialism,<sup>1</sup> bourgeois-gentry class ideologies, sexuality, and most recently colonialism, has replaced the novelist whose description in terms of *limits* was as much self-deprecatingly self-propagated as anything else, as Jon Mee observes in his essay in this collection. Those limits, identified in the form, themes, and style of the novels—variously, comedy, gentility, English provinciality, tradition, upper-class leisure, courtship and marriage—had been perceived as matters either of Austen’s decorum or ignorance or, in more formalist terms, of a deliberate and knowing irony—the first two attributable to her class-location and her gender, the irony variously to her temperament or to the genre of her writing (satire, comedy of manners, country-house novel).<sup>2</sup>

Three critics of the 1970s definitively shift the Austen question, I suggest, outside the critical arguments carried on within these sentimental and formal modes: Lionel Trilling, Raymond Williams and Marilyn Butler. Different from each other, they yet combine to give Austen a seriousness that has made possible our continuing engagement with her work, and open her work to debates that have continued unabated. (For all three, significantly, it is *Mansfield Park* which is the locus of criticism.) The larger context within which my discussion of Austen criticism here is framed, is the shift in literary criticism itself from the influential formalist methods of the New Criticism towards a more politically engaged scholarship in the 1970s; but a full-fledged analysis remains outside its bounds. Short-hand references to the historical events of the 1950s and the 1960s—‘Suez’, ‘Hungary’, ‘Korea’, ‘Vietnam’, ‘Algeria’, ‘McCarthy’, the ‘Cold War’—references to the West’s involvement in wars, decolonization, Communism—must suffice to indicate the climate of the seventies in which ‘culture’ became a crucial term and terrain for political engagement. Feminism, civil rights, anti-racism, the crisis on the left, the crisis of liberalism in Britain and in the United States are the positions from which Trilling, Williams and Butler engage with Austen, in their different ways.

Trilling’s landmark 1971 book, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, placed Austen centrally within a broadly Western current of ideas of the self, specifically the demand for ‘sincerity’ that the moral life placed upon the individual in the modern European world. In observing already in *The Opposing Self* (1955), that in Austen’s novels ‘society, the general culture’ plays a part in the ‘moral life’, Trilling is remarking upon those aspects of her work that had earned her

membership in F.R. Leavis's 'Great Tradition' of the English novel (1947). His claim that it was Jane Austen 'who first represented the specifically modern personality and the culture in which it had its being', drew, however, primarily from Hegel's argument about the 'secularization of spirituality' that characterizes the modern age. As *Sincerity and Authenticity* makes clear fifteen years later, her place in this Hegelian frame of ideas, and her 'lineal descent' from Rousseau, give her a more radically formative role in Western secular modernity. This is a daring, and historically problematic, claim, but for Trilling it does much to account for the meaning of Austen in his times, a question that he is however still puzzling in his last, and unfinished, essay 'Why We Read Jane Austen' (1975; published in 1979). I shall return to the rather different implications of that essay later. That Trilling was recasting Austen in a large gesture of appropriation is undeniable, but it does not reduce the potential of Austen to be so recuperable in another place and time.<sup>3</sup> By giving her a significance in a broader historical frame than that of the England of 1795 to 1817, within the Europe of the 'last four hundred years', instead, he offers her work in terms of one of the West's major ideological configurations for our postcolonial understanding.

If Rousseau is the figure Trilling allies Austen with, against the grain of their distance and difference from each other, then Raymond Williams places her, for contrast, alongside Gilbert White, the English naturalist, and William Cobbett, the radical journalist, her contemporaries and neighbours in the counties of Hampshire and Surrey. At the beginning of the famous chapter, 'Three around Farnham', in *Country and the City* (1973), Williams urges his readers to: 'Imagine a journey, for example, round a thirty-mile triangle of roads, in the turning years of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.... In this small locality, overlapping within a generation, there were these three people, three writers, who could hardly be more different' (Williams 1973:108). His vivid conjuring up of geographical location and address establishes the writers firmly within a novelistic *chronotope*. At the same time Williams is calling attention to the differences of class that separate their 'points of view, interpretations, selection of realities' (108), most strikingly the difference that 'Jane Austen was writing from inside the houses that Cobbett was passing on the road' (112). Yet both are writing, as he says, 'social [criticism], in the widest sense' (118). It is this sense of literature as social criticism—which is always, for Williams, also a critique of capitalism—and of Jane Austen's centrality in recording one of the major historical currents of the time, the 'social history of the landed families' (113), that constitutes the importance to us of what Williams has to say about Austen as a writer. In thus shifting the emphasis from Austen as a novelist of personal relationships to one analysing 'personal *conduct*' (113, emphasis in original), and from a novelist recording a 'traditional' world to one following the *changes* of fortune of a social class (the landed gentry), Williams broadens the scope and significance of her work. Nor is he indifferent, in this context, to the facts that will later, in Edward Said's landmark essay on

*Mansfield Park*, be made much of: both that Sir Thomas Bertram is a colonial proprietor in Antigua, and that Austen elides the implications of this fact, the latter since, while she may be quick to see and judge land as a source of income, she is blind to money of other kinds, ‘from the trading houses, from the colonial plantations’, that for her ‘it has to be converted to these signs of order to be recognised at all’ (115).

Marilyn Butler places Austen in a different political context, primarily within the controversies that animated English writers in the years following the French Revolution (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 1975). In viewing her as a woman writer and within a tradition of women writers Butler’s book also anticipated the spate of feminist critical works on Austen in the 1980s; but her representation of Austen as a ‘Tory feminist’, and her argument that an Austen novel is not ‘only a woman’s novel’, but is ‘among other things a woman’s novel’ (Introduction to 1987 edition, xxxiii, emphasis in original), sets her apart (and against) the later feminist scholarship on Austen. In line with her plea that the canonical writer be aligned with, or constellated as it were among other, lesser writers of her time so that a true historical understanding and evaluation of her work may be reached—a plea whose larger implications I shall return to—she also argues that Austen’s work would be most productively and correctly viewed in terms of its politics and its contemporary influence, and in relation to the largely forgotten minor sentimental novels of the 1790s and the novels of Maria Edgeworth. If her Austen is a more significant political—or, more accurately, *partisan*—writer than had until then been acknowledged, she was also one with considerably less resonance outside the context of English anti-Jacobinism in the early eighteenth century.

It is with these three books of the 1970s, I would suggest, that the way is opened for new readings of Austen’s novels in the 1980s in the explicit frames of feminist, Marxist and postcolonial politics.

### *Colonial discourse*

A position that has now gained widespread acceptance and influence, put forward by Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said among others, is that British literature of the nineteenth century cannot be separated from British imperial activity in the period, and must therefore be regarded—beyond simply participating in a colonial logic—as constituting a *colonial discourse*.<sup>4</sup> Said’s essay on *Mansfield Park* in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) has a central importance not only in postcolonial revaluations of the English canonical texts, but in defining the enterprise of postcolonial criticism itself. Unlike Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*—earlier works long recognized as texts of colonialism, and subjected both to criticism in this light and to endless anti-colonial rewriting and appropriation—other English literary texts have only recently, and in response to such injunctions, begun to be perceived in light of their implication within British imperial history, very largely because, as in the case of *Mansfield*

*Park*, they have tended to elide that implication. Austen's novels, long held to be unconcerned with the contemporary events of her time and free therefore of politics or partisanship, were of course particularly exempt from such analysis (as Clara Tuite points out in her essay in this collection, even where 'the Antigua connection' in *Mansfield Park* was discreetly observed and annotated as such in earlier articles, its political implications never called forth any overt comment).

Said's article therefore was striking in its impact, even though it—self-avowedly—only set out to give 'greater explicitness and width to Williams's survey' in terms of 'space, geography and location' in the novel (Said 1993:84). Said indicts Austen for merely *assuming* (instead of exploring) 'the importance of an empire to the situation at home' (89), insists upon the scandal of *Mansfield Park*'s values by politicizing the Antigua connection, and reads the novel predominantly in terms of the reality *and* metaphor of plantation slavery in eighteenth-century England. The ideological symmetry between country and city in Williams's terms is transposed in Said's analysis on to the relationship between colony and England.

Said's reading is not without problems, both as a matter of interpretation of Austen's style (he overlooks, for example, the operation and effects of irony), as well as in historical understanding (of her position on abolition, for instance); and subsequent critics have productively argued with him about both. In this volume, Jon Mee, Clara Tuite and Elaine Jordan all take on Said's work in their own discussions of *Mansfield Park*, extending his observations, introducing greater nuance and complexity into his argument, and questioning some of his conclusions. Thus Mee ('Austen's treacherous ivory: female patriotism, domestic ideology, and Empire') would insist upon the different relationship between Empire and Englishness in Austen's 1814 novel from the one Victorians like John Stuart Mill (whom Said quotes) expounded: more difficult and complicated, and less sanguine about the consequences of colonial rule for domestic prosperity. Clara Tuite ('Domestic retrenchment and imperial expansion: the property plots of *Mansfield Park*') similarly asks (in line with Moira Ferguson's reading of the discourse of development) that we read *Mansfield Park* within its historical context, as a post-abolition, pre-emancipation narrative, extending Said's analysis so that we may see what he misses, namely that the novel actually registers the coincidence of British imperial expansion with the diminution of the aristocratic family. Both she and Elaine Jordan (in 'Jane Austen goes to the seaside: *Sanditon*, English identity and the "West Indian" schoolgirl') take exception to Said's confident dismissal of the possibility of Austen's being an abolitionist, the one invoking Austen's 'discretion' as a narrative strategy, the other arguing that abolition was a typical 'modern' position that characterized a younger generation, Austen herself as much as Fanny in the novel.

Despite this, and despite the questionable originality and accuracy of his observations about *Mansfield Park*, Said's *Culture and Imperialism* remains an important manifesto of the agenda of postcolonial literary criticism. Said defines

the critic's task as one of voicing resistance, of speaking back, to the text of imperialism:

But just because Austen referred to Antigua in *Mansfield Park* or to realms visited by the British navy in *Persuasion* without any thought of possible responses by the Caribbean or Indian natives resident there is no reason why we should do the same. We know now that these non-European peoples did not accept with indifference the authority projected over them, or the general silence on which their presence in variously attenuated forms is predicated. We must therefore read the great canonical texts, and perhaps also the entire archive of modern and pre-modern European and American culture, with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented... in such works.

(Said 1993:66)

Clearly he regards his own work in this light. The 'natives' he speaks of did engage with English literature, not least because colonial education had facilitated their intimate, frequently critical, acquaintance with it. As Patrick Hogan has pointed out, Rabindranath Tagore, in his celebrated novel *Gora* (1913), includes an episode of theatricals (a conflict over Indians performing for a British official audience), juxtaposed to a reference to indigo plantations, both allusions to *Mansfield Park* which become a telling commentary upon that text's silences and add ironic dimension to his own novel's narrative about the self-discovery of Gora, an Englishman brought up as a Hindu Brahmin.<sup>5</sup>

Readings of English texts as colonial discourse are not, however—except at a very elementary level—matters only of identifying their imperial thematics, uncovering their implicit ethnocentrism or their domestic/provincial/nationalistic self-centredness, and speaking an ideological indictment. Rather we have to grant that a whole range of connections exists with questions of class, race and gender, and that the ideology of the text (including its ethnocentrism) is a complex and contradictory matter. The recent work of Ann Stoler on Foucault and the discourses of race and sexuality has alerted us to the possibility (which Foucault himself has briefly acknowledged despite his neglect of Europe's history of imperialism) that 'external colonialism provided a template for conceptualizing social inequities in Europe' (Stoler 1995:75). Colonial studies, she points out,

have pushed us to rethink European cultural genealogies across the board and to question whether the key symbols of modern western societies—liberalism, nationalism, state welfare, citizenship, culture, and 'Europeanness' itself—were not clarified among Europe's colonial exiles and by those colonized classes caught in their pedagogic net...and only then brought 'home'.

(Stoler 1995:16)

The transactions between metropole and colony in these ways—as well as many others reflective of (political, military) coercion and (economic) exploitation beyond ‘racism’, as such—are now acknowledged to be central to the shaping of European culture, and it is in light of such acknowledgement that English literary texts are being newly interrogated.

Judith Plotz in her essay in this collection (‘Jane Austen goes to India: Emily Eden’s semi-detached home thoughts from abroad’) reads Emily Eden’s sketches, letters and journals based on her India years as colonial discourse in this sense (Eden serving as a ‘surrogate’ Austen, in terms of the form and style of her writing), but also examines her post-India novel, *The Semi-Detached House* (1859), as a national allegory of a new kind of destabilized Britishness. Plotz and Jordan both see the development of English identity in the nineteenth century as crucially (if implicitly or even unconsciously) dependent on constructions of racial ‘otherness’, which intersect with issues of class, gender and sexuality. As Julianne Pidduck reminds us, ‘the domestic chronotype of the white woman is particularly resonant in historical discourses of imperialism’ (see p. 131). Colonial discourse analysis thus identifies a new thematics in European culture, but more than that it discerns a simultaneous construction and radical questioning of national (or European) identity itself in response to the historical pressures of colonialism.

### *Questions of gender*

Austen as a woman writer has meant different things at different times for criticism. For over a century since her death, ‘woman writer’ remained a condescending description drawing from the limits of the world she represented and its preoccupations with women and marriage; from about the 1930s on Austen criticism developed into a more serious evaluation (and valorization) of her fiction in terms of what was regarded as some alternatively formal or essentially feminine qualities she possessed (observation, irony, moral discrimination, sensibility); and in the 1970s it partook of the subversive nature of (all) women’s writing in a patriarchal society that radical feminist criticism asserted.<sup>6</sup>

But when Austen’s novels began to be viewed in the context of larger national, European and imperial structures of events, ideas and ideologies (rather than as being impervious to them as the writings of ‘women writers’ were held to be), the question of gender and, centrally, that of domesticity, had to be rethought in conjunction with these other questions about the nation, commerce, slave trade, war, military conquest, travel. Margaret Kirkham (1983), Mary Poovey (1984), Nancy Armstrong (1987), Glaudiajohnson (1988), Meenakshi Mukherjee (1991), Moira Ferguson (1993) and Maaja Stewart (1993), among other contemporary feminist critics, have located women’s self-fashioning and

the interrogation of concepts of home/ domestic/private as the central concerns of women's novels of the nineteenth century, including Austen's. Their criticism poses and addresses questions such as: what is the significance of bourgeois femininity and domesticity in the context of colonial exchange? How did the construction of leisure affect the ways women's space, work, subjectivities were imagined in nineteenth-century England? How is the trope and narrative function of travel and other forms of mobility—and, by contrast, fixity—gendered? How is the 'domestic' threatened, breached, and then reconsolidated in face of an insurrectionary 'outside'? A whole range of issues and considerations was thus brought into play that considerably extended the meanings of female selfhood and the domestic sphere in women's writings.

The essays in this collection are very largely concerned with similar questions. You-me Park (in 'Father's daughters: critical realism examines patriarchy in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Pak Wanso's *A Faltering Afternoon* [Hwichongkorinun Ohu]') discusses a modern Korean novel whose marriage 'theme' is represented as a brutal exchange of women's sexuality and bodies, within a Korean 'modernity' that juggles the inheritance of traditional patriarchy backed by Japanese colonial authority, and the onslaught of a new form of patriarchy supported by hegemonic Western culture. The thematic similarities between Pak Wanso's novel, *A Faltering Afternoon* [Hwichongkorinun Ohu] and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*—a function of actual literary influence—allow us to probe the complicit relationship between patriarchy and capitalism in transitional societies. Nalini Natarajan (in 'Reluctant Janeites: daughterly value in Jane Austen and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Swami*') draws our attention to the theme of 'daughterly value' developed in *Emma*—in the precise senses of both economic and sentimental considerations that the term 'value' denotes—and examines it in the context of colonial cultural exchange between Britain and India, in both cases as a matter of constructing a feminine domestic ideal for an emergent bourgeoisie in these societies. Clara Tuite transposes the question of bourgeois femininity and domesticity on to the genre(s) of *Mansfield Park*, as both country-house novel (operating within the expansive topos of town and country, recast as nation and empire), and domestic novel (which thematizes the 'domestic turn inward...to the cultivation and consolidation of the smaller circle' (see p. 100), that of the family). Jon Mee borrows from Linda Colley's identification of the 'female patriot' in wartime Britain between 1793 and 1815, to describe Austen's simultaneous challenge to patriarchy and support of the domestic in the preservation of the nation. The association of 'Englishness' with 'home and hearth' meant that women had a special authority in these decades, and domestic virtue held a privileged place *vis-à-vis* nation and empire. Both the essays on Austen films in the 1990s are concerned with the construction of female white (postcolonial) subjects configured by the binary concepts of physical mobility/fixity, excess/regulation, unbounded sexual desire/heterosexuality contained in marriage. In 'Of windows and country walks: frames of space and movement in 1990s Austen adaptations', Julianne Pidduck

interrogates images of (female) fixity and (male) mobility in these films, and through this diagnoses their veiled presentist concerns, specifically in proposing a feminist individualist ‘liberation’ for their heroines. In ‘Clueless in the neo-colonial world order’, Gayle Wald engages—via Emma and Cher (*Clueless*’s heroine)—a question frequently overlooked in feminist studies of imperialism preoccupied with the ‘Third World’ woman, that of imperialism’s consequences for the construction of the ‘First World’ woman—who emerges from this encounter as privileged consumer, ‘clueless’ world citizen and feminized (heterosexual) subject.

In locating these questions within a ‘postcolonial’ problematic, we are suggesting less a thematics than the very conditions of possibility of this kind of feminist criticism, and pointing to the productive coming together of gender, race, class, sexuality and imperialism as analytical categories. Donna Landry’s essay in this volume, ‘Learning to ride at Mansfield Park’, for instance, is recognizably a feminist historical project, but the attention to, interest in, investigation of— in short, the significance attached to—women’s riding and exercise that it exemplifies, emerges from a Foucauldian understanding of bio-power and its inflection by works like Stoler’s. Not only does such a ‘reading’ direct our attention to an overlooked and naturalized aspect of the Austen text—something traditional criticism is also expected to do—it also, as postcolonial feminist criticism, brings into visibility the ways in which colonial racism (often invisibly) framed issues of class, gender and sexuality around European women’s bodies in the nineteenth century. Elaine Jordan’s essay develops a similar focus on the female body, here that of the racially coded West Indian woman: nineteenth-century novels’ criticism of mulatto women’s showy clothes signifies sexual desire in the text and a corresponding fear of miscegenation—which is in turn linked to anxiety about the possible adverse impact of colonial commerce on English economy and traditional social hierarchies.

## Global Austen

### *The ‘English book’*

Jane Austen is second only to Shakespeare in her significance to ‘English literature’. The Austen of the literary canon enshrined in disciplinary English studies has therefore, like him, been called upon to bear the brunt of those interrogations of ‘English’—as language, literature, nation, ideology—that have begun to be articulated most conspicuously from postcolonial places, even as literary criticism in general grows more reflexive about the discipline and institution of literary studies.<sup>7</sup> Molaru Ogundipe’s poem, ‘To a “Jane Austen” class’ (Ogundipe-Leslie 1985/1994, reprinted in this volume), initiated the kind of polemical awakening to the functions of the English text in postcolonial Africa that Ngugi wa Thiong’o so powerfully developed in his essays in

*Decolonizing the Mind* in 1986. In India, the study of English has met with equally vehement opposition in the context of postcolonial nationalism and educational debates, even as it has retained its value in the context of continuing neo-colonial ties with Britain reinforced by US global hegemony. A ‘crisis in English studies’ is announced by the questions about relevance, historical connections, comparative studies and the making of the canon that are beginning to be articulated out of these situations—and as they begin to be taken account of in mainstream (Anglo-American) literary criticism. In this and the next sections I explore these different yet related locations of the crisis—the former colonies, and the metropole—and their distinct politics, as these impact upon Austen studies today and specifically as they inform the essays that constitute this volume.

The issue of English literary studies in India (within which Austen occupies a prominent space, as Nalini Natarajan points out in her essay in this volume) has been provocatively addressed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in an essay appropriately titled ‘The Burden of English Studies’. Spivak remarks upon the ‘gradual cultural alienation’ of the Indian student of English literature who is called upon to relate to the culture of a ‘vague space called Britain, even England, in its transaction with Europeanness (meaning of course Western Europe), Hellenism and Hebraism, the advent of Euroamericanism, the trendiness of Commonwealth literature, and the like’ (Spivak 1992:276). In internalizing ‘this play of cultural self-representation’, the student undergoes the ‘subtlest kind of cultural and epistemic transformation’, ‘a kind of upward race-mobility’ (ibid.).

‘Upward race-mobility’ is a concept which has powerful explanatory force in a global context in which English is cultural capital of great value. At the same time the horizon which the postcolonial subject pursues in his (more often her) imagined mobility, is an ever-receding one. As in the case of other colonial desires, the mobility is real but the goal must remain unattainable—we cannot aspire to read Austen the way educated British subjects read her. The point is no longer to build up this familiar *ressentiment*, but rather to ask what shifts both postcolonial subjectivities and English texts undergo in this process, and what kind of interest and profit there might be in pursuing such readings-in-transit.

Such questions have provoked, and been provoked by, recent studies of the culture of colonialism. The dissemination of the ‘English book’ outside Britain and outside the English-speaking world was primarily of course a consequence of British rule in the colonies, though Western cultural criticism has claimed universal ‘greatness’ as the basis for the popularity and endurance of the European classics.<sup>8</sup> Gauri Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest* (1990) provides a genealogy and historical narrative of English literary studies in India as a particular strategy of colonial rule. English literature’s specific agenda of acculturating the Indian ‘babu’, and its service in the place of the missionary text and tract as a representative imperial culture, made it explicitly ideological in function in India. Other well-documented and persuasively argued accounts of the curricular study of English in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries explain the conditions of its introduction and spread in both England and its other

colonies.<sup>9</sup> While its hegemony met with resistance from colonial subjects, this was never a matter of simple rejection but rather one of ambivalent embrace, appropriation and critical and creative recuperation, as often put to subversive ends as functioning as acculturation—indeed the distinction between the two is hard to tell.

Homi Bhabha provides a theoretical explanation in terms of colonial ‘mimicry’, within which we might view this phenomenon of English in the colonies. He tells the story eloquently, of the Englishman’s ‘sudden, fortuitous discovery of the English book’ in ‘the wild and wordless wastes of colonial India, Africa, the Caribbean’. In this scene, the book is not a ‘plentiful presence’, but is marked instead by its ‘belatedness’ (Bhabha 1994:107). Austen, as much as any other English book, both produces ‘ambivalence’ in such a setting and undergoes mutations itself. Like the postcolonial theorist, the postcolonial novelist too exploits the rich ironies and complexities of the estrangement of English literature ‘elsewhere’. The odd presence of Austen in Meerut, *Emma* in Lahore, or *Mansfield Park* in Miranda House, has not gone unnoticed in recent postcolonial texts.<sup>10</sup> I glean a few signs of her appearance in these different places and conjunctures. ‘Jane Austen in Meerut’ is mocked in Upamanyu Chatterjee’s novel *English, August* (1988) in this conversation between the novel’s English-educated hero (a probationer civil servant) and his publisher friend, about the meaningless ritual study of the English classics in small-town mofussil India:

‘Dr. Prem Kishen [a writer of college cribs for English texts] holds a Ph.D. on Jane Austen from Meerut University. Have you ever been to Meerut? A vile place, but comfortably Indian. What is Jane Austen doing in Meerut?... Why is some Jat teenager in Meerut reading Jane Austen? Why does a place like Meerut have a course in English at all?... That’s why education [in India] is a real challenge.’

(Chatterjee 1988:170)

For Sara Suleri as a young girl, writing in her memoir *Meatless Days* (1989), her Welsh mother teaching *Emma* in Kinnaird College in Lahore was a different cup of tea altogether, a treat not to be missed: “‘What’, I exclaimed, “rehearse right now, and miss my mother teaching *Emma*?’”

Whenever was there such a perfect match, I thought entranced, between teacher and the task? Task and teacher seemed wedded as a voice marries thought, making it impossible to discern at which point one revealed the other’s reticence.

(Suleri 1989:153)

And then she goes on, in the same breath, to compare her mother to Mrs Ramsay in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, only ‘more invisible, more difficult to

discern' (154). Here's a world steeped in English literature, as love and intimacy channelled through the (English) mother, not simply a knowledge of books but a way of knowing provided by them.<sup>11</sup>

And of course Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) is an entire—voluminous—novel written 'in imitation of' Austen, which includes allusions to the heroine's reading of *Emma* as a code for the marriage choices she faces; the implications of such a literary homage and mode are explored at length by Himansu Mohapatra and Jatin Nayak in this volume ('Farewell to Jane Austen: uses of realism in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*'). These references to the Austen novel's presence and function, both bizarre and everyday, outside the place of its origin, we must note, appear in *English* language novels by writers of the Indian sub-continent, itself a phenomenon produced by its colonial history.

It is therefore not only the critical recuperation and the pedagogic value of the English literary text that is of interest and significance in understanding 'Austen in the world', but this more diffusive sense of her 'influence' as a novelist that is to be found in the work of writers elsewhere. Such influence studies have to take into account the trajectory of the European bourgeois realist novel in the world—as more than a genre, as indeed defining the very subject-matter of narrative, as a thematics, as a dominant representational mode offering truth-knowledge, as a 'universal' epistemology. If the essays by Nalini Natarajan, Jatin Nayak and Himansu Mohapatra, and You-me Park in this volume which pursue the investigation of the 'influence' of Austen's novels in different times and places are not mere exercises in comparative criticism, it is because they insist upon the ways in which Austen's 'themes'—bourgeois marriage, domesticity, female 'conduct', daughterly value, property and propriety—and her novels' distinctive forms of critical, social and mimetic realism both apply and are intransigent to these different contexts. Austen is deliberately invoked and given play in the novels that are discussed in these essays—Sarat Chandra's novel in Bengali, *Swami*, Vikram Seth's in English, *A Suitable Boy*, and Pak Wanso's Korean works, *Pride and Fantasy* and *A Faltering Afternoon*. Austen in colonial or postcolonial novelistic appropriations is not merely matter for ironic contrast, or unironic adaptation: rather intertextuality operates in complex and interesting ways to both structure these novels and to read Austen in 'other' ways. (How) is our reading of Austen shaped by this knowledge? What does it tell us of the 'universalism' of her themes and interests—sexuality, marriage, conduct, women and domesticity, social relations of class—as well as the 'realism' in which they are encoded, that they find echoes in such different contexts as Korea, Pakistan, India? Or does it betray only the longing and the imitation of the colonial writer, a Naipaul, say, who 'turns his back on the hybrid half-made colonial world' in order to 'fix his eye on the universal domain of English literature' (Bhabha 1994: 107)? What, too, does it mean that 'Austen' may provide the colonial *woman* writer in the colonies with a lens for viewing the strangeness of her world, as in the case of Emily Eden? Are these examples of difference gendered as well as raced—is Austen an overdetermined choice for the Englishwoman in the

colonies, while for the postcolonial male writer the ‘universal domain of English literature’ (not the oxymoron it appears to be, at all) beckons? It is the historical and yet estranging recognition of the Austen novel in terms of the ‘English book’ in the non-West that allows us to trace these questions in postcolonial spaces.

*The ‘great books’ in the liberal cosmopolitan academy*

The English literary text that went out into the world as a document of ‘civilization’ gives the present-day liberal Anglo-American critic who has read Benjamin and Fanon, pause. How is the study of the great Western texts diverted from its humanist pursuits in light of the acknowledgement of the call to a ‘Third Imagination’, as Jerome McGann describes the point of view of the Third World? It is not that the West’s cultural works should be debunked, he explains, but rather that they must be ‘raised up from their narrowly imagined totalities, must be seen as part of that larger context that emerges when they are *specifically* situated, when they are delivered over to their historical and social localities’ (McGann 1989:88). McGann goes on:

The burden of the past that weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the West is an imperial burden, the anxiety that it might not all be of one piece, that secret histories, forgotten facts, other imaginations operate in all that we do and make, and that our massive ignorance of these Othernesses is working to undermine what we do.... Writers like Benjamin and Fanon call us towards that objectivity, to an imagining of poetical works in ways that will be trying to overcome the illusions those works themselves have helped to perpetuate. Every poem is an island that imagines itself a world; and it *is* a world—but not *the* world —because it is a world within and among other worlds.

(McGann 1989:88–9)

If the cosmopolitan imagination of the critic in the US academy places the culture of the West within a reduced or relativist ‘world’ in response to the rhetorics of the Third World, the more narrowly historicist view of the British critic delimits its ideological functions in response to the reality of Britain’s diminished world status. In her Regius inaugural lecture at Cambridge in 1987, Marilyn Butler seeks to return the English Romantic poets to an English national literary history (as in the case of Austen in Butler’s 1975 book, an argument reiterated more vehemently in the Preface to the 1987 edition).<sup>12</sup> If Butler is sensitive to the contraction of British influence in a post-imperial world, hers is also a beleaguered response to two different kinds of ‘deconstruction’ of the English literary canon, the one by American critics, the other by Indian university teachers. The urgency of her different reconfiguration of the canon is articulated in terms of the contemporary English political situation: ‘It must be for many of us [English readers, in contrast to American and Indian] a brutal

simplification, and in the end a self-destructive one, to type all past literature as the voice of power, or of patriarchy, or of any other hateful institution' when the humanities, in Britain, are under threat (Butler 1989: 66). It is in the context of the present (Thatcher's Britain) that she calls for a 'new literary history' that revises the canon and reevaluates its writers differently from the manoeuvres performed in the US and Third World academics.

In this volume, Elaine Jordan's exploration of questions of 'identity' via the figure of the West Indian schoolgirl in nineteenth-century English novels—which includes Austen's unfinished novel fragment *Sanditon*—is undertaken as historical scholarship of this kind and with similar urgency. Her investigation raises the issues of slavery, abolition and colonialism in the West Indies, and speculates on Austen's positions on these. The larger context of such work as hers is implicitly, however, contemporary British racism, where 'West Indian' is configured differently from the figures of these texts, and multiculturalism and the politics of identity make scholarly neglect of such issues culpable. Jordan's essay concludes with what must be one of the strongest indictments of traditional English humanist scholarship of an earlier generation, referring to its silence about the 'barbarism' of the 'documents of civilization'. Mary Lascelles, the Austen scholar, was Jordan's teacher at Oxford, and a descendant of the aristocratic Lascelles family whose fortunes were built from the slave trade. 'But she never told me what she must have, should have, known. My respect for her is limited by her silence about the ethical relation of Austen's writing to histories of power, and money, in England and beyond' (see p. 50).

### *Consuming Austen*

If postcolonialism—in English studies represented by the resistant voices of the Third World, a post-imperial Europe, 'deconstruction' in the American university, and multiculturalism—has led to a displacement and contraction of the influence of canonical English literature, it is still important to remember that global capitalism has other manoeuvres to offer. As Lisa Lowe reminds us:

In both England and the United States, the novel as a form of print culture has constituted a privileged site for the unification of the citizen with the 'imagined community' of the nation, while the national literary canon functioned to unify aesthetic culture as a domain in which material differences and localities were resolved and reconciled.... We can view Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), for example, as an important artifact and producer of nineteenth-century English discourses on middle-class morality and propriety, of women's domestic role within the ideology of separate 'public' and 'private' spheres, and of the reconciliation of bourgeois individualism and the social order through the marriage contract. Yet as a result of the institutionalization of the novel in England as well as in the British Empire's systems of colonial education, the

powerfully determining divisions and narrative resolutions of Austen's novels extend well beyond her nineteenth-century English public to the globalized readers and recipients of popular culture in the late twentieth century.

(Lowe 1996:98)

It is more as tangible commodity than as abstract value that 'English literature' is made available to contemporary popular culture (by definition global), as it has been transformed into television serials and films for viewing across the world — as Austen's novels have been recently, with such conspicuous success. As Gayle Wald points out in her essay in this volume, US films are 'global commodities' whose 'paths of dissemination mirror the circulation of global capital'. The internationalization of film production is equally a reflection of media cosmopolitanism.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1990s, several film and television adaptations of Austen's novels, following quickly upon one another, have successfully propelled them from the classroom into popular culture. As the 'books of the film' her novels have gained a new lease of life, made lively, amusing and contemporary. Commentary on this phenomenon has gone little beyond remarking upon the likelihood that television and film versions of English classical novels (produced in Hollywood, but sponsored also by those influential British cultural institutions, the BBC and the British Council) might serve as aids (or more likely substitutes) for the classroom study of the written texts.

But films have their own specificity as genre and as cultural production even when they adapt the classics and draw upon their cultural capital. The two essays on Austen films in this collection locate their investigation within both specific cinematic genres and contemporary ideological frames. Julianne Pidduck focuses on the image of the 'woman at the window' in Austen and in costume drama more generally, to argue that there are points of contact between projected female sexual desire, as signified by this image, and other class-based and colonial power relations. The desiring female gaze is projected beyond the male figures—to the 'outdoors', to Norland's picturesque grounds, or Darcy's Pemberley estate. Pidduck suggests that the heroines' 'exclusion from property ownership' creates a yearning for the 'middle-class entitlements of citizenship' denied them because of their sex (see p. 118)—and our awareness of such yearnings cannot but bring to the fore 'the supporting figures of servants and country folk, and...the structuring absences of colonial peoples and places lingering just outside of the frame' (see p. 118). Gayle Wald's essay on Amy Heckerling's Hollywood teen film, *Clueless*, similarly provides a new tack for reflections on contemporary cinematic Austen. Although *Clueless* is 'implicated within a larger discourse of US nostalgia for an imagined and romanticized English past' (see p. 220) promoted by the other Austen films of the 1990s, it possesses liberatory potential in being different from the usual faithfully-rendered cinematic representations of classical British literary texts by reason of

its relocation of *Emma* in the southern California of the 1990s, and its witty and irreverent genre and tone. Finally, however, it remains true to its genre by recuperating conventional heterosexual coupling in its conclusion. Pidduck's and Wald's essays map a different location of Austen 'in the world', and identify the connections of her work, via British heritage cinema and Hollywood, respectively, to a new global world order.

The United States has of course laid claim to the Western and particularly the English 'classics' as part of its own cultural heritage, seeking to reinterpret and rewrite them in the construction of its own hegemony. The classics are circulated and resurrected with a view not only to paying homage to the culture of the past but, even more importantly, to shape a model culture of desirable 'modernity' in the present. What contemporary Americans are supposedly learning from Austen (films), is what to *desire* in relation to romance, marriage, family and morality. Like *Clueless*, another recent Hollywood film *Notting Hill* (dir. William Thacker, 1999), starring the British actor Hugh Grant—typically, as the classy English hero—frames this expectation in terms of the plot of romantic pedagogy. The Englishman, a bookstore owner, persuades the bratty but sweet American actress to do movies based on 'Jane Austen or Henry James', in place of the science fiction movies she has been working in until then. Her education consists not only of this professional graduation to 'better' cinema roles, but the growing desire, respect and love that she learns to feel for the British man—who, like Austen's heroes, represents stability and family values with the right mixture of sharp wit and irony. The juxtaposition of American popular culture (and its global movie industry) with British high culture, in terms of the romance between a Hollywood actress in sci-fi movies and a British bookstore owner (who appears not to watch any movies), is intended to make American-ness appear redeemable. When mixed in with a bit of Jane Austen or Henry James, American global hegemony is exactly what the world needs!

What are we to make of the phenomenon of contemporary international culture being also a popular culture? Their identity is by no means a 'natural' one—in societies in the 'contact zone' as a consequence of conquest or colonial rule in earlier times, for instance, hegemonic cultures and languages were acquired only by the elite. Popular culture too was invariably of 'local' provenance, defined and delimited by geography, language, class or occupational groups. The global dissemination and sharing of cultural products have been made possible by the structures of the communication and entertainment industry, aspects of our contemporary world.<sup>14</sup> In the next section I pursue reflections provoked by the question of *universality*, both as globality in this sense, and the desire which has always haunted the humanist conception of culture.

### **Conclusion: why we read Jane Austen**

Etienne Balibar has raised the interesting possibility that in our present world where *real* universality, that is to say, globalization (of the kind I have talked

about above, a function of capitalist hegemony, culture and communications, transnational politics, diaspora), has been achieved, the figures of *utopian* universality—the connection of mankind by shared or ‘universalistic’ moral values—have become obsolete (Balibar 1995:49). What remains a valid and indeed necessary form of universality is what he terms the *ideal* or symbolic. This consists of the claims for equality and liberty that any group may raise against the limits of any institution in the name of ‘human universality as such’ (72). Therefore when ‘others’—women, minorities—make demands, it is not in the name of their particularity but of this ideal universality that they do so: because their discrimination or exclusion in the first place appeared to involve a ‘negation of human universality as such’ (72). Balibar stresses the resources of ‘multiple’ voices in this struggle, not reduced to pluralism or relativism, but ‘a source of conflicts forever’ (72).

Balibar’s clarifications have provided the basis for my discussion of Austen in the contemporary world. The utopian claims of art to universality, either as an autonomous realm, or as a product that transcends its context and its production, can give postcolonial studies no purchase on Austen. But to deny universality altogether as a political ideal is to remove the very grounds of contestation, debate and redefinition of the universal in terms of the ‘social majority’ of the dominated (Balibar 1995:64), which postcolonial studies builds upon.

Lionel Trilling’s last and unfinished essay, ‘Why We Read Jane Austen’, is a troubled reflection upon the limits of the humanistic conception of literature, the utopic universality which implicitly accounts for why ‘we’ (in Trilling’s essay, young American students in the 1970s, but generalizable to others) read Austen. The question, of course, arises in the first place because of Austen’s popularity despite her cultural and historical distance from contemporary American readers. Humanistic appropriations of culture are based on the unquestioned assumption that ‘any culture of the past out of which has come a work of art that commands our interest must be the product, and also, of course, the shaping condition, of minds which are essentially the same as our own’ (Trilling 1979:212). But the ‘existential differences’ (213) between the worlds of the text and its readers soon begin to obtrude, and at this point Trilling turns to the hermeneutic circle explained by Clifford Geertz in his essay, “‘From the Native’s Point of View’: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding”, as a way of ‘bringing a little complication to humanism’s rather simple view of the relation in which our moral lives stand in relation to other cultures’ (1973:219).

In the face of Geertz’s relativization of Western concepts—here, of selfhood—with reference to the cultures of Iceland, Bali, Java and Mexico, Trilling grants the fact of difference, the possibility of ‘our’ (Western readers’) misunderstanding and dismissal of other values, and the limits of ‘empathy’, which is the standard humanistic cognitive mode. And yet, he maintains, the Javanese sense of personhood, its aestheticization of life, ‘is considerably more accessible to us than Mr. Geertz says it is’.<sup>15</sup>

Jacqueline Rose draws out the implications of Trilling's engagement with Geertz: it marks

the extent to which the study of literature, as soon as you raise the issue of what makes for an identifiable or legible culture moment, is something of an anthropological undertaking. There is no single automatically available culture, not even when you're reading Jane Austen.<sup>16</sup>

(Rose 1995:6)

In other words, cultural pluralism, and its consequence, relativism, not only are frames for viewing 'other' cultures, but also provoke the turn inwards, towards 'our' culture and our ways of reading it. It is when anthropology reverses its gaze, when the anthropologist (who is Western, it goes without saying, as a matter of structural location) watches himself or his kind watching, that it becomes a critique of 'imperial naming', a postcolonial enterprise.<sup>17</sup>

Picking up on Trilling's reflections upon the self, liberalism and literature, Jacqueline Rose offers in 'Freud and the Crisis of Our Culture'—her own 1993 lecture delivered more than twenty years after his lecture on Austen was written—a powerful and moving literary journey among texts from 'around the world', in this complexly self-reflexive and dialogic mode. The figures in these texts, not Austen's, but like hers offering images of selfhood and its accompanying liberalism in Western literature—Henry James's Isabel Archer, Dorothy Richardson's Miriam Henderson, Creina Alcock in Rian Malan's South African memoir, *My Traitor's Heart* (all women, not coincidentally, for whom the exploration of the limits of selfhood is made both urgent and poignant by their own marginality)—come up against the hard obstacles to the humanist vision: the realities of difference, and the discriminations and oppressions it produces as sexism, racism, imperialism.

This brings her to the question of the canon of English literature—how it is to be studied in such a context:

As I see it, the task for literary studies is to find the forms of language, and they will have to be more than one, which allow for connections between cultures—of affiliation, recognition, antagonism—without dissipating the voices in which they clash.... This could not however expect to take the traditional form of comfortable dialogue, but would have to be something which wrenches open our utterances into their histories.

(Rose 1995:18–19)

This is a liberalism '*in extremis*' as Rose terms it (17), at a point of historical crisis brought about by multiculturalism, reflexive anthropology, and thwarted humanism, all implicated in the histories of colonialism and its aftermath. But her hope of building upon this crisis, of 'connecting cultures', also informs

Balibar's grounding of resistant politics in the ideal of universality, and accounts for Trilling's stubborn search for the common ground of our different cultures.

Most recently, Satya Mohanty's reflections on the problems posed by our current theoretical impasses on political issues usefully feed into postcolonial critiques of the literary text. The decolonization of the third world and our postcolonial dreams of *both* internationalist solidarity and cultural pluralism' (Mohanty 1997: xiii) require, he suggests, that we adopt a position that takes us through and beyond relativism and postmodern scepticism about 'truth', objectivity and the universal, towards a 'postpositivist realism'. The (cultural and historical) particular and the (moral) universal [must] complement and substantiate each other' (236).

*Why* we read Jane Austen is also a function of *how* we read Jane Austen. The essays in this volume offer a range of methods and concerns, theoretical and political, described as 'postcolonial', as a way of addressing her work. The consensus implied in the invocation of a homogeneous readership—'we'—can only be ironically sustained in our context, and it marks the distance from Trilling's essay, itself, as we saw, a recognition of and an enquiry into the cracks in that assumed consensus. The dialectic between the particular and the universal, culture and epistemology, difference and a shared sameness, explored by the critics I have invoked in this discussion, is the theoretical dimension of postcolonial critique. The questions about Austen's fiction that these essays raise are placed within this problematic—and the metaphor that seems to us to most suggestively describe these engagements is that of 'mapping' the dissemination of its word 'in the world'.

### Notes

This introductory essay was written in close collaboration with You-me Park, who provided its best insights, corrected its worst errors, and guided me through its process. However, I am solely responsible for its deficiencies in the present form. I am profoundly grateful to Anupama Rao for her invaluable responses, engaged, vigorous and acute. Several of the contributors read and responded to the introduction in the draft stage, and for their encouragement, and their participation in this volume, my deepest appreciation and gratitude.

- 1 It is useful to recall Fredric Jameson's clarification about the shifts in the use of the term 'imperialism', in connection with reading Austen. In an 'older period, from 1884 to World War I', as he explains, it designated the 'rivalry of the various imperial and metropolitan nation-states among themselves'. It is only recently, since World War II, that 'the problem of imperialism is as it were restructured: in the age of neo-colonialism, of decolonization accompanied by the emergence of multinational capitalism and the great transnational corporations, it is less the rivalry of the metropolitan powers among each other that strikes the eye...[than] the internal dynamics of the relationship between First and Third World countries,

- and in particular the way in which this relationship—which is now very precisely what the word “imperialism” means for us— is one of necessary subordination or dependency, and that of an economic type rather than a primarily military one’ (Jameson 1990:47–8).
- 2 The major critical works on Austen include those by Mary Lascelles (1939), D.W. Harding (1940), Q.D.Leavis (1941 and 1942), F.R.Leavis (1947), Marvin Mudrick (1952), and later, Avrom Fleishman (1967), Alistair Duckworth (1971), and Tony Tanner (1986).
  - 3 Marilyn Butler comments on Trilling’s ‘brilliant and moving idealization of Austen as artist’, a product of his difficult ideological situation in McCarthyite America. This ahistorical appropriation, nevertheless, makes her uneasy. See her Introduction to the 1987 edition of *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (xi). See also Isobel Armstrong’s comment that ‘Trilling retrieves from the novel [*Mansfield Park*] a liberal Jane Austen oddly like himself’ (Armstrong 1988:100).
  - 4 ‘Colonial’, or ‘colonialist’, discourse is defined by Elleke Boehmer, in her introductory handbook to postcolonial studies, as a ‘collection of symbolic practices, including textual codes and conventions and implied meanings, which Europe deployed in the process of its colonial expansion and, in particular, in understanding the bizarre and apparently unintelligible strangeness with which it came in contact.... Colonialist discourse, therefore, embraced a set of ideological approaches to expansion and foreign rule’ (Boehmer 1995:50).
  - 5 Patrick Hogan, ‘Gora, Jane Austen, and the Slaves of Indigo’. I am grateful to Professor Hogan for allowing me to read his paper in manuscript.
  - 6 The major influence in this area has been Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). See also Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977).
  - 7 Pioneering works from Africa include Chinweizu *et al.* (1983) *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*, and Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986) *Decolonizing the Mind*. In India, the following collections have been influential: Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (ed.) (1992) *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*; Svati Joshi (ed.) (1991) *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History*.
  - 8 This is a concept most closely associated in the modern critical tradition with Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*.
  - 9 A brief bibliography would consist of: D.J.Palmer (1965) *The Rise of English Studies*; Terry Eagleton (1983) *Literary Theory*; Chris Baldick (1983) *The Social Mission of English Criticism*; Franklin E.Court (1988) ‘The First English Professorship in England’; Janet Batsleer *et al.* (1985) (eds) *Rewriting English*.
  - 10 ‘*Mansfield Park* in Miranda House’ is the title of Ruth Vanita’s essay in *The Lie of the Land*, in which she discusses teaching Austen’s novel in Miranda House, a Delhi University women’s college.
  - 11 Suleri’s relationship with Urdu, her father’s language, possesses a different and more difficult kind of intimacy: ‘When I return to Urdu, I feel shocked at my own neglect of a space so intimate to me’ (Suleri 1989:177).
  - 12 Butler’s Regius lecture, ‘Revising the Canon’, first appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* (4–10 December 1987). A revised version, titled ‘Repossessing the Past’, appeared in Marjorie Levinson *et al.*, *Rethinking Historicism*. My citations are from the latter.

- 13 Directors/producers of non-Anglo-American origin involved in the making of British 'heritage cinema' include Merchant-Ivory (several Forster, James films since the 1980s), Ang Lee (*Sense and Sensibility*, 1995), and Shekhar Kapur (*Elizabeth*, 1998).
- 14 Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt school, offer the earliest reflections on the popularization of culture and mass culture.
- 15 The point of identification is to be found in the West's occasional succumbing like these other cultures to a similar wishful aestheticization of life, to the attraction of the 'fixed, moveless, silent', which is in 'dialectical' relationship to its strong sense of assertive selfhood (Trilling 1979:222–3). See also Satya Mohanty, who rehearses an 'instructive exchange' between Ernest Gellner and Talal Asad (Mohanty 1997:122 ff.), which centres on the question of cultural relativism.
- 16 It is perhaps inevitable in such a case that the Austen oeuvre should be quite literally treated as both anthropological 'data and analysis' in recent criticism. Richard Handler and Daniel Segal's book *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Culture: An Essay on the Narration of Social Realities* (1990) undertakes this venture in imitation of anthropological studies of 'foreign tribes' (1). Handler and Segal focus on the marriage theme, and the related anthropological topics of kinship, incest, social relations, status, romance, and reproduction in Austen's novels. They locate themselves as contemporary readers of the English-speaking world to whom, as to Trilling's students, Austen's novels are 'a partially foreign, partially familiar social world' (6). This allows them to mark both 'intercultural translation and intracultural defamiliarization' in the novels (7). The tone of exposition and argument in this critical work is confidently assured in its espousal of post-structuralist and post-modern theoretical positions current in both literary and anthropological studies as it engages 'issues of text and context, narrative description and cultural translation, intertextuality and realism' (2). As even this brief description makes clear, such discussion does not generate recognition of the politics of race, gender or sexuality even if it engages these terms in anthropological discourse. It operates in a different genre and mode from the difficult philosophical and political debate between Geertz and Trilling, which turns finally on the limits of liberal humanism.
- 17 Rose refers to Geertz's account of the Danish traveller, Helms, whose response to the spectacle of *sati* (widow immolation) in Bali was not only one of rage but also delight: 'Geertz suggests that in this context the aesthetic response might be a form of imperial naming' (Rose 1995:13).

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## **Part II**

### **Austen at home**

## 2

# Jane Austen goes to the seaside

*Sanditon*, English identity and the ‘West Indian’  
schoolgirl

*Elaine Jordan*

### I

In contemporary Britain ‘West Indian’ is an easy synonym for ‘black’. The description ‘Black British’ was adopted by politically-conscious black people in the 1980s when official forms had to be filled in, but ‘English’, ‘Welsh’, ‘Scottish’, ‘Irish’ still suggest ‘white’—‘there ain’t no black in the Union Jack’, as the racist slogan has it—and someone born in Britain may still be thought of as West Indian, if that was their family origin, and by no means as English. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, ‘West Indians’ (born in Britain, or creoles settling in Britain) were simply those who had a propertied and therefore political interest in the plantation and slaving economy. The ‘West Indian interest’, like that of Ulster Unionists more recently, was a force in the British parliament.

Richard Cumberland’s highly successful romantic comedy *The West Indian* (1771; revived at Drury Lane in 1814) exemplifies one masculine stereotype of the West Indian creole. The young hero, Belcourt, is not black (blacks appear in one cast list, as ‘porters, etc.’). Son of a creole heiress and an English merchant, inheriting her plantation and visiting England for the first time, he is represented as unused to the ‘free air’ of a country which could not tolerate slavery, at least not on its own ground, and doesn’t see at first that in England he should not just whack people out of his way on the street. Poorly-educated, as West Indians brought up in the place of their birth were understood to be, he is extravagant and gullible (possibly this masks the financial acuteness of actual ‘West Indians’). Especially, he does not understand the delicate sensibility of the English lady. Among the prejudices which the play pretends to negotiate is the belief that the ‘broadest, hottest, glare of [the sun’s] meridian beams’ (Act III, scene i) makes creoles of both genders hotter, more torrid and ardent, regardless of ethnic origin; in contrast to the cool moderation supposed to come naturally to the English-born. His mistaken assumptions about the English heroine, and his sentimental education, form the substance of the main plot. In one of the many editions we are told that this comedy was designed to reform common prejudices

against both ‘the West Indian’ and the Irish military officer. The Irish officer who links the main and sub-plot, prevents rather than provokes duels, and both the West Indian and the Irishman prove their sentimentally warm hearts, and capacity for good sense, by the end of the play. Cumberland’s comedy clearly has a political edge. Its prologue argues that it is in Britain’s interest to think well of West Indians and to respect, especially, Jamaican interests:

For sure that country has no feeble claim  
Which swells your commerce and supports your fame.

(Bentley 1950)<sup>1</sup>

Cumberland deploys common prejudices while pretending to reform them, in the West Indian commercial and political interest. The West Indies remained a source of scandalous characters and stories, especially from those hostile to the ‘plantocracy’ and friendly to the abolition of slavery. In Amelia Opie’s novel *Adeline Mowbray* (1805) the heroine befriends a ‘mulatto’, Savannah, who becomes her devoted servant but is delivered into slavery by Adeline’s husband, Berrendale. (Equally devoted are Savannah’s British sailor husband, William, and their son, named only as ‘the tawny boy’—even by his mother, who is usually called ‘the mulatto’.) Berrendale had previously abducted a West Indian heiress from school; after her death he returned to England, leaving their son in Jamaica, but he goes back to manage an estate and marries a widow, another heiress, already pregnant. He regrets his bigamy: at the time of his death he feared ‘the anger of his West Indian wife; who, it was not improbable, might even attack his life in the first moment of ungoverned passion’ (Opie 1805:174).<sup>2</sup> Most of this is narrated in passing, except for the scene of Adeline’s initial benevolence; Opie appears to expect readers to recognize this sort of thing. Besides the grateful mulatto, she gives two common images of the creole, or West Indian, lady: she is particularly feminine in her vulnerability to seduction (both wealthy and promiscuous), and she is unfeminine, in the ‘violent temper and overbearing disposition’ which Berrendale, like Charlotte Brontë’s Mr Rochester, came to fear in his ‘other’ wife. A further stereotype of the creole woman apparently contradicts these violated or violent figures: she is luxuriously indolent. The factor unifying all three types is that she is not under proper control. When Jean Rhys rewrote the story of Rochester’s mad wife, she retained these English stereotypes of the creole woman, in the husband’s distorted fantasies, and in Antoinette’s actually liking to spend much of the day in bed (Rhys 1966).

In didactic fiction of the late eighteenth century, against which Austen defined her subtler ironic realism, a frequent index of virtuous or vicious sensibility was the attitude of a man or a woman to the financial and sexual opportunities offered by the East or West Indies, as in *Adeline Mowbray*: sentimental benevolence, or villainous exploitation.<sup>3</sup> In this context, how should we read the slight figure of the West Indian schoolgirl, Miss Lambe, in Jane Austen’s unfinished novel

(written in 1817 but not published until 1925), *Sanditon*?<sup>4</sup> Commentators on *Sanditon* have noted its concern with ‘the dislocation of rural society’, and of the English socio-economic order, but have barely noticed Miss Lambe, who is indeed barely noticeable, but significant (Roberts 1979:59–67).<sup>5</sup>

I was reminded of Austen’s Miss Lambe by Susan Meyer’s brief consideration of Charlotte Brontë’s 1853 draft for a novel, ‘Emma’, which features the frail and dubious Miss Fitzgibbon, left at a Yorkshire school by a father or guardian who may be a ‘West Indian’, and possibly Irish as well (Meyer 1991:159–83).<sup>6</sup> ‘Had she been a poor child—Miss Fetherhed herself would not have liked her physiognomy at all’ (Brontë 1853/1987:311), and a neighbour observes ‘her large Leghorn hat shading such a face as fortunately had not its parallel on the premises’ (313)—although he could be referring to the wretched unhappiness he perceives in her. It could be distaste, or empathy, or a mixture of the two. The representation of this girl is ambiguous to a point I would call uncanny; and this is one reason for calling her up to in considering Jane Austen’s sketch of a West Indian schoolgirl. The racism that Meyer emphasizes is undoubtedly there in Brontë’s ‘Emma’, but it is framed and shot through with more sympathetic attitudes which could have questioned that racism and potentially made of this girl a reparation for the refusal of any sympathy for Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. Miss Fitzgibbon could have been Jane the suffering schoolgirl and Bertha the tormented creole, in one person. She turns out not to be ‘the most aristocratic and richest’ of Miss Fe[a]therhed’s pupils (311); her fees are not paid, and when the schoolmistress cries out against the financial loss, which is her only concern, her neighbour, the enigmatic Mr Ellin, suggests (perhaps ironically) that “‘if we were only in the good old times... where we ought to be—you might just send Miss Matilda out to the Plantations in Virginia—sell her for what she’s worth and pay yourself” (322–3). He goes on to question whether the false heiress is ‘an accomplice or a mere tool?’, but when the pitilessly hard-headed schoolmistress interrogates the girl—‘What do you know about yourself?’—he begins to take charge and protects her. “Beware or you will do... mischief.... That kind of nature is very different from yours—it is not possible that you should like it—but let it alone” (323–5). The beginning of the narration has already suggested that Miss Fitzgibbon will ultimately pass from his care into that of a childless widow living close by, who is the narrator.<sup>7</sup> The rights and wrongs of Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray*, their definite distribution between male and female, benevolent protection and exploitation, are not dissolved in Brontë’s ‘Emma’, her last fiction, but confused in that anxious ambivalence which Homi Bhabha has seen as characteristic of colonialism: muddying up the spring of Enlightenment.

Given running debates about education in English Literature, the diversified field of writing in the English language, and the arguments about history or ‘heritage’ engaged in these debates, I am interested in the often slight and unstressed traces of colonial dislocation within the writings of central, canonical, English authors: what part do they play in defining Englishness, English

Literature, English History? In an echo of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Catherine Hall has argued that colonized people, immigrants from former colonies, and their British children, have constituted modern English identity. Fantasies of the alien (the dominated, the migrant, competitors, enemies) *create* a sense of identity, of national belonging: 'the English can only recognise themselves in relation to others' (Hall 1992:208).<sup>8</sup> This may be a truth about all identities, too general to be interesting, and at the same time an overstatement—we may well be positively fond of our shared national 'thing', whatever it is (landscapes, seashores, beer, cricket, garden parties, the Welfare State). The overstatement, however, reminds us of the significant 'outsider' who determines or confirms what 'we' are. The West Indian schoolgirls of Austen and Brontë are marginal to any proper identity, significant in their insignificance (not black, not white, not adults, credited with the power of wealth but powerless, West Indian but uncannily appearing on the English scene).<sup>9</sup> When Brontë's 'Emma' was published posthumously in *The Cornhill Magazine* (April 1860), it was introduced by W.M. Thackeray, to whom, as a social 'regenerator', Brontë had dedicated *Jane Eyre* (embarrassingly, as he actually had a mentally ill Irish wife). This fact recalled to me the very definitely black Miss Swartz in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847–8), who first appears as a schoolgirl. Another young woman with a West Indian mother is the stylish but violent Crystal Manners, who is educated, like the Miss Fe[a]therheds, in France, producing an un-English, heartless, artifice. Crystal is foil to the deformed, artistic, sensitive heroine of Mrs Mulock Craik's *Olive* (1850). A half-sister of mixed race, the narrative implies that she ought to be more grateful than the legitimate daughter for the benevolent womanly care she receives, and resents.

What do these mid-nineteenth-century figures have in common, what do they represent about shifts in English consciousness between campaigns for abolishing the slave trade, at the time Austen was writing, and later campaigns against slavery in America?<sup>10</sup> A significant intervening figure is the East Indian creole heroine of George Sand's *Indiana* (1832). The French writer, Sand, was a dangerously exciting example for English women poets and novelists.<sup>11</sup> Austen's Miss Lambe offers an earlier case for comparison, especially in the light of Austen's family connections with the West Indies, and her manifest concern about slavery. Meanwhile, what does this small constellation of 'Misses' mean? I am not aware of a comparable cluster of West Indian schoolboys in fiction of the early and mid-nineteenth century. By 1770 over three-quarters of creole heirs and heiresses were educated in England (Sypher 1924/1969:87).<sup>12</sup> I am concerned with how the fictional schoolgirls signify, and what they may signify for writers and their readers, and not with actualities and the experiences of those so educated. That research remains to be done. My argument, developed elsewhere through closer analyses of the mid-nineteenth-century texts and their context, is that English literary representations of young female dependants of West Indians figure what is alien to Englishness in economic modernization (colonialism and

capitalism generally), and thereby support a concept of English identity which is anxiously hostile to whatever emerges from the colonies.

The English have tended to disavow the place of imperialism, colonization and enslavement in Britain's history, and its prosperity as a nation state. Like fetishists, they know it and they don't know it, it's there and it's not there. From the early nineteenth century the preferred emphasis has been on national pride in abolishing the slave trade and later emancipating slaves, rather than the equally British activity of setting up and profiting from colonies and slavery:

O mother Britain lift thou up,  
 Lift up a joyful brow,  
 There lies not in the circled seas  
 A land so great as thou.  
 O let the far-off shores be glad,  
 The isles break out in song,  
 For thou didst buy them with a price  
 To ransom them from wrong.  
 A time may come: this world of men  
 May roll in broader light,  
 But never shall this world forget  
 Who taught the nations right.  
 O let the hills of cane rejoice,  
 The palmy valleys ring!  
 What other people old or young Has done so just a thing?

(Tennyson 1969:622–3)

Tennyson's enthusiastic lines, written but not published in 1833, celebrate legislation for the emancipation of slaves which followed the 1832 Reform Act. They also celebrate British imperialism, which depended on naval force rather than superior ethics; hence the relative efficacy of the 1807 ban on the slave trade. The poem typifies a certain Anglo-Saxon attitude in simply forgetting Britain's role in organizing the triangle of slaving and trading, between England, Africa, and the Americas (Britain does have to lift herself up, however, as if she had something to be depressed about, and, moreover, others are not going to praise her if she doesn't do so herself). Tennyson's lines contrast strongly with an earlier poem on the effects of the slaving economy on national health, Anna Laetitia Barbauld's 'Epistle to William Wilberforce':

The spreading leprosy taints every part,  
 Infects each limb, and sickens at the heart.  
 Simplicity! Most dear of rural maids,  
 Weeping resigns her violated shades:  
 Stern Independence from his glebe retires,

And anxious Freedom eyes her drooping fires;  
 By foreign wealth are British morals chang'd,  
 And Afric's sons, and India's smile avenged.

(1791/Turley 1991:29)

For Tennyson, Britain, a few years before Victoria's reign, was great because just, just because great; whereas for the earlier, abolitionist, woman poet, Freedom (guarding home fires rather than fanning insurrectionary passions) is in a state of anxiety over the loss of feminine Simplicity and masculine Independence. For Barbauld, British virtues and health are debilitated by slavery, horribly infected by colonialism, and maybe by international trade generally. Commerce, modernization and health are all important topics in Austen's *Sanditon* (Southam 1969). Miss Lambe is a minor character, but how minor is she to Austen's concerns, and to English Literature, English identity?

The poet Merle Collins has written about how strange it was to be shaped by an education in English Literature, in particular 'visiting/with the Brontës, from afar', and then to have people staring at her as a black stranger when she visited Haworth, one of the homelands of her imagination. After that, she decided not to visit with other English writers (Collins 1992:17–18). Tennyson's poem suggests a Britain whose virtues could be universalized, restoring the health threatened in Barbauld's verse epistle; but Merle Collins's 1990s poem again dislocates such imaginary communities:

Yorkshire was not at all as I remembered it  
 But then, England is not as I remembered it, either,  
 from the times when my dad smiled and sang  
 put on his ex-serviceman's uniform  
 went off whistling to celebrate the day that  
 WE  
 had victory in the war.

(Collins 1992)

Austen's novels suggest an idea of inalienably English qualities, and have become 'English heritage', like the works of Shakespeare, the Brontës, Dickens, Hardy. The commercial value of such a classic heritage, wherever English Literature is taught, can be seen in the recent spate of film and television adaptations. These representations of Englishness are involved in relations of power and have material effects, which cannot be dissociated from imaginative and cultural effects.

*Sanditon's* ethical concern with modern commercial speculation in health spas is prefigured in all the discussions in *Emma* about health, especially the various effects of diet, weather, and sea-bathing. Care of one's health, and that of the family, was very much part of civic virtue in the contemporary English ideology

of the educated classes: the proper amount of walking or riding, a balance of relaxation and bracing exercise (there's an echo of eighteenth-century medical terminology when we now speak of sea air as 'bracing'). Looking after oneself was part of one's responsibility to others, in the ideology of civic humanism. Austen shares this ideology, and mocks it, in *Emma* and *Sanditon*. At the end of *Emma* we learn that the heroine—'the picture of grown-up health' despite the wilful feebleness of her father, excessively health-conscious but more concerned with diet than exercise—had never been to the seaside, although her marriage to Mr Knightley, actively healthy, healthily active, will take her to that bracing environment for a brief honeymoon tour (Austen 1816). *Mansfield Park*, which is generally considered to precede *Emma*, and *Persuasion*, which follows, opens up much more of a perspective on an England at war, and 'at sea', undergoing change. They have some concern with a world beyond the English countryside, and with new sorts of England. In each, crucial episodes take place at the seaside: on or near the docks at Portsmouth in *Mansfield Park*, and at the seaside resort of Lyme Regis, in *Persuasion*. In these novels, as in *Sanditon*, the seaside, and a dip in an alien element, confirm the island identity—imperial, but anxious for its health.

From this perspective, *Emma*, often considered the liveliest of the later novels, can be seen as more landlocked in conservative nostalgia. The character who is made to work against this happy conservatism is Jane Fairfax, shadow heroine to the sunlit Emma. Never in good health, she foreshadows Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre in her dislike of dependency, and in suffering from social and sexual repression. She can be seen as one of the 'dark unhappy ones' with whom George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver sided, in *The Mill on the Floss* (Eliot 1860/1991: 306). That Jane fell in love with Frank Churchill at the seaside, that Emma credits her with an Irish love-affair, is on the shadowy romantic margins, not in the heartland of the text, which is Emma's paternal home Hartfield, near the village of Highbury, and Mr Knightley's estate, Donwell Abbey. Austen characteristically contains key episodes and encounters within excursions, and in *Emma* these are all inwards: to Box Hill, to Donwell Abbey. Although both these episodes display Jane's discordant feelings (more significant on a second reading), their most obvious surface is Mr Knightley's ideal of good management, genially trusting to or aiding those who know their place in the patriarchal order of the estate, the county, the country. This 'civic humanism' can be called Tory, or bourgeois liberalism. Emma's final marriage to Mr Knightley is presented as very much the right thing, and even before she expects to marry him she contemplates his property, the property of a brother-in-law which her sister's son might inherit, with 'honest pride and complacency'. Her entranced observation—landscaped at great length by the narrator, lovable by anyone who loves rural England—hymns the well-managed estate, and lineal family purity.

It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was...the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding.... It

was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and to the mind. English verdure, English culture. English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive.<sup>13</sup>

(Austen 1816/1966:353, 355)

In *Emma*, the dark heroine Jane Fairfax is ‘tainted’ in behaviour rather than in understanding, by romantic passion and secrecy (she is obliged to keep the local community in the dark about her engagement to Frank Churchill). Emma’s blonde protégée Harriet is ‘tainted’ by illegitimacy (the narrator comments that Harriet’s blood ‘was likely to be as untainted, perhaps, as the blood of many a gentleman’), and even more by the fact that her father was a tradesman, not the gentleman Emma needed to imagine: ‘The stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility and wealth, would have been a stain indeed’, for the Churchill or Knightley families—the marriages that Emma had encouraged Harriet to imagine (Austen 1816/1966: 462–3). This thought can be attributed to Emma, as free indirect speech, so it is hard to know how sarcastic the authorial voice was being about these arbitrary class-based differences in judging the ‘taint’ of illegitimacy. According to Christian principle (which Austen showed herself to be concerned about most clearly in *Mansfield Park*), sexually promiscuous acts would be sins regardless of the class, or any other differentiated identity, of the participants. Emma, from a liberal ethical perspective, is supposed to have learned to be less snobbish, as well as less imaginative in her sense of possibilities. My judgement is that the matter is undecidable, between the character’s irony or the narrator’s irony at the expense of a supposedly improved character; my preferred reading is that both Emma and the authorial voice are ironically citing the mean-spirited hypocrisy to which their gentry class tends; but that both also share an ideal view of ‘true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding’ (Austen 1816/1966:353; compare Emma’s irony about the ‘candour and common sense’ of a ‘generous public’ which is in fact mean-spirited (109–10)). Their ethics are tinted, and bleached. *Emma*’s discourse is double, but celebrates more than it criticizes Englishness. Liking for a sweet English gentility without sin or taint (a liking hard to separate from enjoyment of the green landscape, or from the whited sepulchre of hypocrisy) is the side of it most likely to be undermined from late twentieth-century egalitarian perspectives.<sup>14</sup>

These stains on an England, ‘sweet to the eye and the mind...under a sun bright, without being oppressive’ (Austen 1816/1966:355), are obviously related to concerns about sexual purity, especially that of women. Equally, the concern is about rights to status and property, and, through the recurring metaphors of stain and taint, anxiety about unequal class liaisons can be associated with cross-racial anxieties entailed by ‘commerce’ with Africa and the Americas (‘commerce’ carried a stronger sexual connotation then). Emma, however boxed-in, includes one glance toward a wider world, which can be linked to concerns in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* with the subordination of upper-class English

women, their opportunities for resistance, and for some kinds of power. These concerns connect such women to thoughts about the truly enslaved, under a more oppressive sun (as well as to the even more ambiguous figure of the West Indian heiress). The connection emerges, in *Emma*, in relation to the trials of the governess, whose class status was notoriously uncertain—more-or-less a lady who taught girls, and younger boys, how to be ladies and gentlemen in a class to which, as an employed person, she could not belong. Emma's former governess Mrs Weston is a lucky exception, but such working women, neither servants nor family, could be drastically isolated by the terms of their employment, sometimes ending up in workhouses, or in asylums for the insane. In *Emma* this situation is discussed in the context of Mrs Elton's excessively public persistence in seeking a 'position' as a governess for Jane Fairfax. Emma calls this a 'horrible indelicacy', presumably because a lady of her acquaintance is being treated as an employable person (Austen 1816/1966:389). Mrs Elton is represented as a vulgar newcomer, 'as fine as pearls and lace could make her', for all the world like a typical creole woman decked-out to display the wealth with which a slaving economy could endow her.<sup>15</sup> So much dressiness implies lack of taste, and of personal worth. Jane responds by comparing the situations of governesses and slaves, as sometimes equal in misery (Austen 1816/1966:300), although she acknowledges that employment agencies for governesses are not equal to slave traders in guilt. Her main motive may be, desperately, to deter Mrs Elton from so relentlessly seeking employment for her.

Mrs Elton for once is over-sensitive. Before Jane has clarified what she means in speaking of 'Offices for the sale—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect', Mrs Elton just knows that this is 'a fling at the slave-trade'. Mrs Elton is sensitive on this issue because she has habitually boasted of the wealth and style of her Bristol connections, Bristol being one of the four major English ports engaged in the slave trade (Fryer 1984:32–40). She feels forced onto the defensive, since abolition has become the more fashionable and respectable line: 'Oh, my dear, human flesh! You quite shock me; I assure you Mr Suckling was always rather a friend to the abolition' (Austen 1816/1966:300). The 'difference of women's destiny' is a major concern in *Emma* (Austen 1816/1966:375),<sup>16</sup> and Mrs Elton's unwanted patronage of Jane casts a grotesque light on Emma's own misguided patronage of the illegitimate teacher Harriet. Mrs Elton herself is not a creole slaver, but she summons up the stereotype, just as Jane's phrase about trade 'in human flesh' summons up both 'primitive' cannibalism and 'civilized' prostitution.

There are ethical problems about aligning the situation of women in England with that of slaves arbitrarily ripped from their kin, and transported to work, unpaid, in the Americas or West Indies, especially as England's prosperity was so closely related to the plantation and slaving economy. Nevertheless, it is clearly a connection Austen wanted to make, in one of the rare direct incursions of politics into her fiction. Jane Fairfax's equation of employed Englishwomen with slaves is worth considering further. Both Austen and George Eliot, later,

regard employment outside the family home in school-teaching or governessing as a kind of slavery for women—respectable, but not a desirable opportunity.<sup>17</sup> In the period between Austen and Eliot, however, Anne and Charlotte Brontë take a different line, without underestimating the stresses. Their fictions make a claim for women on the grounds of employed work, earnestly done. For men, work to support their families was coming to be the basis of claims for civic status and respect, for ‘manhood suffrage’. The capacity for civic responsibility was less and less identified with owning inherited property, which had been considered ‘disinterested’, unlike dependence on an employer. Anne and Charlotte Brontë seize the new claim, for women employees. Emily Brontë did not appear to give a damn about such matters (partly, no doubt, because being away from home was so painful to her), but all the fictions of her sisters make a claim for women’s status, on the grounds of the social role manifested in their employed work, as well as in motherhood. This attitude to paid employment, as distinct from disinterested independence on the one hand, and slavery on the other, should be ranked with the way in which Mary Wollstonecraft compromised men’s claims for equal rights, by demanding the same rights for those who had been excluded (Wollstonecraft 1792). Jane Austen, like George Eliot later, was not making such a timely demand for active, able and intelligent women such as Emma and Jane. Protection remains the ideal, especially for Harriet, ‘placed in the midst of those who loved her, and who had better sense than herself’ (Austen 1816/1966:463).

The care and protection offered by Mr Knightley in *Emma* are part of the active responsibility he assumes in his neighbourhood, a Tory communitarian ideal. In this respect he can be strongly contrasted to Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park*. Sir Thomas’s demonstrable care, in England, is not, like Mr Knightley’s, for tenants and neighbours, but for his house and estates, especially the culling of his reserves of game, and for the development of political interests in the county (which could well be associated, at national level, with the ‘West Indian interest’). Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion*, the novel after *Emma*, utterly ignores the ideals of civic humanism which Mr Knightley represents. The England of *Persuasion* is different from that of *Emma*, and prepares the way for the self-interest satirized in *Sanditon*. Even members of the same family live like separate little ‘commonwealths’, uninterested in each other’s affairs (Austen 1818/1974:40). The heroine’s home, her heartland, will pass from her irresponsible father to the reprobate Mr Elliot, maybe allied to the adventuress, Mrs Clay: earthly impure, not sweet but calculating. In the England of *Mansfield Park* such a conclusion would be impossible, but in *Persuasion* it is as if the adulterous Maria Bertram and her lover Henry Crawford could take possession of the family land. National interests and domestic virtues have gone elsewhere.

In *Mansfield Park* there is upward mobility: Fanny Price moves up in the world, and on the way attracts the influence of Henry Crawford to promote her brother William’s naval career. More radically, in *Persuasion*, national spirit moves from the home estate to a mobility represented by the navy, and also by

the strengths that women can discover in themselves (its last paragraph combines domestic and adventurous virtues with mocking affection). The hero, Captain Wentworth, had no influence, and was refused as a suitor for Anne Elliot, because of low expectations for his future fortunes. The wars against revolutionary and Napoleonic France, in which economic power in the Caribbean was a significant factor, gained him 'prize-money', and this put him in a position to marry someone of Anne's social status. The final reunion of Anne and Wentworth is now as much 'the right thing' as the earlier estate-based marriage of Emma and Mr Knightley, and is supported by the example of the happiest marriage in all of Austen's fictions, that of the Crofts. Wentworth's sister is wife to Admiral Croft, and they take over the lease of Kellynch Hall from Sir Walter Elliot. While Mrs Croft manages the legal matters, and takes the reins when her husband seems likely to drive them into a ditch, he makes the domestic environment more shipshape. This weather-beaten couple, whose previous life has followed his naval postings, exemplify the crossings in class and gender values, which are suggested as a move towards greater happiness in *Persuasion* generally. Mrs Croft scolds her young brother Wentworth for his patronizing chivalry to women, in language which recalls Wollstonecraft's contrast of 'fine ladies' to 'rational creatures' (Austen 1818/1994:68).

*Persuasion* characteristically questions what is important and what is proper, to men and women. This is discussed in the crucial conversation about the relative strengths of men and women, and is what causes the difference, between Anne and Captain Harville in Chapter 23 (which brings Anne and Wentworth together again), but also in the endurance and resources of Anne and Mrs Croft, as distinct from the minor recklessness of Anne's petty rival Louisa Musgrove and the equally wilful uselessness of Anne's sister Mary Musgrove. Captain Harville, a disabled naval hero, is good at woman's work, managing a tiny domestic space, mending nets, making toys for the children, and, with his wife, being hospitable. Anne advises the sentimental Captain Benwick on more serious reading matter than romantic poetry. *Persuasion* subverts conventionally gendered strengths, and questions social 'importance' in England.<sup>18</sup> However, *Persuasion's* heroes are prize-winners in the sphere of naval adventure, supporting colonial trade and imperial ambition however little they know the history they are making; and the strong women are supporters too. There is implicit support for the English commercial and political interests involved in the Napoleonic Wars. Like Austen's brother Francis, Captain Wentworth had done well for himself out of his naval service off the West Indies (Austen 1818/1994: 63). Traces of a concern with slavery disappear in Austen's most questioning novel about gender and class power.

In *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said writes that it would be too much to expect Jane Austen to have been a passionate opponent of slavery (Said 1993: 115). But she was a principled opponent, like her brother Francis, who became an Admiral, and like her favourite poet, William Cowper. In 1813 she wrote to her sister Cassandra that, in reading his work, she had been 'in love' with

Thomas Clarkson, a long-standing anti-slavery polemicist, radical in predicting and justifying active rebellion.<sup>19</sup> Austen's attitudes were not unusual at the time of Wilberforce's parliamentary campaign against the trade, which engaged the sympathy of a wide cross-section of the British public. It became the first modern mobilization of mass protest (including refusal to use sugar, which involved women as domestic managers).<sup>20</sup> Where Austen's sentiments on this matter emerge in her writing, they are particularly interesting in intergenerational terms. In 1760 her father, the Reverend George Austen, accepted trusteeship for a plantation in Antigua, which could have left him responsible for its management (Gibbon 1982:298–305). By the end of the century his children saw involvement in slavery as incompatible with humane, and Christian, belief. This is interesting for reading the difference between generations represented in *Mansfield Park*. One dominant critical account of that novel sees Sir Thomas Bertram's management of his English estates as belonging to a native tradition which is refined by the final marriage of Fanny Price to his second son, Edmund (Tanner 1986). On this view an irresponsible younger generation is chastised, and an older sense of responsibility regenerated.

But suppose we read Sir Thomas as a West Indian, rather than as the guardian of English tradition? *Mansfield Park* is not an old establishment, it is 'a spacious modern-built house' (Austen 1814/1970:42). Since we are not told of any other source for Sir Thomas's status or wealth, presumably it was built on the proceeds of his Antigua estate. Contrast Sotherton, site of the novel's major excursion. This truly is the place of English tradition, and whatever romantic regrets Fanny Price may have, it has been emptied out, and is past history. The lady of the house, Mrs Rushworth, has learned to do a guided tour from the housekeeper, and is happier telling ladies in Bath all about it, than trying to perform any useful function there. Sir Thomas's interest in young Mr Rushworth as a son-in-law has to do with consolidating political interest in the county, and consequently in parliament. This is congruent with the way in which those who had 'made it' in the West Indies were concerned to build up political power, locally and nationally (Gibbon 1982). Sir Thomas displays many features attributed to the 'West Indian'. The last chapter stresses deficiencies in his idea of education, and he is always a rather unthinking bully. Insensitivity to the delicate complexity of women's feelings (as in Cumberland's *The West Indian*) is shown particularly in his treatment of Fanny Price when she refuses to accept Henry Crawford, a marriage which would be in Sir Thomas's economic interest. Lady Bertram's notable indolence fits perfectly with the conventional image of the creole lady (although, like Mrs Elton, she is not actually a creole, just a bit above her station). Although Mrs Norris, like Mrs Elton, is not technically a slave-driver, she does share her name with the worst anti-abolitionist described by Austen's beloved Thomas Clarkson, John Norris, who had been employed in plantation management. Fanny's most direct oppressor is Mrs Norris, whom Sir Thomas implicitly, and stupidly, left in charge of family affairs at *Mansfield Park* when he went to check up on the management of his estate in Antigua. Is he really

supposed to be the guardian of the kind of Englishness represented in *Emma* by Mr Knightley?

The West Indian connections of Jane Austen's circle of family and friends can extend our idea of the English heritage. In her letters, Austen worries about what to do with a portrait of Mr Nibbs, when moving house. James Langston Nibbs was a college friend for whom George Austen agreed to be a trustee, for his plantation in Antigua: Nibbs's grandfather had started out with a bit of Caribbean land in 1671, and the grandson, returning 'home', was looking for gentry status and public office in the English home counties, in the 1760s.<sup>21</sup> This connection would be a trivial matter in discussing Jane Austen's fiction if it were not for its reverberation in the plot of *Mansfield Park*: Nibbs took his son and heir, named after himself, out to Antigua to cure his extravagances in England. Unlike Tom Bertram, this son did not return. His half-brother Christopher, a slave, also died in Antigua.

Christopher Nibbs was a Methodist, which was acceptable in Antigua, but the Attorney-General in Bermuda, father-in-law of Jane's brother Charles Austen, thought that this form of Christianity (considered a low-class sort of thing in England) was likely to encourage rebellion, and banned it; a black carrying a prayer-book was considered subversive, as in the oppositions between missionaries, settlers and the administration in some African colonies. The father-in-law of Jane Austen's brother James was born in Antigua, and bequeathed an estate in Dominica 'with all the cattle and slaves therein'. Austen's Aunt Leigh-Perrot, the one who was charged with shop-lifting, was born in Barbados, where her father was on friendly terms with the Governor. The fiancé of her sister Cassandra, a military chaplain, died of yellow fever in the West Indies, like so many others. Other acquaintances travelled back and forth: for example, Tom Williams, later Commander-in-Chief at the Nore, who was Charles Austen's commander, and married a cousin (Honan 1987:334).<sup>22</sup> Francis Austen served in naval actions off Antigua, and later commented, from St Helena, on the sheer indecency of slavery (Hubback and Hubback 1926:192).

This surely makes quite an extension to the likely concerns and conversations of 'two or three families in an English village'. What families consciously keep quiet about, and what they just don't think of discussing, are as crucial to their ethos as what they do say. In *Mansfield Park* Fanny falls silent when the rest of the family don't take up her enquiries about the slave trade, when Sir Thomas returns from Antigua. Edmund gently reproves her reticence, but quite rightly she says that it was up to the rest of the family to take up the discussion: 'there was such a dead silence!' which any sensitive girl would take as a message to shut up (Austen 1814/1970:178). Austen marks this silence, but has no more to say about it as narrator. In *Northanger Abbey*, which Austen was revising while she wrote *Mansfield Park*, conversation passes, in Chapter 14, from picturesque landscapes to enclosures, and, in feminine company, 'from politics, it was an easy step to silence'.

How would we read *Mansfield Park* if we took the colonial network as the proper context? Tony Tanner in his influential account rightly argues that the tensions between generations in this novel represent an actual historical shift, a challenge from modern attitudes to traditional ones. But are the old ones necessarily good, are the new ones so bad? The younger Bertrams and the Crawfords clearly represent uncaring irresponsible youth, but how may Sir Thomas be regarded, if we align him with George Austen's apparent acceptance of the laws of the slaving economy, which appalled his son and daughter? Tanner's account of the Mansfield Park estate is drawn more from the radical Tory Cobbett than from Austen: there is nothing in *Mansfield Park* at all like Emma's anthem to Donwell Abbey. Moira Ferguson is one who has considered Sir Thomas as a West Indian rather than a fine old English gentleman (Ferguson 1991:118–39).<sup>23</sup> His anxiety about family finances and his overseas estate echoes real problems for the sugar industry at the time the novel was written (1811), and a few years earlier. Ferguson sees Fanny's story as an allegory of slavery, comparing Sir Thomas's last-chapter 'improvement', and recognition of his failings, to the '[a]meliorist' position on emancipation' (Ferguson 1991: 118–39).<sup>24</sup> After the abolition of the slave trade, the 'West Indian interest' argued for better treatment for slaves. There was a greater need that the slaves who were there should survive, and reproduce, and in the face of campaigns for emancipation, however much they mocked them, the 'West Indians' were concerned to look more ethically respectable.

But if, with Ferguson, we think of Fanny's story only as a slave allegory which occludes representation of actual slaves, of Christopher Nibbs, say, or his mother, we lose something. In Ferguson's reading, Fanny is a slave/woman who complies with amelioration rather than emancipation. This underplays her resistance, as a figure who is put as helplessly where she is put, and as much at a disadvantage, as the West Indian schoolgirl Miss Lambe in *Sanditon*, or Miss Fitzgibbon in Charlotte Brontë's 'Emma'. Fanny Price is a heroine who resists the greatest possible pressure that can be put on a frail young girl in her difficult situation.<sup>25</sup> Everyone, including her beloved Edmund, puts pressure on her to marry Henry Crawford, which from her perspective would be obscene because she loves Edmund and, with good reason, dislikes Henry. But most twentieth-century readers collude with Sir Thomas in finding Fanny's feelings incomprehensible and unjustifiable; attitudes not unlike those of rapists or slave-masters.

She doesn't theorize like Jane Eyre, but Fanny Price is a heroine of resistance, of what Tony Tanner calls the 'negative will'. Pushed to the limit, she says 'no'. That is something, for the disempowered. Tanner's example of negative will is the woman who does not consent either to a calculated marriage or to her rape by the man she loves, the heroine of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (Tanner 1979).<sup>26</sup> Austen admired, imitated, and mocked Richardson, not least in her gentler reworking of *Clarissa* in Fanny Price's story (Jordan 1987:138–48).<sup>27</sup> It is astonishing how few readers of *Mansfield Park* can give any recognition to this

disadvantaged girl's resistance. An honourable exception is Ruth Vanita's study of how such texts may be judged in India, when reading of canonical English texts is required (Vanita 1992:90–8). She decided to negotiate the difference between herself, as teacher, and her students, whose life situation and experience as young women, and men, might be very remote from that suggested by these set texts. She asked them how they identified with the heroines of *Mansfield Park*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mill on the Floss*. They preferred the childhood defiance of George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver, regarding Emily Brontë's Catherine Earnshaw as too extreme and too selfish, and Fanny Price as too submissive and boringly selfless. There is consensus among readers in England, too, that Fanny is a poor little scaredy-cat, and hypocritical with it: my students never mention the courage it took to go on refusing to marry Henry, and only discuss it when I point it out to them. Austen was always ready to take risks with imperfect heroines whom her readers might not much like (too dull, like Fanny or the fading Anne Elliot, or too uppity, like Emma), and in Fanny Price she seems to have reached the limits of sympathy. Vanita comments on the vague vicariousness of her students' identification with Maggie Tulliver: they might sympathize with her rebellions, but would be unlikely to try and emulate them. They repudiate Fanny Price because, she suggests, Fanny was too close to home, to their own subordination and minimal possibilities for resistance:

Fanny knows what she wants but she goes about getting it in ways available to the powerless. Her strategies...are much closer to the strategies available to, and relatively more successfully pursued by, women than the open defiance of a Maggie, but for that very reason they evoke less sympathy and respect...our contempt for our own lives surfaces in our contempt for Fanny Price.

(Vanita 1992:96)

Vanita concludes that, for her students, reading and discussing English set texts could be a way of avoiding their actual situation, but also of facing up to it.

If Fanny Price deserves reconsideration in terms of 'the power of the powerless', of the intergenerational conflicts traditionally supposed to be the theme of this novel. reading *Mansfield Park* from the perspective of slavery also demands reconsideration. Neither Jane Austen's actual father, George Austen, nor Sir Thomas as patriarch, can be kept free and clean of the gross ethical indifference which permitted slavery, its spin-off industries and economic effects. If Sir Thomas represents English values, then they are bad values. As a 'West Indian' he may represent for Austen—as for Thackeray and Brontë in their different time, and ways—a commercial adventurism that was destroying the England of *Emma*. Fanny Price's romantic sensibility was modern then—her interest in traces of the past, in the strange natural world of stars in the night sky, and possibly also in the desperate slaves and deserted Indian maids (the borderline figures of abolitionist and romantic poetry, and of pre-romantic poetry

such as Cowper's). The Crawfords represent one kind of modernity, Fanny represents another. Arguably they are more archaic than she is, hangers-on of the Regency dandy, licensed by aristocratic privilege and conventions.<sup>28</sup>

## II

In *Sanditon* (1817) a middle-class gentleman, Mr Parker, and Lady Denham (a widow who had married into the minor English aristocracy) are trying to develop Sanditon as a seaside health resort, exploiting the new vogue for sea-bathing. Austen herself was literally sick to death when she was writing this novel, and did not live to complete her comedy of English invalidism, and its commercial exploitation. Cheltenham would be an inland equivalent of the plans for Sanditon; now a centre for celebrating the cultural heritage, it was developed as a health spa in the late eighteenth century, on money from the West and East Indies. Lady Denham's 'old-fashioned formality' is combined with her 'harassing apprehensions' that they might not be able to let lodgings quickly enough to get a return on their investment. However, it appears that they have two new applicants:

'Very good, very good', said her Ladyship.—'A West Indy family and a school. That sounds well. That will bring money'.

'No people spend more freely, I believe, than West Indians', observed Mr Parker.

'Aye—so I have heard—and because they have full purses, fancy themselves equal, may be, to your old country families. But then, they who scatter their money so freely, never think of whether they may not be doing mischief by raising the prices of things and I have heard that's very much the case with your West-Indjines—and if they come among us to raise the price of our necessaries of life, we shall not much thank them, Mr. Parker'.

'My dear madam, they can only raise the price of consumable articles, by such an extraordinary demand for them and such a diffusion of money among us, as must do more good than harm.—Our butchers and bakers and traders in general cannot get rich without bringing prosperity to us.—If *they* do not gain, our rents must be insecure—and in proportion to their profit must be ours eventually in the increased value of our houses'.

(Austen 1817/1974:180)

The dialogue is nicely tuned, between the careful precision of new economic man, and the more casual rhythms and vocabulary of the old lady of the Home Counties (her 'necessaries of life' are translated into his 'consumable articles'). Lady Denham is the epitome of an English will to deplore West Indians, and modern commercial activity, and also to beat them at their own game. Her business partnership with Mr Parker typifies the alliance between the aristocracy and the middle class, in trade, which has formed the modern English ruling class.

This hegemony was also represented in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), but there gentry prejudices against both trade and aristocracy are overcome when the businessman Mr Gardiner and the aristocrat Mr Darcy unite to redeem Lydia Bennet, runaway daughter of Austen's own class, the country gentry. The alliance which was positively entertained in *Pride and Prejudice* is mocked in *Sanditon*. Lady Denham's prejudice, that 'West Injines' distort the economy while aspiring to equality with the old families, tends to confirm the account given by Frank Gibbon, in 'The Antigua Connection', of attitudes to the ambitions of those who, like Mr Nibbs, had prospered in the West Indies and 'returned', to spend their money and seek status in England.<sup>29</sup> Her idea of 'the country' begins and ends with her local interests. These are far from firmly established, and by 'the old country families' I am pretty sure she is meant to mean exclusively what I would call 'County'—the upper crust, on which she doesn't have a secure foothold either.

What of Miss Lambe, the West Indian schoolgirl? She is 'about seventeen, half mulatto, chilly and tender, had a maid of her own, was to have the best room in the lodgings, and was always of the first consequence in every plan of Mrs Griffiths' (Austen 1817/1974:206). Mrs Griffiths is the schoolmistress whose pupils, including Miss Lambe, number only three, and prove to be all that exists of the West-Indy family and the school, on which Lady Denham and Mr Parker pinned their new hopes for the development of the resort. Miss Lambe is privileged, unlike Fanny Price or Jane Eyre; 'always of the first consequence in every plan' may suggest the resentment against excessively privileged rich girls which is more openly expressed in Charlotte Brontë's 'Emma' (316–17). Miss Lambe's delicate health is emphasized, as if she and the English climate might be radically unsuited.<sup>30</sup> Like the West Indian schoolgirls in mid-nineteenth-century fiction, she is a figure of dislocation. There are geographic and diasporic aspects to 'dislocation' (notably, the Black Atlantic triangle of England, Africa and the Americas, described by Paul Gilroy (1993)),<sup>31</sup> and associated economic aspects—too much money in new hands; disruption of an earlier socio-political order by the wars with France, and by the plantation and slaving economies which were involved in that contest (Roberts 1979). Such displacements and disruptions may also be psychic and emotional transitions and transvaluations. The West Indian schoolgirl might feel out of place, like a 'displaced person', however privileged. Miss Lambe is a very faint presence, obviously not represented 'in her own right', still less 'in her own write'. Unlike Brontë's Jane Eyre, she has no subjectivity of her own. She is apparently an heiress, being groomed for an English marriage.<sup>32</sup> Conceivably she could have become a threat to the secret romance developing towards the end of Austen's narrative, between Lady Denham's profligate and needy son (a would-be Byron, or a Lovelace, Richardson's seductive villain-hero in *Clarissa*) and Clara Brereton, who might have become a replay of Jane Fairfax (191–2; 210–11). The focalized, sensible, heroine is Charlotte Heywood, no sort of 'Emma', but a girl whose previous life has also been locked into the English countryside, in a gentlemanly farming

family. The slightness of the unfinished representation of Miss Lambe, so much in keeping with her supposed physical frailty, invites an attempt to understand her in relation to the mid-nineteenth-century schoolgirls, her companions in the English cultural heritage—especially the strongly coloured and definite image of Thackeray's Miss Swartz, and the faint 'uncanny' image of Brontë's Miss Fitzgibbon. I want to focus on this tiny network, on the incidental and not fully-thought ways in which these fictional representations of West Indian schoolgirls are put to use when the authors, Austen and Thackeray in particular, are manifestly considering changes in English life.

The presence of an heiress in nineteenth-century novels generally suggests that her marriage will be part of the romantic plot. It can be an obstacle to more passionate pairings, to a more caring alliance: the money that comes with her is usually foreign to true love. However, the heiress herself may show a good heart. This might have been the planned role of Miss Lambe, and was the case with the affectionate and generous Miss Swartz, in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847–8). In spite of the 'tropical ardour' she is ready to feel for him herself, she becomes the happy catalyst of George Osborne's forbidden marriage to the impoverished Amelia Sedley: "'Lor!...is it *my* Amelia?'" (253–6). Like Lady Denham's, her English usage is rough: the aristocratic or wealthy feel no need to watch their words carefully. She is a much more robust figure than Austen's Miss Lambe, and Thackeray's language about her is more explicit and highly coloured than that of Austen, or Brontë. She is the 'rich woolly-haired mulatto from St Kitts' in the first chapter of *Vanity Fair*, one of the schoolgirls in hysterics when Amelia Sedley leaves school. The extravagance of her grief is ironically justified by the double fees she pays (she feels she has a right to let herself go, unlike the subordinate schoolmistress with whom she is contrasted, and no one is going to rebuke her). She never learns the properly restrained feminine behaviour such schools were meant to teach, and 'woolly-haired' soon mutates into 'woolly-headed' (42–3). For Austen, the association with lambswool was enough of a hint at Miss Lambe's appearance, but like Miss Swartz she pays 'in proportion to her fortune', and is therefore 'beyond comparison the most important and precious' of the three schoolgirls—that ironic displacement of importance and preciousness onto money alone is Miss Lambe's introduction into Sanditon (206).

With the exception of Mrs Craik's *Crystal Manners*, the small fictional company of 'West Indian schoolgirls' that I have gathered together are without mothers (not visible, represented, ones; and *Crystal's* mother, shown at her last gasp, on her deathbed, is not motherly). Fathers may be around, somewhere off to the side, but these girls are basically represented as being in the charge of schoolmistresses, and Austen's Miss Lambe is the epitome: only her fortune is mentioned, nothing of her parents. Another element associating them is their naming. 'Miss' suggests social and institutional formality, while the surnames are all more-or-less allegorical: Miss Lambe, Miss Swartz, Miss Fitzgibbon (Susan Meyer assumes this means 'child of a monkey', but the name, like

Brontë's text, precedes Darwinian scandals, and could simply signify Irishness). Mrs Craik's 'Crystal Manners' allegorizes a preciosity and artifice which, the narrative implies, are at odds with her mother's dark passion, understood as being the fundamental truth of Crystal herself, which finally has to be contained in a convent. Miss Swartz and Miss Fitzgibbon do have Christian names (Rhoda, Matilda), but here again Miss Lambe suggests the personal loss they have all suffered: she has no first name. Too early use of a first name between women implies vulgarity in Austen's fiction (similarly, use of a man's surname alone can imply an intimacy too easily taken for granted, as when Mrs Elton, to Emma's disgust, starts talking about 'Knightley'). But abstract allegorical naming is not Austen's usual practice, so that in this as in other respects Miss Lambe does seem particularly lonely.<sup>33</sup>

All the fictional West Indian schoolgirls are associated with showily expensive dress, but, as with George Sand's delicate Indiana in 1832, the dressiness in *Sanditon* is not Miss Lambe's but that of her companions, the Miss Beauforts:<sup>34</sup>

just such young ladies as may be met with, in at least one family out of three, throughout the kingdom; they had tolerable complexions, showy figures, an upright decided carriage and an assured look—they were very accomplished and very ignorant, their time being divided between such pursuits as might attract admiration, and those labours and expedients of dexterous ingenuity, by which they could dress in a style much beyond what they ought to have afforded; they were some of the first in every change of fashion—and the object of all, was to captivate some man of better fortune than their own.

(Austen 1817/1974:206)

The Miss Beauforts have work to do on the marriage market, and having been 'involved in the inevitable expense of six new dresses for a three days' visit' are not best pleased with the 'smallness and retirement' of Sanditon, which Mrs Griffiths has preferred 'on Miss Lambe's account' (206). The implication is that Miss Lambe's complexion is not 'tolerable', and that is why she, like Miss Swartz, has to pay extra. Ciphers as the Miss Beauforts are (they seem unlikely to figure in the further plot), Miss Lambe is not more 'important' and 'precious' in herself, on this initial showing. Her fortune, the new money incoming from the West Indies, is what matters, and is likely to be better than that of a suitor such as Lady Denham's son, but if her face is her fortune she's at a loss, like Brontë's Miss Fitzgibbon. In the case of Miss Fitzgibbon her fashionable appearance—'all worked muslin, and streaming sash and elaborated ringlets' (Brontë 1853/1987:315)—sets her up for 'a shew-pupil—a decoy-bird' (308–9). The schoolmistress here sees no reason to hide her away; in contrast to Austen's Mrs Griffiths, she is incautiously eager to use the 'heiress' to suggest that her school is one where the wealthy send their daughters. When Miss Fitzgibbon is 'exposed', her adornments are 'no longer acceptable' (323).

Fashionable dress as a cover-up of an unacceptable body, and doubtful origins, is a particularly conspicuous feature of Thackeray's representation of Miss Swartz, which may suggest a corresponding will to strip her bare. There is a hint of such a desire in *Sanditon*, although Austen presents Miss Lambe more tentatively, more respectfully; I will attempt to support these questionable assertions shortly. As for origins, those of Thackeray's Miss Swartz are mockingly presented by the upwardly mobile George Osborne: "'Her father was a German Jew—a slave-owner they say—connected with the Cannibal Islands in some way or other'" (Thackeray 1847–8/1968:245). That is, she is not British at all, though she marries into the Scottish nobility, having been courted by, among others, the English businessman Mr Osborne, for his son and then on his own account. Thackeray's exuberant comic imagery presents her as a good-hearted 'Sambo' in fancy dress. The imaginative rhetoric has much in common with his 1853 letters on slaves in America, which supported the claims of plantation owners in the South.<sup>35</sup> Her blackness and love of ornament provoke an implicit comparison to the use of colonial trade goods ('diamonds and mahogany, my dear!' (Thackeray 1847–8/1968:244); 'countless rings, flowers, feathers, and all sorts of tags and gimcracks, about as elegantly decorated as a she chimney sweep on May-day' (252)). Like her 'streeling' satin dresses, these items perversely associate her with servile work and dirt, with chimney sweeps and, later, crossing sweepers. The real negation of generosity in Thackeray's representation of Miss Swartz is that she profits from slavery (inheriting fortunes from both the East and West Indies), but by implication she should herself be a slave, a woman you would rather put to work than marry. 'Poor Swartz', as the narrator calls her (252), is not to be taken seriously in herself, only in her potential to corrupt an Englishness all too ready to dishonour itself. Excessive emphasis on her excessive dress, by the character George Osborne but elaborated with equal mockery by the narrative voice, leads towards George's thoughts of her as a naked black woman.

This is George's finest moment, when he refuses to marry Miss Swartz for her money, with a fine sense of himself as an officer and a gentleman, and his father as merely a businessman. But George is not a fine character, and his hoity-toity statement can disturb readers, as well as the father, who at this point is 'almost black in the face' at his son's defiance of his wishes:

'Marry that mulatto woman?' George said, pulling up his shirt-collars. 'I don't like the colour, sir. Ask the black that sweeps opposite Fleet Market, sir. *I'm* not going to marry a Hottentot Venus.'

(Thackeray 1847–8/1968:256)

His finest moment, but a poor return for Mr Osborne's calculations, and also for Rhoda Swartz's affection towards Amelia. It is not clear, however, that Thackeray's authoritative narrative voice dissents from the terms in which George defies his father and refuses to marry the black heiress, rather than poor

Amelia. The 'Hottentot Venus' was an African woman, called Sarah Bartman, or versions of that name, who had been exhibited in London and other European capitals between 1810 and 1815, 'as if naked' (Gilman 1985:83–8).<sup>36</sup> Part of the interest was in the supposed difference between the sexual features of black and white women; sadly, horribly, her posthumous remains continued to be examined in this way. In Austen's *Sanditon* another interested party, Miss Diana Parker, is eager to encourage Miss Lambe in taking her first dip in the sea, from a bathing machine: 'She is so frightened, poor thing, that I promised to come and keep up her spirits, and go in the machine with her if she wished it' (Austen 1817/1974: 209). We may suppose that Miss Parker's charitable interest, bound up as it is with Mr Parker's commercial enterprise, includes a desire to see Miss Lambe in a state of undress. Austen may have wanted to note this. *Sanditon* studies, in a comic ironic mode, how our native frailty and mortality, our common kindness and need for both compassion and respect, are transformed and deformed by ambitious commerce.

In their different cultural and political contexts, all these texts that I compare encourage the reader to think of dressiness, or being over-dressed, and, by extension or inversion, of both the erotic naked body and the vulnerable, mortal, human being. Adornment (feathers, finery, fetishized stones) can signify both 'primitive savagery' and the wasteful expense of civilization, especially in the case of Miss Swartz: "I dare say she wore a nose-ring when she went to court, and with a plume of feathers in her top-knot she would look a perfect Belle-Sauvage" (Thackeray 1847–8/1968:244). Dress as a signifier of the female body, and of positive or negative sexual desire (a mode of representation which links all these West Indian schoolgirls), could suggest disapproval of 'miscegenation' as the main reason why this small constellation appears. In *Vanity Fair* Mr Sedley fears that his son Jos, an East Indian 'Nabob', might furnish him with an undesirable commodity, 'a dozen of mahogany grandchildren' (69). But fear of 'cross-race' reproduction may signify a more profound distress, at the damage done by a universalizing modern culture in which commercial interests dominate. The main feature shared by the representations of these girls is excess wealth, artificial luxury and privilege at the expense of members of the same, and other, communities. They signify the suffering and the excess entailed by modernity, by capitalism. The damage is then disavowed as un-English, as Irish, or West or East Indian, German or Jewish, or coming from somewhere in 'the Cannibal Islands'. Austen's Lady Denham and Mr Parker, in *Sanditon*, articulate the combination of disavowal and complicity in a process from which Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park profited. The dispute between Mr Osborne and his son in *Vanity Fair* repeats the doubleness of profit-making by the businessman, and its repudiation by the 'gentleman'.

Miss Lambe is not a heroine. We don't know what she looks like, let alone what she thinks and feels. She has no countenance, no substance, no subjectivity of her own; she only figures in the calculations of others. Austen's lamb (a lamb to the slaughter, near-contemporary of Blake's Christ-child, 'The Little Black

Boy’) stands on the uncanny edge of English Literature as ambivalently as Brontë’s sleepwalking Miss Fitzgibbon, the victim who stands accused:

she stood as if palsied—trying to speak—but apparently not competent to articulate...speech still seemed for her out of the question. Never such a pale face was seen at a legal bar—never such a quivering frame stood in a dock.

(Brontë 1853/1987:324)

According to Paul Gilroy, black people tend to figure in English discourse as victims or problems or both: ‘The oscillation between black as problem and black as victim has become, today, the principal mechanism through which “race” is pushed outside of history and into the realm of natural, inevitable events’ (Gilroy 1987:11). I have tried to think about how a small group of figures was imagined within the history of English literature and colonialism, and how these representations might be analysed, across their particular moments. They can, however, be differentiated, including as they do the scarcely decipherable ‘chilly’ or ‘pale-faced’ girls of Austen and Brontë, Craik’s demanding and murderously resentful Crystal, and Thackeray’s good-hearted Rhoda Swartz, robust and colourful as a rubber doll at a carnival. They testify to the presence of ‘the West Indian’ in the heartland of English culture, in the work of writers considered major, not just in works ‘added’ to the syllabus on multicultural principles. They also testify to anxieties about that presence.

### ***Afterword: the Yorkshire connection***

I am a Yorkshire girl, with a Danish father and a mother from Lancashire (her mother was Irish). Like many English people, I’m hybrid and proud of it; the genealogy of my husband’s family and therefore of our children would complicate matters further. I am confidently, and to some extent gratefully, essentially English. Some years ago my colleague Peter Hulme, who hails from Yorkshire’s old local enemy, Lancashire, reminded me that the ‘hinterland’ of slavery is not always out there, in another place or time, but may be close to home: not just on the coast, but sustained by inland industries, even in Yorkshire (Hulme 1994; Heywood 1987: 185–98).<sup>37</sup> England countenanced slavery and profited, in many ways and places, not just in the major slaving ports.

However, my sympathy with the bitter ‘WE’, in Merle Collins’s poem ‘Visiting Yorkshire—Again’ is not simply the guilt of a postcolonial, well-educated, middle class. My father never spoke English properly (child of a large family, he worked his way around the world on ships, in restaurants, serving and singing, and later he worked with people who mostly didn’t speak proper English either; he had a very fine tenor voice). I was attacked in an alleyway by local lads, not just because I was ‘brainy’ and ‘stuck-up’, but because my father was ‘a

yellow foreigner'. This traumatic memory, epitomizing others, is one source of my sympathy, I guess.

School visits in the 1950s to Harewood House, from my girls' grammar school, did nothing to inform me that this great English country house, and the Lascelles family fortune which built the Harewood estate, were founded on profits from the West Indies, on sugar and slavery. The house is now a cultural centre, with popular attractions in the grounds, such as exotic birds. I was a scholarship girl (and a Welfare State child, dosed with free vitamins, cod-liver oil, orange juice and milk): the beneficiary of moves, after the Second World War, to get more young women, and more students from underprivileged schools and areas, into Oxford University. At Somerville College, Oxford, in the 1960s, I was taught by Mary Lascelles, the Austen scholar, who may have been active in this liberal opening-up. She was then (I was told, as you are told such things at Oxford) seventeenth in succession to the throne. Her ancestor, the first Earl of Harewood, received huge compensation when slaves were emancipated in the Caribbean; that's how the 'aristocratic' estate was founded. He was heir to the Lascelles brothers, who were colonial tradesmen: sugar-factors, customs officials, and money-lenders to slave merchants. That is how they got started (Fryer 1984).

Mary Lascelles was undoubtedly a good scholar—wide, often surprising, reading, critical acumen and grace—and a conscientious teacher, though I wish now that she had not knocked the stuffing out of my late-adolescent interests and enthusiasms (as other scholars of the period, such as Brian Southam and Ian Jack, conscientiously tried to knock the stuffing out of some lines of critical enquiry). I am confident that she was a resister, a lady who would not 'kow-tow'. But she never told me what she must have, should have, known. My respect for her is limited by her silence about the ethical relation of Austen's writing to histories of power, and money, in England and beyond. She hadn't thought seriously about these matters, prevented by her culture and education. Was I naïve to be so shocked to learn the history of Harewood House, or of great ports like Liverpool, or of genteel spas like Cheltenham? To be sure, I was.

### Notes

- 1 The comedy was reprinted in many play collections. Cumberland belonged to an eminent Anglo-Irish family, and was made Secretary to the Board of Trade and Plantations in 1775, perhaps as a reward for his promotion of 'the West Indian interest'. West Indian and Irish concerns remain interestingly close in nineteenth-century political and literary journalism and essays (Ireland being the colony closest to home, for the English). See Carlyle's *Chartism*, 1839, ch. 4, on the Irish peasantry, and *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question*, 1849/1853 (*Works* vol. 17, 1888:268–76, 463–92). For Thackeray's *Irish Sketch Book* see Ray 1955: 311.
- 2 *Opie* 1805, III:5. See also II, 154–61, 174–9, 186–9.

- 3 See, for examples, Henry McKenzie, *Julia de Roubigné* (1777); Charlotte Smith, *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1794), and her earlier *Desmond* (repr. 1974, New York: Garland); and Amelia Opie's *Temper* (1812, repr. 1974, *Works*, New York: AMS Press Inc.). Opie, from a well-known radical circle in Norwich, East Anglia, knew Mary Wollstonecraft (her husband John painted Mary's portrait), but after divorce she took a more hostile view of the 'reformation in female manners' proposed by Wollstonecraft, and this appears in *Adeline Mowbray*. Smith's attitudes to slavery shifted comparably, from an abolitionist stance, to something like the 'amelioration' (improved conditions without emancipation) proposed by the plantocracy.
- 4 *Sanditon* was first published in *Works*, ed. Chapman, 1925, vol. VI.
- 5 Roberts criticizes Raymond Williams's view that, in comparison to Cobbett, Austen was 'unaware of the economic change on the English countryside' (Roberts 1979:65–6).
- 6 'Emma' is transcribed from ms. in *The Professor*, ed. Rosengarten and Smith, 1987: Appendix VI, 303–25; page references are to this edition. There are two schoolteachers, the Miss Fetherheds, but only one is developed, and she is variously called Miss Fetherhed, Miss Featherhed, and Miss Wilcox.
- 7 The edited version of 'Emma' published in *The Cornhill Magazine*, April 1860, with an introduction by W.M.Thackeray, is reprinted in *Unfinished Novels*, ed. Winnifrith, 1993. The name Matilda may recall the white Creole heroine of Barbara Hofland's popular *The Barbadoes Girl* (1801). Not the heroine of the title, Matilda might have been contrasted to an English heroine, as Mrs D.M.Craik's *Crystal Manners* is contrasted to the Anglo-Scots heroine of *Olive* (1850). The Irish/West Indian connection is continued in 'Emma': Fitzgibbon is an Irish name, and the father/guardian's name in ms. was originally Ormond, also Irish.
- 8 Hall's work is of particular interest to this study, with two of its focal points in Jamaica, and gender.
- 9 '...again and again it seemed that Miss Fitzgibbon was about to fall to her proper level—but then somewhat provokingly to the lovers of reason and justice—some little incident would occur to invest her insignificance with artificial interest' (317). This is one of the points in Brontë's text which is most hostile to Miss Fitzgibbon, but the incidents include the sleepwalking—'all white in her night-dress—moaning and holding out her hands as she went' (318)—which hints at her relation to both Bertha Mason and Jane Eyre, and her uncanny ambiguity at the end of the text (323–5).
- 10 Britain banned the slave trade in 1807. Legislation for the emancipation of slaves was passed in 1832, and was meant to become effective from 1838. Brontë's 'Emma' was written late in 1853, when Harriet Beecher Stowe was campaigning in England against slavery in the Southern American states. In the same year Thackeray was touring America, and very concerned that his womenfolk should not compromise his position, or that of English diplomats, by supporting Stowe.
- 11 Sand 1832/1994. See also Miller 1985:93–5: 'Even though the only difference between the French Creole and the French of France is climate and culture, that difference is radicalized and expressed as if it were a question of race.' Aurore Dudevant influenced the Brontës, George Eliot and the poet E.B.Browning; her pseudonym George Sand was neither masculine (Georges) nor feminine, and more English than French.

- 12 See Sypher also for common representations of the 'West Indian'.
- 13 These passages evoke the charm of English cultivated landscape, whose rambling gradations recall Edmund Burke's idea of the English constitution, not to be idly or arbitrarily redesigned—which might be true of what remains of the countryside.
- 14 We may learn from *Emma* that Emma's perceptions and interests are not so central as she thinks, rereading it from the perspective of the shadow heroine, Jane Fairfax: as Emma herself acknowledges when she misquotes *Romeo and Juliet*, 'the world is not theirs, nor the world's law' (Austen 1816/1966:391).
- 15 Later we will see Thackeray's Miss Swartz dressed in satin, and young ladies commenting nastily on how lovely the *satin* is, implying that the lady herself is not so lovely. Indiana's black maid Noun is similarly 'dressed up rather than dressed in her fine attire' (Sand 1832/1994:62).
- 16 Cp. the discussion between Emma and Mr Knightley in Ch. 8, and between Emma and Harriet in ch. 10.
- 17 See the dread of having to go out to teach represented by Mary Garth, in Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–2), and by Gwendolen Harleth, in her *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Maggie Tulliver's school-teaching experiences in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) are not described, only pitied, although on the whole school-teaching is preferred to the dependency of governessing.
- 18 'Anne was ashamed.... [Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret] were nothing' (Austen 1818/1994:147). Anne, regarded as someone of no importance in family affairs, values the impoverished invalid Mrs Smith and Nurse Rooke, her accomplice in getting charity out of ailing wealthy women, much more than these 'important' relations (152–4). They, like Jane Fairfax, are the shadow side of Austen's social sympathies. Through Nurse Rooke she gives a new perspective on gentry society: Rooke listens and observes, to see what she can make out of her patients (while helping poorer ones like Mrs Smith); but Anne just didn't see Nurse Rooke when she opened the door to her (196). 'To rook' meant to cheat, but there's no censure of Nurse Rooke as a con-woman.
- 19 Clarkson's *A History of the Slave Trade* was published in 1808. On 24 January 1813 Jane Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra that she was 'as much in love' with the author of an essay 'on the Military Police and Institutions of the British Empire... as ever I was with Mr Clarkson' (Austen 1955). Had her views changed, and what would this imply? The claim, frequently quoted, that Austen was 'in love' with Clarkson ignores its place, subsidiary and retrospective, in this letter. Opposition to slavery and commitment to policing the world were by no means incompatible. It is clear that Jane Austen was opposed to slavery, on principle. For Francis Austen's views, see Hubback and Hubback 1926:192.
- 20 On British campaigns for the abolition of the trade and the emancipation of slaves, see Blackburn 1988, Drescher 1986, Ferguson 1993, Hall 1992, Midgley 1992.
- 21 Southam 1969:19–20, on George and Francis Austen's connections with the West Indies: 'These facts are trivial, and add nothing to the meaning of *Mansfield Park*.' This wilful veto on further thought and investigation by a respected scholar can be compared to an editorial note in a scholarly edition of *Wuthering Heights*: 'Speculation about the racial origin of Heathcliff are [*sic*] futile, as Emily Brontë deliberately leaves the matter uncertain' (1847/1976:419). Silence precisely provokes speculation, which need not be seen in advance as trivial or futile.

- 22 The naval shipyard at the Nore, where Tom Williams commanded in 1811, was a site of mutiny in 1797. Of such mutinies Francis Austen wrote: 'The unpopularity of the navy, and the consequent shorthandedness in time of war, had one very bad result in bringing into it all sorts of undesirable foreigners, who stirred up strife among the better disposed men, and altogether aggravated the evils of the service' (Hubback and Hubback 1926:36). Thirteen of Francis Austen's crew deserted in the West Indies in 1806; the Hubbacs, however, stress that his treatment of his men was better than most (169). His comments are interesting in view of claims that more than a quarter of the 'hearts of oak' at this time were neither British nor white. Peter Fryer finds no evidence for such a high proportion, but many black men did work on British ships (Fryer 1984:502, fn. 22). Resistance by experienced British seamen to being press-ganged into 'national service' during this period is movingly recorded in the early chapters of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863).
- 23 I do not stress the echo in the title, of Lord Mansfield's 1772 decision in the case of James Somerset, that a slave brought to England could not legally be considered a slave in England, and therefore could not be forced to return to a colony as a slave. I don't think this enters into the novel's argument, though it may be a back-beat to the analogy between Englishwomen and slaves, in the famously 'free' air of England (Fryer 1984: 120–6). Austen met, and disliked, members of the next Earl Mansfield's family, in 1813, while writing *Mansfield Park* (Honan 1987:155).
- 24 Fanny was wrenched from her home, taken to Mansfield Park and made perpetual use of there, then repatriated to Portsmouth to teach her a proper preference for Sir Thomas's regime. He wants to mate her to Henry Crawford, which would benefit him financially, and cannot understand why the girl might resist.
- 25 Fanny can figure the subordinate who resists, quite as much as Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, and, in her case, vindication is not won at the expense of a West Indian woman represented as an ogre.
- 26 Tanner 1979, *passim*. The heroine who says 'no', even if she loves her would-be seducer, is celebrated in women's fiction from Mme de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*, in the late seventeenth century, to George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*.
- 27 The use of letters to Fanny in the Portsmouth chapters of *Mansfield Park* (Vol. III) can be seen as a quiet tribute to Richardson; that Crawford 'wanted the glory of forcing her to love him' is a more sentimental version of Lovelace's desire to 'have' Clarissa.
- 28 Tanner's influential thinking about tradition and modernity in *Mansfield Park* is limited, and this limitation is shared by leftist social and cultural historians such as Raymond Williams, E.P.Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, whose exclusionary thinking about a national identity outside capitalism and colonialism is not so far from right-wing nostalgia. See Paul Gilroy 1987:49–53.
- 29 Gibbon 1982: fn. 10. In Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847–8), set in the period of *Sanditon*, a parliamentary seat is sold by an old county family, the Crawleys, to a Mr Quadroon. This is before the 1832 reform of parliament: Mr Pitt Crawley is an abolitionist but knows the value of money, so the MP is given 'carte-blanche on the Slave question'. The implication is that Mr Quadroon is of mixed race, and also votes in the 'West Indian', plantocratic, interest (Thackeray 1847–8/1968:121). The meanings of 'country' and 'county' in these contexts deserve more consideration.

- 30 A West African orphan who became a protégée of Queen Victoria in 1850, Sally Forbes Bonetta, was sent to a missionary school in Sierra Leone because, as the Church Missionary Society advised, 'the climate of this country is often fatally hurtful to the health of African children' (*Sunday Times*, 16 March 1997:7).
- 31 In ordinary English, 'dislocation' suggests injury to a limb, or bone structure. Since the translation by Alan Bass of Jacques Derrida's *Writing and Difference* it has been used, in academic circles, more widely and metaphorically, as a theoretical term (Derrida 1978: 282). The unhappy aspects of feeling, or being made to feel, 'out of place' are particularly apposite to figures such as the West Indian schoolgirls I discuss.
- 32 Fear of 'black blood' insinuating itself into the English ruling class can be seen in Thackeray 1847–8/1968:67–9, and in Anthony Trollope's *Phineas Finn* (1869), where Lady Glencora fears that Madame Max, widow of a Jewish banker, may marry the aged Duke of Omnium and introduce into the English aristocratic bloodline something too new and too old, both primitive and degenerate: 'some little wizen-cheeked half-monkey baby with black brows and yellow skin' (Chapters 57 and 62). The conjunction of the German Jew and the 'Black' in the nineteenth-century imagination is present in *Vanity Fair* also, and discussed in Gilman 1985.
- 33 Allegory is common in the naming of Thackeray's puppet-characters (for example, Mr Quadroon; or Miss Pye, a mulatto heiress with whom George Osborne had flirted in the West Indies); and Brontë in 'Emma' was in two minds about giving her schoolmistress a realistically ordinary name, Miss Wilcox, or the ironic Fe[a]therhed (this French-educated schoolmistress is clearly meant to be both hard-headed and hard-hearted).
- 34 Sand 1832/1994:43. Indiana's delicate simplicity is contrasted to other women's 'diamonds, feathers, and flowers'. Like Brontë's Jane Eyre, and her first, cancelled, thoughts about Miss Fitzgibbon, she is 'fairy-like'. Cp. Brontë's 'Emma': The child had a graceful and flexible figure her short skirts shewed limbs exquisitely turned—never owned elfin or fairy finer ankles [...] Nevertheless Miss Fitzgibbon also looks '[the stylish] little lady' (Brontë 1853/1987:308–9).
- 35 1853 was the year of Harriet Beecher Stowe's visit to England to campaign against slavery in America, supported by the Duchess of Sutherland (whose own treatment of Highland Scots on her estates was deplorable). Thackeray, who had earlier shown scant sympathy with the Irish people, writes with especial insistence to his mother, daughters, and women friends, urging them not to sign the 'Womanifesto' against slavery. Almost without reservation, he accepts the plantation owners' view of their benevolence (Ray: 1958: 216–19, and 1946:181 and *passim*). Letters written on a later visit in 1856 suggest apprehensions which evoke both Conrad and Toni Morrison (Ray 1955:167–74), but he is still fantasizing about buying a little 'imp' or two for his daughters, if only they didn't have to grow up. It was in late 1853 that Charlotte Brontë sketched 'Emma', a year when emancipation of slaves was on many minds, and which saw the publication of Carlyle's 'On the Nigger Question'.
- 36 During one of Thackeray's youthful visits to Paris, c. 1829, there was another 'Hottentot Venus' on display (Ray 1955:167–74).
- 37 Hulme's discussion of the use of family histories is relevant to my use of Austen's family history.

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### 3

## Learning to ride at Mansfield Park

*Donna Landry*

*Mansfield Park* is about learning to ride. With her usual social perspicacity, Jane Austen reveals the intimate connection between upper-class English femininity and ‘having a leg over’, or, in the days of side-saddle riding, two legs over, on the same side. It is hardly surprising that, in their excitement at recognizing the novel’s colonial dimensions, recent critics have not noticed this phenomenon. Yet it too has its colonial dimension, in that a sporting, fox-hunting, horse-mad image of Englishness was exported to the empire, where colonized subjects could observe ‘group photographs of cheerfully grinning white faces, or of hunting scenes with Englishmen dressed in red coats happily falling off horses’ (Keating 1987:42). Advising her readers to marry riding men and to follow outdoor pursuits themselves, Violet Greville extolled the pleasures of riding in India in a manner designed to recruit women for service to the empire:

There is a peculiar charm in Indian riding.... There is something fascinating in the sense of space and liberty, the feeling that you can gallop at your own sweet will across a wide plain, pulled up by no fear of trespassing...free as a bird, you lay the reins on your horse’s neck, and go till he or you are tired.

(Greville 1894:27, 19–20)

Training in horsemanship sufficient to enjoy taking such colonial liberties with native landed property should be understood as part of that ‘domestic imperialist culture’ identified by Edward Said, ‘without which Britain’s subsequent acquisition of territory would not have been possible’ (Said 1993: 95).

Previous generations of critics may have found *Mansfield Park* as priggish and as lacking in irony as they found Fanny Price herself, but recent criticism has emphasized the novel’s social and political complexity and subtlety, its use of irony, and its centrality to Austen’s *oeuvre*. Alistair Duckworth, for example, organized his study of estates and ideas of improvement in Austen’s fiction around this novel (Duckworth 1971). Plantation slavery in Antigua shores up the Bertrams’ estate at Mansfield Park, as Avrom Fleishman (1967) and R.S.Neale (1985) have demonstrated. Moira Ferguson has read the novel as a post-

abolitionist text seething with insurrectionary potential. She observes, 'Lady Bertram is comatose, but can that state last? The condition of indolent plantocratic wives is certainly coming to an end' (Ferguson 1993:87). Ferguson sees the novel as replete with foreclosed insurgencies, and the 'rebellious acts' of Fanny Price and other female characters as 'paradigmatic of slave resistance' (ibid.: 87-8). Working closer to the context I have in mind, Marilyn Butler discovers not so much insurrection in Austen as 'a prison break of a kind', 'a palace revolution' on behalf of the cadet branch of impoverished lesser gentry to which she and her brothers belonged, that class of 'new professionals, emerging from, but intellectually impatient with, the gentry' (Butler 1987: xliv).

Butler also notices Mary's riding lesson as a key to character in *Mansfield Park* (ibid.: 223), as does John Wiltshire. For him, Fanny's near-invalidism is symptomatic of libidinal repression, and her final permanent return to Mansfield is a therapeutic one, 'less as victor than as convalescent' (Wiltshire 1992:68-72, 107). He thus projects a conservative resolution to the novel, paralleling Fanny's own settling 'for "comfort" and "peace" within an admittedly imperfect social world' (ibid.: 107). Wiltshire's diagnosis of Fanny, however, is a far more upbeat one than Claudia L. Johnson's. Johnson detects not social imperfection but pervading disease at Mansfield Park, in which Fanny colludes because she cannot help but identify 'ideologically and emotionally...with the benighted figures who coerce and mislead her' (Johnson 1988:96). Johnson considers it 'Austen's most, rather than her least, ironic novel and a bitter parody of conservative fiction' (ibid.: 96). Yet how bitter a parody is it? I find the novel's diagnosis of upper-gentry pathology less dire than Johnson's but less sanguine than Wiltshire's.

How might the discourses and practices of the countryside, as they had developed in the previous century, have helped produce this complex, ironic, colonially alert novel, written between 1811 and 1813, and published in 1814? What place do hunting and riding have in this figuring of rural society? Once, critics of Austen were likely to know these things without even having to think about them, much as Austen's readers might have been expected to do. Mary Lascelles, for example, knew the gentry, great as well as small, as an insider. Comparing Austen's inheritance of a prose style in which generalizations need not seem vague to the inheritance of 'a prosperous and well-ordered estate' (Lascelles 1939:107), Lascelles rehearses Vernon Lee's figuring of a writer's relation to a reader as that between someone driving and the horse. The reader, like a horse,

'has to be always kept awake, and kept extra awake whenever any new turn is coming, so that much of the craft of writing consists in preventing the Reader from anticipating wrongly on the sense of the Writer, going off on details in wrong directions, lagging behind or getting lost.... People catch naturally at what is most familiar to them, as a horse turns naturally down the streets he knows.'

(Lascelles 1939:173)

Lascelles herself adds that the reader, properly managed, may become, as it were, ‘half-horse, half-man; may like to *feel* himself well handled, to *understand* the skill with which his attention and energy have been directed’ (ibid.: 173–4). Few literary critics think in such terms today.

That Austen herself may well have done so is suggested by Mary Augusta Austen-Leigh’s account of the Austens as a sporting family. Jane Austen’s brothers all went fox-hunting at an early age ‘on anything they could get hold of’,

and Jane when five or six must often have gazed with admiring, if not envious, eyes at her next oldest brother, Frank, setting off for the hunting field at the ripe age of seven, on his bright chestnut pony Squirrel (bought by himself for £1 12s.), dressed in a suit of scarlet cloth made for him from a riding habit which had formed part of his mother’s wedding outfit.

(Austen-Leigh 1920:57)

Austen-Leigh wastes no time on her ancestor’s gender-specific heart burnings, however, but assures us that all such memories would be grist for the novelist’s mill. We ‘feel that she is perfectly at home in all branches of the subject’ of sport ‘and could readily enter into the feelings of Sir John Middleton and Charles Musgrove towards the precious fox or the pernicious rat’ (Austen-Leigh 1920:57–8).

Not to put too fine a point on it: what are we to make of the very different ways in which Fanny Price and Mary Crawford learn to ride, but not to hunt, at Mansfield Park? Between its gradual adoption in Europe from the fifteenth century onwards<sup>1</sup> and its practical abandonment in the course of the twentieth, the side-saddle functioned both as sign and machine of gender difference.<sup>2</sup> The use of the side-saddle at once presupposes and ensures most women’s athletic inferiority. Side-saddle manuals repeatedly stress that ‘a woman’s limbs are unsuited to cross saddle riding, which requires length from hip to knee, flat muscles and a slight inclination to “bow legs!”’ (Hayes 1893:179–80). The assumption that women’s physique and muscles are such that they need the extra security provided by the side-saddle seat goes hand in hand with assumptions of their general weakness, of femininity as invalidity. But the extent to which the side-seat limits the woman’s ability to use her whole body to control a horse, as a man riding astride can do, is the extent to which feminine feats of side-saddle prowess should be recognized as more, not less, athletic and brave than those accomplished by modern women (and men) riding astride. The first thing we should notice about riding in the vicinity of Mansfield Park is that both women and men do it, but that men also go hunting, a point to which we shall return. The fact that Mansfield Park lies in Northamptonshire, a county of posh packs of hounds and fashionable hunting countries,<sup>3</sup> is, like the insurrectionary potential of Antigua, simply assumed by the narration, represented by the casual talk of fox-

hunting and people's hunters as Antigua's instability is registered by Sir Thomas's 'recent losses on his West India Estate', the 'very great uncertainty in which every thing was then involved', and the 'dead silence' that follows his disquisition on the slave trade (Austen 1966: 59, 71, 213).

Austen's description of a female riding lesson is historically significant, for the very term 'riding' had undergone a shift during the later eighteenth century. Before 1800, *The Sportsman's Dictionary* did not bother with a special entry on 'Horsemanship' as such, and the entry 'To Ride' referred only to 'learning the manage' (*The Sportsman's Dictionary* 1735, 1778, 1792). 'Manage' or 'menage' here refers both to an enclosed, and often covered, riding school and to the principles of classical riding —what we would today call 'dressage', which means literally training or schooling.<sup>4</sup> In the 1800 edition, 'Horsemanship' appears as an entry drawn from John Lawrence's *A Philosophical And Practical Treatise On Horses* (1796):

The decline of Riding-house forms in this country, and the universal preference given to expedition, fully confirm the superior use and propriety of a jockey-seat.... There are many persons unaccustomed to riding on horseback, who, when they occasionally mount, are very justly anxious both for their personal safety, and their appearance. It is for the benefit of these we write.

(*The Sportsman's Dictionary* 1800)

A growing urban culture was by the 1790s producing increasing numbers of city dwellers with no necessary or immediate connection to horsemanship. Like William Cowper's comic citizen, John Gilpin, they might, without instruction, be expected to be run away with by wilful horses and made laughing-stocks of town and country.<sup>5</sup> In 1807, still under Lawrence's influence, a revised entry 'To Ride' is added:

To RIDE is so familiar and appropriate a term for exercise on horseback, that it is impossible to make it clearer by any periphrasis.... What is commonly called riding the great horse, but more properly the manage... has the same relation to riding, in its common acceptation, that the military exercise and dancing have to the general use of the limbs of a man in walking and running; and the traveller and the sportsman, if they have only been trained in the riding school, will have much to unlearn, or they will find their horses ill able to carry them through a long journey, or a long chase.

(*The Sportsman's Dictionary* 1807:382)

By this moment in history, the English hunting seat has been fully invented. We have also entered the world in which Austen's landed female characters may, or rather must, take the air on horseback for their health's sake.

In 1796, Lawrence had written regarding the ‘Modern Method of Riding on Horseback, as Practised by Both Sexes’:

This salubrious exercise, by which the air may be so amply varied, is peculiarly adapted to debilitated and consumptive habits, and the lax fibre; for it tends to the increase of substance, which the labour of walking has, in general, the effect to abrade.... It is, perhaps, the only effectual remedy for habitual costiveness and wind.... The motion of the horse and fresh draughts of pure, elastic air, are the best, perhaps the only means, to recruit and exhilarate the exhausted spirits, relieve the aching heads, and enliven the imaginations of studious and sedentary men; but how much it is to be lamented that under our profuse, and I am sorry to add, dishonest and ruinous political system, these comforts are now totally out of the reach of moderate incomes.

(Lawrence 1796:277–9)

Lawrence’s works were numerous and well-known; Austen might well have read them. The rationale for Fanny’s learning to ride because she lives at Mansfield Park is thus packed with contemporary social meaning.

In the spirit of John Lawrence, riding for women is celebrated in the novel not as competitive enterprise but as therapy. Indeed in *Mansfield Park* the femininity that does not take exercise is represented as invalidism. Wiltshire (1992:64–5) puts a spin different from mine on Lady Bertram’s supine femininity when he quotes the passage in which she is described as ‘the picture of health, wealth, ease, and tranquillity’ falling into a gentle doze (Austen 1966:151). I think there is more irony attached to the narrator’s attribution of health here than he does. Such a supine being as Lady Bertram, who assumes invalidism to be her natural state, shows up the pathological dimensions of contemporary definitions of femininity. Ironically, Lady Bertram is both perfectly healthy and perfectly inert. So long as she remains on her sofa, she need not put her femininity to any tests—or tasks. However *comically* invalidated out, Lady Bertram figures femininity as pathology; without therapy, Fanny too is prone to disease. As therapy, riding is represented by the novel as more beneficial than walking, because more energetic, although walking too is recommended, even if only in landscaped ‘walks’ designed for the purpose. In this respect Austen engages ironically with Mary Wollstonecraft’s diagnosis of upper-class women’s femininity as diseased, requiring and reproducing a hot-house atmosphere. ‘Liberty’, Wollstonecraft had written, ‘is the mother of virtue, and if women be, by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must ever languish like exotics, and be reckoned beautiful flaws in nature’ (Wollstonecraft 1988:37).

Expounding the view of women’s riding as health-regimen, Austen also looks forward to ‘Victorian notions of feminine puissance’, to borrow a phrase from Claudia L. Johnson (1995:203). Johnson’s own argument is that, in *Emma* at

least, Austen does *not* look forward to such notions, ‘but hearkens backwards still to the norms of manly independence which Burke’s paeon to Marie-Antoinette interrupted’ (ibid.: 203). As Mrs J. Stirling Clarke expounded, in the self-professedly first treatise on riding entirely aimed at ladies rather than gentlemen, no other recreation can compare with riding in this respect, and in a few others as well.

Who that has observed some of the many fair equestrians of the present day, accompanied by their brothers or more favoured esquires, sweeping by in their morning canter, glowing with health and cheerfulness, but will readily admit that grace and beauty are never more finely displayed than in the practice and enjoyment of this invigorating exercise?

(Clarke 1860:1)

Clarke’s preface is dated July 1, 1857. There had of course been earlier treatments of the lady’s seat, briefly in the works of John Lawrence, and in George Reeves, *The Lady’s Practical Guide to the Science of Horsemanship* (London, 1838), and Willis Hazard, *The Lady’s Equestrian Manual* (Philadelphia, 1854). But Clarke’s book was by far the most elaborate and sumptuously produced, emphasizing riding as an art, not a science. In granting that skilled horsewomen, however rare they might be, might wish to gallop, jump, and go fox-hunting, Clarke’s treatise anticipates the yet more puissant Victorian work of Mrs Power O’Donoghue (1881, 1887) and Alice M. Hayes (1893), who give detailed advice about the hunting field and the management of difficult horses. For,

of all the recreations with which this generation abounds over those which have proceeded [sic] it, none creates more real and heartfelt enjoyment in the young, and indeed in all ages, than the exercise of riding; for, seated, as we are, high in air, surrounded by the pure atmosphere, and inhaling it, our elasticity is increased, and an indescribable sense of happiness pervades the whole frame. But to feel this exquisitely, proficiency in the art is indispensable; fear and trembling giving place to that consummate ease and confidence, which can only be obtained by good practice and study.

(Clarke 1860:4)

That Fanny regards horses and riding initially with terror (Austen 1966:62) is, in one sense, then, perfectly normal for a child or young woman. But since health benefits outweigh these natural fears, the fears must be overcome. Like Lawrence, Clarke gives us a language of the physiological and aesthetic sensations to be gained from riding that is more semiotically detailed than Austen’s novel, but nevertheless remarkably in keeping with it.

For Clarke, riding, at least in fashionable places like London parks, figures in the list of accomplishments that a woman might display to advantage in the

marriage market, despite its status as a new fashion, and one newly legitimated by royal example:

Some years ago, riding was by no means general amongst the fair sex; then ladies on horseback were the exception and not, as now, the rule... [T]here is now scarcely a young lady of rank, fashion, or respectability, but includes riding in the list of her accomplishments; and who, whether attaining her end or not, is not ambitious of being considered by her friends and relatives, 'a splendid horsewoman'.... Too thankful indeed can we not be to our most gracious Queen, and,—we repeat it, for inciting in her own amiable person so many of her fair subjects to following her illustrious example...for...it is to be feared that the many great advantages due to horse exercise would never have been so effectively brought before parents, as to induce them to admit riding among the early requirements of their daughters.

(Clarke 1860:2–4)

Thus Sir Thomas might seem a proto-Victorian father, both in insisting on equestrian exercise for his daughters and Fanny, and for implicitly recognizing the value of Fanny's becoming a competent, if not a 'splendid', horsewoman. With regard to her securing by marriage the 'provision of a gentlewoman' (Austen 1966: 44), which Sir Thomas, in the light of his own overburdened estate, hopes she will achieve, riding fashionably well might well be essential. This would seem to be true for the 1850s at least, but what evidence is there for earlier in the century?

Clarke, although writing mid-century and primarily for a London audience, nevertheless gives us a glimpse of how things might have been in rural Northamptonshire forty years before:

In the provinces, excellence in the art is often met with amongst the female members of many an old county family; and, if it be so much prized, where, frequently, there are but few to witness the beauties of an elegant equestrian deportment, how much more so should it be by those, who are preparing to enter a public and fashionable ride like *Rotten Row*, thronged with fair candidates for equestrian fame; the resort, too, of every noble stranger, who, charmed with a '*coup d'oeil*' such as no other country can boast, will doubtless on returning to his native land, descant on horsemanship, or excellence in riding, as not the least amongst the many valued attributes of Albion's daughters.

(Clarke 1860:15–16)

There is no need for Austen's novel to dwell upon the class markers of this particular form of exercise, nor upon its patriotic as well as self-promotional and erotic-exhibitionist qualities. The association of riding with wealth and position

as well as health serves as a powerful injunction for newcomers to Mansfield. According to Austen, riding for pleasure<sup>6</sup> in the early years of the nineteenth century seems confined to landed county families, as Clarke's treatise suggests. John Lawrence had also found horse-keeping out of the reach of 'moderate incomes' in 1796. Not even Mary Crawford, with twenty thousand pounds, has learned to ride in London. Within a few decades she might well have been portrayed as dashing along Rotten Row before her visit to Mansfield.

So self-enclosed is the world of the estate and the larger, but only ever obliquely mentioned, community of gentry with whom the Bertrams mix, that what the Bertram women do has to stand in for what women as a whole do; or rather, what ladies do. Not even Fanny's original class difference prevents her from learning to ride once she is at Mansfield. The making of a gentlewoman—Sir Thomas's object in taking Fanny into his household—*requires* that she be able to ride, even in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Although it may be girlishly normal for Fanny to fear horses at first, her terror might also be said to bear a satirical trace of her lower-middle-class and sea-going origins. After all, Clarke's *The Habit & The Horse* was aimed at young women of fortune to whom riding did not come naturally because they had no familial experience of it. This particular class-fix might be detected in the order of precedence reflected in the title; the habit coming before the horse suggests a Barbie-style sense of riding viewed as a feminine accomplishment for which appropriate dress is the most crucial feature. The daughter of 'a Lieutenant of Marines, without education, fortune, or connections' (Austen 1966:41) is not likely to cut much of a figure on horseback without proper tuition. Horsemanship and the navy are traditionally at odds, as Smollett hilariously demonstrates when Commodore Trunnion tacks laboriously across the fields on horseback *en route* to his wedding, until a stag-hunt inspires the newly purchased horses to follow the chase instead (Smollett 1983:36–41). Because sailors traditionally cut an absurd figure on horseback, William's equestrian prowess takes Fanny by surprise.

So Fanny must learn to ride, despite her terrors: a certain mastery of native fear is useful for a gentlewoman. And she must maintain this regimen after the death of her old grey childhood friend. Yet amongst the Bertram females whether or not Fanny should have 'a regular lady's horse of her own in the style of her cousins' (Austen 1966:70) causes dispute. Surely she could just borrow Maria's or Julia's? But 'as the Miss Bertrams regularly wanted their horses every fine day', and as they 'took their cheerful rides in the fine mornings of April and May' (ibid.: 69), Fanny's health begins to suffer. With Sir Thomas in Antigua, there is confusion about how best to uphold the distinctions of 'rank, fortune, rights, and expectations' (ibid.: 47) that separate Fanny from Maria and Julia, while still assuring Fanny of the exercise she needs. Lady Bertram and Mrs Norris disagree characteristically as to strategy, one from inattention and one from meanness, but neither would actually purchase her a horse. It is up to Edmund to sacrifice his third 'useful road-horse' (ibid.: 70)—presumably not so useful to

himself as to be indispensable, unlike his two hunters—in order to exchange it for a suitable mare that will be his in name and Fanny’s in practice:

The new mare proved a treasure; with very little trouble, she became exactly calculated for the purpose, and Fanny was then put in almost full possession of her. She had not supposed before, that any thing could ever suit her like the old grey poney; but her delight in Edmund’s mare was far beyond any former pleasure of the sort; and the addition it was ever receiving in the consideration of that kindness from which her pleasure sprung, was beyond all her words to express.

(Austen 1966:71)

The beginnings of triangulated desire are already firmly in place. The new mare, a ‘treasure’, becomes the repository of Fanny’s unspoken—and unspeakable—feelings for Edmund. In what sense is Edmund’s generous gesture also a sign of his for Fanny? This is exactly what Sir Thomas feared when first the name of Fanny Price loomed on the horizon: ‘He thought of his own four children—of his two sons—of cousins in love, &c’ (ibid.: 43). Capitulating to Mrs Norris’s assurances that being brought up together as brother and sister will provide the only safeguard against such an attraction— “‘It is morally impossible. I never knew of an instance of it’” (ibid.: 44)—Sir Thomas is persuaded against his better judgement, or at least his previous knowledge of a certain tradition of ‘cousins in love, & c’.<sup>7</sup> Fanny’s riding of the mare is the physical enactment of her love for Edmund, and, as such, cannot be written, especially at this stage of the narrative. The mare that is Edmund’s but also Fanny’s is a lodestone for Fanny, an object of legitimate affection and a means of independent movement, agency and pleasure.<sup>8</sup> Might there not also be a hint of the eroticism of riding as a skill, a technique or form of *techne*, something so rarely at Fanny’s command?

Certainly there was a set of knowledges involved in Edmund’s judgement, his choosing and schooling of the mare. For such a treasure was not, we notice, simply purchased *as* a lady’s horse, but chosen as a likely subject, who with ‘very little trouble’ would soon become ‘exactly calculated for the purpose’. What are the characteristics of the lady’s horse?

For elegance, a lady’s pad should have a considerable show of blood, and I think, should seldom exceed fifteen hands in height; the paces should not be rough; and an easy slow trot, the pace of health, is a valuable qualification; the canter is of the chief consequence, and that it be performed naturally and handsomely, the neck gracefully curved, and the mouth having pleasant and good feeling; these are natural canterers, they will last at it, taking to it, and on the proper signal dropping into the trot or walk, without roughness, boggling, or changing of legs. But the first and grand consideration is going safely.

(Lawrence 1829:144–5)

The well-sprung suspension of the well-bred, nearly 'blood' or thoroughbred, horse, combined with a quiet, easygoing temperament, gives Fanny a pleasure in riding she could not have known from the serviceable old grey pony. To the elastic air inhaled one must add the thrill of elastic paces and a sensitive mouth. What is required to enjoy this play of sensibility, animal power, and fresh air? Mrs Clarke describes the requisite *techne* thus:

It has been, and still is, believed by many, that a good seat is in itself sufficient to make a good rider; but my gentle readers may rest assured, that, in either sex, good hands are the all-important means for effecting this much to be desired end. There is no denying that a good seat, and above all, a graceful one, is of vast importance to the fair equestrian; indeed, with me, it is so truly inestimable, that it forms one of the chief features of the present treatise. But as this excellence can be more easily attained, than what is proposed in this chapter, so soon as ladies find themselves at home in their saddles, their attention should be particularly directed to those parts of the art, which require the longest practice, and study, viz., the use of the hands and the management of the reins.... The exquisite sensibility, and power of immediate adaptation to the peculiarity of any horse's mouth, which is the essential of a perfect hand, are natural gifts, and can neither be communicated, nor self acquired. The means, however, for forming a good hand, can be imparted.... Women, generally, have the reputation of possessing a finer hand upon a horse than men.... But...of the many ladies who, at this gay season of the year, are daily seen in our public rides, by far the greater number, in riding '*parlance*', have no hands at all.

(Clarke 1860:101-3)

I quote at such length because the language here seems to parallel quite closely that of the climactic scene of riding in *Mansfield Park*. Here we have encapsulated the subtle dynamics of Mary Crawford's riding lessons in relation to Fanny's equestrian history.

Through Fanny watching Mary learning to ride, the twin triangulations of desire, Fanny-the mare-Edmund, and Fanny-Edmund-Mary, become complicated by the triangulation of desire, Fanny-Edmund's mare-Mary. The narrator reports of Mary's second lesson:

Miss Crawford's enjoyment of riding was such, that she did not know how to leave off. Active and fearless, and, though rather small, strongly made, she seemed formed for a horsewoman; and to the pure genuine pleasure of the exercise, something was probably added in Edmund's attendance and instructions, and something more in the conviction of very much surpassing her sex in general by her early progress, to make her unwilling to dismount.

(Austen 1966:97)

Mary Crawford, an indescribable feeling of happiness pervading her whole frame, no doubt, has her ego boosted and sees her stocks go up on the marital exchange. No wonder Fanny's observations, waiting for Mary to finish so that she too can have a ride, are as follows:

At first Miss Crawford and her companion made the circuit of the field, which was not small, at a foot's pace;<sup>9</sup> then, at *her* apparent suggestion, they rose into a canter; and to Fanny's timid nature it was most astonishing to see how well she sat. After a few minutes, they stopt entirely, Edmund was close to her, he was speaking to her, he was evidently directing *her* management of the bridle, he had hold of her hand; she saw it, or the imagination supplied what the eye could not reach.... She began to think it rather hard upon the mare to have such double duty; if she were forgotten, the poor mare should be remembered.

(*ibid.*: 98)

Displaced self-pity is soon adumbrated, the feeling of being slighted in this competition for Edmund/the mare further hammered home by the old coachman's praise of 'Miss Crawford's great cleverness as a horsewoman': "It is a pleasure to see a lady with such a good heart for riding!" he says. "I never see one sit a horse better. She did not seem to have a thought of fear. Very different from you, miss, when you first began, six years ago come next Easter. Lord bless me! how you did tremble when Sir Thomas first had you put on!" (*ibid.*: 99). To this there can be no response except our sense of Fanny's imagined silent mortification.

Mary Crawford wishing to canter as soon as possible represents in miniature all Edmund finds most fascinating yet troublesome in her character. Mrs Clarke could have predicted Mary's enthusiasm because, she declares, 'The canter is, "*par excellence*", the lady's pace, and, when properly performed by both horse and rider, is by far the most delightful', as well as being 'the pace in which an elegant and lady-like bearing is most conspicuously distinguished' (Clarke 1860: 145).

Mary is an exhibitionist, proud of her ability to acquire the semblance of a good seat so that she can canter as soon as walk. (The much more difficult, bone-jarring trot is tactfully avoided by Edmund in these beginner's lessons.) Mary has no problem taking her seat:

exactly in the centre of the saddle, with the body erect, and with a slight bend in the back to throw the shoulders gracefully '*en arrière*', the whole figure being at the same time so perfectly pliant, and divested of stiffness, as the moment the pace is commenced, to correspond with the position, and accommodate itself to the movements of the horse.

(Clarke 1860:146-7)

So Mary Crawford's seat, with all it implies about spinal pliancy and hip flexibility and aerobic aptitude—how can we escape the overcoding of these as qualifications for copulatory sex?—is a naturally good one, but how are her hands? Has she 'any hands' at all? 'The exquisite sensibility, and power of immediate adaptation to the peculiarity of any horse's mouth, which is the essential of a perfect hand, are natural gifts, and can neither be communicated, nor self acquired. The means, however, for forming a good hand, can be imparted.' And so Edmund tries to direct Mary's 'management of the bridle' (how resonant is the pun on 'bridal'). Ultimately, however, Mary will not be managed. Here we confront another horsey pun on 'mannaged', or schooled according to venerable, but now somewhat dated, principles. Should we be surprised that what Mary possesses in athleticism, she lacks in 'management' and in 'exquisite sensibility, and power of immediate adaptation' not only to the 'peculiarity of any horse's mouth' but to the peculiarity of any person's character, especially the moral delicacy of the clerical Edmund's?

Why in *Mansfield Park* does Mary Crawford seem initially to triumph over Fanny Price? Because she is so keen on her riding lessons, so energetic, and so fearless. Why then in the end does Fanny Price triumph over Mary Crawford and marry Edmund Bertram? Because although Fanny loves horses and riding, and it is the only exercise that does not fatigue her, she has always been timid if not afraid, easily tired, less than enterprising or ambitious regarding her horsemanship. Riding for health, not merely for pleasure, legitimates what could otherwise all too easily become an unseemly delight in the erotic dynamic of power and control between horse and horsewoman. Narcissistically praising Mary's early success in the saddle because it is 'like their own', Maria and Julia Bertram proceed to claim Mary as one of their own, just as they would both like to claim and be claimed by Henry Crawford, in a coterie founded on riding well, having neat figures, good spirits, and 'energy of character' (Austen 1966:99). As Maria puts it, 'I cannot but think that good horsemanship has a great deal to do with the mind' (ibid.: 99). And, no doubt fancying herself a 'splendid horsewoman', Maria will all too quickly engage in an unseemly, because frankly sexual, dynamic of power and control in order both to marry Rushworth and still take Henry Crawford as a lover. What Maria and Mary, two women sharing a name, also share is something not quite seemly, not quite sound, about their femininity, and their attitude toward riding embodies it. They are, like Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, examples of Austen's autoerotic style of femininity, described by Eve Sedgwick as the masturbating girl, who frankly enjoys the 'locomotor pleasures of her own body', from running down hills to the prospect of a gallop on Willoughby's horse (Sedgwick 1991:828).

Mary's narrated ambition, enterprise and competitive spirit put her in a line of direct inheritance from such notorious 'Amazons' of the 1780s and 1790s as Laetitia, Lady Lade (née Darby, alias Smith), wife of Sir John Lade, the famous whip (or coachman) and friend of the Prince of Wales. Her origins were both tainted and obscure, as was emphasized by her portrait in the scandalous expose

of the Prince of Wales's circle, *The Jockey Club* (Pigott 1792:81–3). The Prince of Wales both commissioned a portrait of her mastering a rearing horse, from Stubbs in 1793, and coined the phrase 'to swear like Lady Lade'.<sup>10</sup> She lived until 1825 and was often in the newspapers, including *The Times*. As late as 1849 she inspired the 'Amazon', Letitia, Lady Lade, in George W.M.Reynolds's *The Mysteries of the Court of London*, a character who is introduced in vol. 1 (p. 56) and appears frequently thereafter. In 1794 *The Sporting Magazine* published an engraving entitled 'The Accomplished Sportswoman', clearly alluding to Lady Lade as 'a lady of rank and fortune, leaping over a five-barred gate in the neighbourhood of Windsor, and who may be frequently seen with his majesty's hounds during the hunting season' (*The Sporting Magazine* 1794:154–5). In November 1796, she was celebrated as a rider of thoroughbred horses, the only mounts who could keep pace with the royal stag-hounds, and pronounced 'the first horsewoman in the kingdom, being constantly one of the only five or six that are invariably with the hounds' (*The Sporting Magazine* 1797:61). Thus was the hard-riding, hunting, swearing kind of Englishwoman put into circulation, in this case through a woman of the royal *demi-monde*, a milieu that might seem to suit Mary Crawford perfectly—or at least would once have done before her sojourn at Mansfield.

I would submit that Lady Lade, as figured in the Stubbs portrait, the reports in *The Sporting Magazine*, and all the scandalous paraphernalia that make the Amazon character possible, represents that which must be marginalized, if not exterminated, from nineteenth-century English femininity. Lady Lade becomes a code word for 'female vermin', as if she were as low, as despicable a prey as Vicky Vixen, the female fox herself. Mary Crawford's resemblance to a would-be Lady Lade is her downfall. Fanny Price must win in this contest of femininity, she who represents fully domesticated riding for women—picturesquely inspired riding to view, rather than sporting, amazonian riding to hunt, to dominate—men and other prey. She who can consider looking 'upon verdure' as 'the most perfect refreshment' (Austen 1966: 123) will, even when riding, ride for health and exercise, for healthy pleasure, not excessive pleasure: 'Miss Crawford's enjoyment of riding was such, that she did not know how to leave off.'

As the English countryside becomes fully invented as a pleasure-ground or apparatus of leisure by the mid-nineteenth century, it becomes progressively more a place where nice women don't hunt, or if they do, much is made of it as exceptional. Women may, however, as Fanny does, ride to ride, ride to walk, or walk to walk without attracting attention to themselves. They might even, according to Mrs Clarke, have a crack at that very old-fashioned, very low-tech sport, hare-hunting:

In speaking of hunting, I do not refer to a mere gallop with the harriers on the Brighton Downs, or similar places; for, if they are properly mounted for the purpose, such exercise may be considered legitimate ladies' hunting. They have not far to go from home; they can join them when they



Figure 3.1 'The Accomplished Sportswoman', from *The Sporting Magazine*, vol. 4 (June 1794), opposite p. 154. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library University of Oxford

like, and leave when they like; and last, but not least, there are usually several of their own sex present to assist them in case of accident. But my counsel and caution refer to the more exciting and hazardous sport of foxhunting, which calls for consummate skill in riding,—a knowledge of the sport that can *alone* be acquired by experience and practice,—the most determined courage, and great power of enduring fatigue—a spirit that holds in contempt both wind and storm,—and a constitution that sets at defiance coughs, colds, and rheumatism. In almost every part of the country two or three ladies are to be found who greatly distinguish themselves in the hunting field.

(Clarke 1860:211–21)

The twentieth-century decline of fox-hunting as *the* dominant rural sport so crucial to English identity-formation may not be unrelated to the dramatic increase in women's participation in it. In Austen's day, as in Clarke's, there were exceptional women who rode to hounds in fox chases, but the sport remained the supreme testing ground for English *masculinity*. As William Somervile had put it in his poem of 1735, *The Chace*, hunting is the 'Image of war, without its guilt' (Somervile 1735: line 15).

What sort of sociable commerce takes place between Henry Crawford and the Bertrams out hunting? It is assumed but not narrated. Tom Bertram's extravagance in betting on racehorses may seem predictable for an elder son, but

what does it mean that Edmund Bertram, second son destined for the church, keeps two hunters? That fox-hunting is an indispensable part of country life among the county families we must deduce. What does it mean that William Price performs heroically in the hunting field on one of Henry's hunters? William is in his own way as upwardly mobile a type of masculinity as Fanny is of femininity. Although a navy- and not an army-man, and although merely a midshipman, he has nevertheless managed to gain quite a lot of equestrian experience here and there. Fanny's reverence for fox-hunting as the supreme testing ground of male prowess is such, however, that:

She feared for William; by no means convinced by all that he could relate of his own horsemanship in various countries, of the scrambling parties in which he had been engaged, the rough horses and mules he had ridden, or his many narrow escapes from dreadful falls, that he was at all equal to the management of a high-fed hunter in an English fox-chase; nor till he returned safe and well, without accident or discredit, could she be reconciled to the risk, or feel any of that obligation to Mr Crawford for lending the horse which he had fully intended it should produce.

(Austen 1966:246)

There is that sense of 'management' again, the pun on to 'manage' as to ride in a trained way, even elegantly, though now, as in John Lawrence's work, the forward-going, galloping, cross-country, taking-fences-as-they-come 'jockey-seat', and not the classical dressage seat, is intended. That William is equal to the task, and manages not only without accident, but without 'discredit', in a highly fetishized ritual performance, whose codes and protocols are famous for separating those who belong to county society from those who don't, should give us some idea of his natural discretion as well as his manliness, which has been thoroughly, because colonially, tested. Those colonial 'scrambling parties', and the rough-riding in which he has engaged abroad, have indeed fitted him for domestic prowess. As Violet Greville lamented, during a 'wild hot scramble', the drawback of riding in India was that 'the ground is dreadfully hard, and falls do hurt' (Greville 1894:25, 24).

In analyzing *Emma*, Claudia L. Johnson makes the interesting point that Mr. Woodhouse's 'effeminacy' mocks an old-fashioned—that is, 1790s—sentimental masculinity of feeling. Mr Knightley, on the other hand, signifies a new manly masculinity, however much some tradition of 'gentry liberty' may be invoked on his behalf to make his manliness seem properly old-fashioned, not new-fangled. Even more interestingly, this new manly man also legitimates an Emma who is not conventionally feminine, given to excesses of heterosexual passion or indeed feeling, but instead a manly woman with whom an almost *fraternal* bond will be possible (Johnson 1995:191–203).

In *Mansfield Park*, a slightly earlier work set in a more snobbish as well as more polarized social scene, I would suggest that the stakes are rather different. The

*fraternal* bond shared by Fanny and William, and supplemented by Fanny's 'cousins in love' marriage to Edmund, parodies gentry fantasies of exclusivity, since even upward mobility is represented as circumscribed by the extended family. Indeed one might argue that Austen is sending up a gentry society in which Fanny must suffer terror, humiliation, and manipulative coercion to become only what she had always already been—a 'natural' member of the gentry.

But I fail to find bitterness here so much as bemused recognition, on the part of that cadet branch of the gentry to which Austen belonged. Fanny and Edmund's fraternal marriage will be shored up by their mutual attachment to 'country pleasures' (Austen 1966:457). Yet that attachment will remain as insistently gendered as Jane Austen's envy of her brother Frank's hunting. Men, including parsons and sailors, hunt; women ride, slowly and decorously, around the estate. Violet Greville describes the colonial version of such riding in India, rendered more exotically picturesque than its domestic counterpart, but equally suitable for latter-day Fanny Bertrams who ventured abroad. For those who choose not to gallop over the plains, 'there is the pleasant ride along the mall under the flowering acacia trees, where friends meet you at every step, and your easily cantering Arab, with flowing mane and tail, is in harmony with the picturesque Oriental scene' (Greville 1894:25). Fanny must continually guard against the ill-health, the fatal weakness to which her proper—and dangerously rare—femininity is pathologically prone. Austen refuses to let us regard Fanny as incipiently masculine or even, to use Johnson's word, 'equivocal'. In this respect, *Mansfield Park* looks forward more than Austen's other novels to anxious but determined, increasingly reified, Victorian notions of gender difference. As Mrs Clarke will argue in 1860, not even mastery of difficult beasts, nor management of them 'at speed' (however 'fast?'), need make a woman masculine:

To be used to a horse, to put on a habit, vault into a saddle, and gallop along a public ride, are the equestrian accomplishments of many who not unfrequently imagine that, to become, and be esteemed good horsewomen, it is necessary alone to assume the masculine in manner and expression. But, to sit a horse equally well through all his paces—firmly, yet gently, to control his impatient curvettings; fearlessly, yet elegantly, to manage him at speed, with a hand firm, yet light; steadily, yet gracefully, to keep the seat; preserving the balance with ease and seeming carelessness; to have the animal entirely at command, and, as if both were imbued with one common intelligence, the rider vying in temper with her steed in spirit; to unite courage with gentleness, and to employ energy at no cost of delicacy;—these are the essential attributes of the lady-like and accomplished horsewoman.

(Clarke 1860:2–3)

Something more radical indeed would be necessary to disrupt the ladylikeness of the Victorian horsewoman—the abandoning of the side-saddle altogether, and, with it, the fiction of feminine pathology.

### Notes

- 1 For a brief but authoritative history, see Commandeur 1986. By the late sixteenth century, the side-saddle had become increasingly common in England and France. In Italy, however, in the eighteenth century, ladies still rode astride, as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu discovered. Commandeur offers a nineteenth-century illustration of an Italian woman riding side-saddle, suggesting that by the later nineteenth century the side-seat had become fashionable there as well (Commandeur 1986:7).
- 2 I have analysed this phenomenon extensively in a separate study, *The Making of the English Hunting Seat*.
- 3 Such as the Pytchley, the Grafton, the Fitzwilliam, and the Bicester and Warden Hill; see Carr 1976:xviii–xx.
- 4 The Duke of Newcastle, who instructed Charles II in the art, was a famous English advocate of the ‘mannage’ (see Cavendish 1667).
- 5 See ‘The Diverting History of John Gilpin, Showing How He Went Farther Than He Intended, And Came Safe Home Again’ (Cowper 1926:346–51).
- 6 As opposed to transport, see Clarke: ‘Since...riding is no longer necessary as a means of ordinary transit, and can be regarded only in the light of an agreeable and healthful recreation, and of a lady-like accomplishment’ (1860:15).
- 7 Austen could have had in mind the story of Byron’s falling in love with his cousin Mary Duff at age seven so violently that when he heard of her marriage ten years later, in 1805, he fell into convulsions (*Norton Anthology* 1993:481).
- 8 This sense of agency, of Fanny’s competence on horseback as one of a very few arenas in which she might display skill, is stressed in the BBC’s dramatization of *Mansfield Park* (dramatized by Ken Taylor, produced by Betty Willingdale, directed by David Giles, 1986). On horseback, Fanny flashes past Mary walking with the Bertram brothers, sparking Mary’s enquiry as to whether or not Miss Price is ‘out’ (Austen 1966:81–3). The scene reads as if Mary had not found Miss Price worthy of notice until that moment.
- 9 That is, at a walk.
- 10 She was reputed to be a gypsy, a servant in a brothel (perhaps a cook) at Broad Street, St Giles, and the mistress of a highwayman, John Rann, before meeting the Prince of Wales at a masquerade in 1781 and marrying his friend and equestrian adviser, Sir John Lade (1757–1838), in 1787. I am told that ‘Darby’ is still a ‘gypsy’ name, still associated with horses. See also Egerton 1984:177; Evans 1990: 108; Robinson 1894:60–2, 204, 250–1; Melville 1908:62–4; Buxton 1987:36.

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## Austen's treacherous ivory

### Female patriotism, domestic ideology, and Empire

*Jon Mee*

Perhaps the most often-quoted description of Jane Austen's practice as a novelist comes from the letter she wrote to her nephew James Edward Austen on 16–17 December 1816:

What should I do with your strong, manly, spirited Sketches, full of Variety & Glow?—How could I possibly join them on to the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour?

(Austen 1995:323)

The letter playfully compares her kind of novel-writing to miniature painting, a flourishing and popular genre at the time, and one that is often mentioned in Austen's novels. Discussing these references, Lance Bertelsen (1984:362) has pointed out that it was an art form which catered specifically to the tastes of the gentry and middle classes. 'A reduced medium for a keepsake market', miniatures were associated with the intimacy of the home and something—as Austen's letter implies—that people frequently did for themselves.<sup>1</sup> Austen's letter draws attention to the domestic aspects of her own fiction, its concern, as she put it in another letter, with 'pictures of domestic Life in Country Villages' (Austen 1995:312). Miniature painting precisely fits this idea of her own artistic practice, but what of the 'Ivory' which she explicitly mentions?

By the end of the eighteenth century, ivory was well established in the craft of miniature painting as the favoured base or 'support' on which the paint was applied, but a century earlier this function had been fulfilled by vellum (Murrell 1981:16). What made this development possible was Britain's aggressive expansion of Empire from the late seventeenth through the eighteenth century. Ivory was one of many luxury items made abundant in the home market by the expansion of British trade. During the late seventeenth century, the Royal African Company had secured Britain's place in the West African trade, vigorously supported by a series of governments anxious to protect the lucrative slave trade. Slaves were the staple of the West African trade, followed by gold, but ivory was an important third. The combined Dutch and British trade brought 5 million lb. of ivory out of West Africa between 1699 and 1725. By the third

decade of the eighteenth century, Britain had secured a dominant position in the trade and frequently re-exported ivory to Europe. British ships also carried ivory along with the slaves as part of the triangular Atlantic trade that went on between Africa, Europe, and the Americas (Feinberg and Johnson 1982).<sup>2</sup> Ivory was carried on precisely the sort of ships which Jane Austen imagines taking Sir Thomas Bertram to his Antiguan plantations in *Mansfield Park*, but her mention of the material in her letter to James Edward Austen shows no sense of this exotic provenance. By the time Austen was writing, of course, ivory had been thoroughly domesticated, masked, as it were, by its familiar use in items ranging from miniature painting to piano keys. That it slips out beneath the familiar face of an imagined portrait in Austen's letter, however, should alert us to the fact that the domestic is not always as homely as it might seem in her fiction.

Claudia Johnson (1988: xiv–xv) has discussed the role of the ivory letter in perpetuating the myth of Austen as a shy retiring authoress. It was used to this effect by her brother, Henry Austen, soon after her death, in his 'Biographical Notice'. Henry Austen ignored the irony of Austen's letter, which mocks the pretensions of her nephew's 'manly' writing, in order to stress the idea of her feminine modesty. The exotic origins of the ivory beneath the portrait might be used as a convenient analogy to reinforce Johnson's stress on the engagement with her time that goes on behind the seemingly intimate surface of Austen's fiction. More specifically it could be used to endorse Edward Said's account of the importance of Sir Thomas Bertram's colonial properties to supporting the domestic scene that dominates *Mansfield Park*. Austen's novels are deeply concerned with issues of domestic management, but in ways that participate in contemporary attempts by women writers to show that the proper management of private lives and family relations had serious public consequences. Indeed I'll be showing that they participate in an effort to develop patriotic discourse in ways which offered a newly central role to women, but what I also want to explore is the relationship between this expanded view of domesticity and the expansion of Empire. The two spheres cannot simply be seen as parallel, or as extensions of each other. The spectre of imperial expansion haunts Austen's ivory metaphor in her letter, but doesn't move to the centre of its meaning. Ivory has been incorporated as a domestic product. Austen's own novels might be regarded as familiar portraits of English provincial life painted on ivory. They are domestic fictions written on the exotic 'support' of colonial trade, but the process is one of inscription which works to *obscure* its own relations to a world of war, trade, and Empire.

As a painting surface one of the peculiar effects of ivory is a luminosity which shines through the paint. It was this effect which made ivory a sought-after material for English artists, but it was also one which they found hard to master. As a major historian of eighteenth-century miniature painting has noted, English artists for a long time found the ivory 'treacherously slippery' (Murrell 1981:17). In this respect, painters were only experiencing a more general phenomenon of Empire. The riches of Empire were valued and eagerly consumed at home, but

they were not always easy to incorporate into traditional practices. The role of the exotic in Austen's *Mansfield Park* is similarly complicated. Colonial wealth is a necessary economic support to the Bertram family, but it is 'treacherously slippery' too in its own way. Sir Thomas's Antiguan plantations are representative of a difficult, recalcitrant Other place which the novel in some respects glosses over in its concern for the integrity of English identity. This view, of course, is contrary to that put forward by Edward Said in his controversial account of Austen in *Culture and Imperialism*:

Jane Austen sees the legitimacy of Sir Thomas Bertram's overseas properties as a natural extension of the calm, the order, the beauties of Mansfield Park, one central estate validating the economically supportive role of the peripheral other.

(Said 1993:94)

Said's account of Austen's novel is part of a larger argument about the ways in which European culture prior to the late nineteenth-century heyday of imperialism proper 'enabled, encouraged, and otherwise assured the West's readiness to assume and enjoy the experience of empire' (Said 1993:96). While the general thrust of his argument is surely correct, I would suggest that it tends to underestimate the often contradictory ideological work that constituted this process of preparation, that is, the problematic nature of the process of incorporating Empire into ideas of Englishness. Said's version of the development of a colonial world view underplays the ideological contortions and anxieties involved in accommodating 'the experience of empire'. I shall return to the historical telescoping upon which Said's view of imperialist ideology in the period depends, later; for now I want to concentrate on the point that Said's account of Austen's novel is heavily dependent on a vision of the orderliness of Mansfield Park and the good government of Sir Thomas Bertram.

Feminist scholarship over the past two decades has frequently questioned the picture of Austen as an anti-Jacobin novelist writing in defence of patriarchal authority and the country house which provided one of its most potent symbols.<sup>3</sup> Margaret Kirkham, for instance, regards Austen as a 'rational feminist' whose fiction comprises 'a radical criticism of the society in which she lives' (1983:75). Claudia Johnson (1988:6) for her part has suggested that Austen's novels are much less Burkean than has often been supposed. If love of family is 'the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affection' for Burke, then, by representing the hollowness of the patriarchal family, *Mansfield Park* is a novel which 'turn[s] conservative myth sour'.<sup>4</sup> There seems to me little doubt that Said exaggerates the harmony of Mansfield Park and the authority of Sir Thomas Bertram. Although readers often assume that problems come to Mansfield Park only in Sir Thomas's absence, the moral order of his house is a fragile one from the very beginning of the novel. The hollowness of the patriarchal family values expounded by Burke appear to be indicated by the empty spaciousness of

Mansfield Park experienced by Fanny when she arrives: 'the grandeur of the house astonished, but could not console her. The rooms were too large for her to move in with ease' (Austen 1988, III:14–15). There is no intimacy in the house and nothing seems to fit quite as it should to Fanny. The Bertram children never demonstrate the 'fraternal' ties even of the Crawfords, seemingly cast as the novel's wicked interlopers, never mind the novel's explicit ideal of William and Fanny Price (Wiltshire 1997:64). At the root of the problem is Sir Thomas, who can maintain decorum and seems to be cast in the mould of a 'guardian' of traditional authority (Tanner 1986:154), but who is less successful when it comes to feelings. Jane Austen's fiction is typified by either literally or metaphorically absent fathers. On a metaphorical level, *Mansfield Park* is not the exception it might seem. Of course, for the novel's heroine, Fanny, Sir Thomas is only a substitute father anyway, but there is a sense that something is lacking in the performance of his paternal duties for the whole family. He may not be guilty of the vanity and dereliction of duty of Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion*, he may not be as weak and selfish as Mr Woodhouse in *Emma*, but the distance between Sir Thomas and his family—whom he leaves to be brought up by the egregious Mrs Norris—is quite explicitly linked by Austen to the problems experienced at Mansfield Park.

Unlike Mrs Norris, the architect of the scheme to bring her to Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas does take his duties towards Fanny seriously and he is 'fully resolved to be the real and consistent patron of the selected child' (Austen 1988, III:8), but Austen limits the reader's sense of his generosity by making us privy to his concern with the need to 'preserve' (10) distinctions of rank between his own daughters and his niece. Fanny is always afraid of him during her childhood. When she arrives at Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas 'had to work against a most untoward gravity of deportment' (12), the word 'untoward' nudging the reader towards realizing that the fault is not all to be laid at the door of Fanny's shyness. Alone in the emotional emptiness of Mansfield Park, her developing relationship with Edmund aside, Fanny creates a more intimate space out of the East room. Only after he returns from Antigua does Sir Thomas discover that the economies of Mrs Norris have forced her to go without a fire there. The orderliness of Sir Thomas's house, which most definitely is valued in the novel, especially by Fanny when she returns to stay with her own chaotic family in Portsmouth, has a negative side in the absence of physical and emotional warmth, a fact reinforced later on when Fanny recalls 'the terror of his former occasional visits' (312). Sir Thomas's own children, Maria and Julia, are well-mannered and intelligent, but they are 'entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility' (19). The deficiencies of his daughters are not seen by Sir Thomas because, 'though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him' (19). What each of the daughters lacks is a 'knowledge of her own heart' (91), a lack produced in part by the cold distance of the father from his children.

It also needs to be recognized that these deficiencies are not entirely rectified when Sir Thomas comes back from the West Indies. The return from Antigua does not represent the complete restoration of order Said seems to think it does. Sir Thomas may come home with a renewed appreciation of 'domestic tranquillity' (186), he may be 'active and methodical' (190) in repairing the moral damage of the private theatricals planned in his absence, but he himself remains damagingly distant from the emotional and moral lives of his family. His return establishes 'a sombre family-party rarely enlivened' (196). Fanny reminds Edmund that the atmosphere is not new to Mansfield Park. There was 'never much laughing in [Sir Thomas's] presence' (197). Skilfully exploiting free indirect speech, Austen even reveals Sir Thomas repressing his own concerns about the suitability of Rushworth as a match for Maria in the interests of 'respectability and influence' (201). He is equally flattered that a man of Henry Crawford's background is 'somewhat distinguishing his niece' (211), although here too Austen alerts us to repressed doubts: 'He wished him to be a model of constancy; and fancied the best means of effecting it would be by not trying him too long' (345). Nowhere is Sir Thomas shown to worse advantage than when he seeks to force Fanny to marry Henry Crawford. The reader knows both that Sir Thomas has his own doubts, which he keeps from Fanny, and that these doubts about Crawford are more accurate than he imagines. There is little to keep the reader from consenting to Austen's acerbic view of the situation: 'He who had married a daughter to Mr Rushworth. Romantic delicacy was certainly not to be expected from him. She must do her duty' (331). That genuine family feeling has too often been sacrificed to an ossified sense of duty is only confirmed and reiterated by Sir Thomas's reflections on his own conduct, which take up a large part of the novel's closing chapter.

Claudia Johnson's conclusion is that *Mansfield Park* represents a 'bitter parody of conservative fiction' (1988:96), that is, she believes that Sir Thomas and his country house are patently Burkean icons revealed by Austen to be empty and hollow. Sir Thomas himself acknowledges the failures of the patriarchal gentry family, but I am not convinced that Johnson's estimation is completely correct. It would be more convincing if it acknowledged the developing nature of nationalism in the period. *Mansfield Park*, begun in 1811, is very much a book of its time, and its time was one for which the nature of conservatism had been transformed by the experience of war against revolutionary France and then against Napoleon. Johnson is acute on the difficulties of defining anti-Jacobinism as a coherent doctrine, but her account of the critique of conservatism in the novel depends on our reading it against the grain of Burke and his progeny in fiction (Johnson 1988:xxi). What her stress on Burke underestimates is the extent to which conservative ideology was evolving in the period beyond the straightforward elitism of much of the Burkean anti-Jacobinism of the 1790s. One of the historical ironies of the period was that a populist and more inclusive brand of nationalism emerged in the process of protecting Britain from so-called French ideas. Obviously prompted by the Thatcherite phenomenon of populist

conservatism in the 1980s, British historians over the last two decades have devoted a great deal of time to showing how the period of the French Wars was a key one in the emergence of a conservative nationalist ideology prepared to appeal to the loyalty of 'the people' on a hitherto unprecedented scale (Dickinson 1990; Colley 1994). Whereas in 1795 Bishop Samuel Horsley could aver that the people had 'nothing to do with the laws but to obey them' (*Hansard* (Lords) 13 November 1795: col. 268), this newer kind of nationalism looked to a more participatory idea of the nation. It is true that parliamentary reform remained anathema even to more popularly-oriented brands of conservatism, but other kinds of less directly political participation were sought and encouraged to ensure the perpetuation of traditional structures. This kind of more inclusive definition of the nation meant on a larger scale that traditional institutions were often transformed in the very process of being preserved.

Linda Colley (1994: ch. 6) has stressed the importance of 'Womanpower' in this new formation of nationalism. As soon as war was declared in 1793, groups of gentlewomen banded together all over the country to provide winter clothing for British troops bound for Flanders. Others made flags and banners for volunteer and militia groups. Colley tells us that between 1798 and 1800 over ninety different women presented colours to volunteer regiments. An extension of their traditional role in keeping up the morale of husbands and sons at home these activities might be, but they also 'demonstrated that their domestic virtues possessed a public as well as private relevance...in staking out a civic role for themselves' (Colley 1994: 275). They were activities which could take them out of the home and teach women how to lobby, run committees, and organize. Women activists such as Hannah More played a very prominent role in producing anti-invasion propaganda and censuring upper-class complacency during the 1803–5 invasion scares, and always stressed the importance of women to the struggle: 'On the use which women of the superior class may be disposed to make of that power delegated to them by the courtesy of custom...will depend, in no low degree, the well-being of those states...and the virtue and happiness, nay perhaps the very existence of that society' (More 1799, I:5). Even the House of Commons recognized the active role women were playing during this time of national emergency. In 1804, at the height of the invasion scares, William Windham, MP, gave Parliament his opinion on the importance of the civilian population to the war effort:

We need go no further for a proof of this than to enquire what the influence is, in promoting the military spirit, of that half of the community, which certainly takes no part in [armed] service, namely women.

(Quoted in Colley 1994:268)

'Female patriotism', as Colley calls it, gave women 'an outlet for their energies and organisational capacities, and a public role of a kind' (1994:274). Women were seen to have 'a moral life', to use a famous phrase from Austen criticism,

which was not only autonomous, but of national importance.<sup>5</sup> The idea of the importance of the conduct of private individuals to the nation's well-being seems to be parodied in Jane Austen's early fragment 'Catharine or The Bower', written some time between 1792 and 1809, when the intrusive and fussy Mrs Percival tells the heroine:

the welfare of every Nation depends upon the virtue of it's [sic] individuals, and any one who offends in so gross a manner against decorum & propriety is certainly hastening it's [sic] ruin.

(Austen 1988, VI:232–3)

There might seem to be an echo of someone much like Hannah More here in the character of the humourless busybody Mrs Percival, but to hear such an echo means being partially deaf to the specificities of Austen's irony. Female patriots such as More made it clear that it was not decorum or 'female accomplishments' which mattered, but moral seriousness and the exercise of reason. Usefulness was, above all else, More's watchword—the kind of unobtrusive usefulness that Anne Elliot displays on the Cobb at Lyme. Mrs Percival cannot see the difference and so misses Austen's sense of the rational and moral nature of the domestic virtues—displayed in some measure by nearly all her heroines—which women could contribute to the national welfare. Although it is again expressed with the irony that is Austen's signature as a novelist, something of these kinds of attitudes can surely be identified in her famous defence of novel-writing in *Northanger Abbey*, where she implies that in her hands the genre will not be the source of 'insipid' female pleasure, but a medium through which a fundamental reformation of manners might take place (Austen 1988, V:37–8).

Colley's idea of 'female patriotism' is not dissimilar to what Margaret Kirkham describes as 'rational feminism' in her important and influential study of Austen in so far as it stresses women's capacity for rational and moral action. Where it differs is in being much more historically and politically specific. Kirkham's desire for a 'subversive' Austen, while not entirely misleading, leads her to collapse, for instance, important differences between the novelist and Mary Wollstonecraft. 'Female patriotism' is a term that allows us to see how Austen could challenge traditional forms of patriarchy, while still stressing the value of the domestic in the preservation of the nation. From this point of view, Austen seems much closer to Hannah More, Colley's prime example of a female patriot. More stressed the domestic virtues of the developing middle classes and in the process foregrounded the role of women in national security. There are clear parallels with Austen. More was not afraid to present the upper classes as idle and self-indulgent when recommending domestic virtues to them (Sutherland 1991:39–40 and 51–61). Similarly *Mansfield Park* allows for the perpetuation, not the destruction, of a land-owning family through an infusion of specifically female virtue from outside. Those, such as Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion* or Lady Catherine in *Pride and Prejudice*, who insist on seeing

'distinction of rank preserved' (Austen 1988, II:161) for its own sake are satirized mercilessly in Austen's fiction. In *Mansfield Park*, as I have already shown, Sir Thomas's regard for 'respectability and influence' in two separate instances, his daughter's match with Mr Rushworth and Fanny's with Henry Crawford, threatens to destroy his family until he fully realizes the deeper worth of the 'domestic tranquillity' associated with Fanny. Gerald Newman (1975) sees writers such as Hannah More as part of a vanguard seeking to appropriate the concept of the national interest for the middle classes, but this point should not be overstated in relation to Austen. Fanny is still related to the Bertrams, just as Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* brings old blood into an alliance with Wentworth's meritorious exertions on behalf of the nation. Margaret Kirkham takes Sir Thomas's anger at Fanny's 'independence of spirit' in refusing to marry Henry Crawford as a sign that *Mansfield Park* is 'a radical criticism of the society in which she lives' (Kirkham 1983:106), but it might be closer to the mark to say that Austen is indicating just how blind he has become to who his real friends are. Female patriotism was a conservative attempt to defend rather than subvert the nation, which demanded a rethinking of women's roles and opened up new opportunities for their participation. If Sir Thomas's anxiety about rank stems from his own relatively '*nouveau*' status, as Brian Southam (1995:14) has suggested, reflecting the anxieties of 'a second-generation absentee, set on rising above and obscuring the origins of his wealth', then one might even argue that Fanny's influence represents the reassertion in the novel of what Austen presents as more essentially English values.

In terms of reading Austen as a female patriot, it seems significant that Fanny is closely associated with Englishness in *Mansfield Park*, Fanny has a Burkean sense of the importance of local attachments to people and places in a way that Sir Thomas's family do not (Butler 1987:228–9). When she arrives at Mansfield Park, what is noticed about her is her lack of worldliness, comprising among other things a literal ignorance of the world. Julia and Maria rush to report to their parents her ignorance of 'the map of Europe' and their discovery that 'she never heard of Asia Minor' (Austen 1988, III:18). This unworldliness is corrected by Fanny in the novel, a matter I shall return to later, but it initially confirms her essential Englishness. What she supplies in exchange for the knowledge she acquires later is the 'heart' missing in Sir Thomas's relations with his family. It is a heart identified with a strong relationship to the English landscape. Inside and outside are important markers of value within the novel. Fanny's feelings are powerfully felt within and strongly associated with a love of the English countryside. Critical discussions of Fanny's passivity often overlook the novel's stress on her emotional responsiveness. She may often restrain her sensibility, but Austen leaves no doubt as to the 'warmth' in the core of her being. Even Mary Crawford recognizes that, as well as being 'as good a little creature as ever lived', she also has 'a great deal of feeling' (231), a quality lacking in the well-heeled, urbanized Crawfords themselves, but equally absent from the well-mannered Bertrams, who should be the guardians of right feeling,

from a straightforwardly Burkean perspective. Amid his self-recriminations, Sir Thomas sees that there was an 'active principle' which was 'wanting *within*' (463) his daughters. It is 'within' that Fanny is 'active' in *Mansfield Park*. Fanny's feelings are always 'warm and genuine' (427). She even apologizes to Mary Crawford for her 'rhapsodizing' when 'out of doors' (209).

This responsiveness to nature is an important part of Fanny's symbolic power as a national heroine within the text. Fanny has a feeling for what she thinks of as the distinctive beauties of the English countryside, such as the evergreens which she praises in comparison to the flora of other countries (209). In Fanny's feeling for nature, there is an anticipation of the patriotic eulogy of Donwell Abbey in *Emma*:

It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive.

(Austen 1988, IV:360)

The last phrase, of course, calls to mind all those places in which the sun is oppressive and which in *Mansfield Park* produce in Sir Thomas 'the burnt, fagged, worn look of fatigue' (178). The eulogy of Donwell Abbey in *Emma* contains another important parallel with *Mansfield Park*: the preference for traditional country houses, 'rambling and irregular' (Austen 1988, IV:358), over the vogue for picturesque 'improvement'. *Mansfield Park* itself is 'modern-built' (48), a phrase which may reflect on the relative uncertainty of Sir Thomas's social position and the precariousness of his relationship to Englishness. Fanny's Englishness is affirmed by Austen in her preference for a traditional English style in relation both to Rushworth's property at Sotherton and Edmund's parsonage at Thornton Lacey. Fanny wants to 'see Sotherton before it is cut down, to see the place as it is now, in its old state' (56). Her close emotional relationship to what is represented as an age-old landscape, the avenue of oak trees at Sotherton, implies that she is emotionally grounded in the traditional English countryside in a way that the urban Crawfords—who are improvers—are not. A country house in the English Midlands, *Mansfield Park* should be not only geographically but also symbolically in that position from a traditionally conservative point of view, but something is lacking there too for most of the novel. The hope that *Mansfield Park* might supply a 'cure' (47) for the moral deficiencies of the Crawfords is not fulfilled because the Bertrams, who are in the position of potential healers as guardians of tradition, have themselves something 'wanting within' which must be supplied by Fanny.

Fanny's patriotism is also signalled by the fact that she has strong ties—like several of Austen's heroines—with the navy, the service most strongly associated with meritocratic nationalism, as Sir Walter Elliot notes with disapproval at the beginning of *Persuasion* when he describes it as 'the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction' (Austen 1988, V:19).

Fanny plays an important role in maintaining the morale of her brother, William, for the war effort. The novel also implies that her moral resolution supports the effort on a broader and more fundamental front. In *Persuasion*, of course, the idea of the importance of the domestic virtues to the war effort is much more explicit, especially at the very end of the novel where Anne's role *at home* in supporting Wentworth's is outlined:

She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance.

(Austen 1988, V:252)

What is often overlooked here is the suggestion that 'domestic virtues' may actually be more important to the war effort even than the military endeavours of the navy.<sup>6</sup> Nothing could make clearer the extent to which this period of crisis allowed women to fashion a public role for themselves via the idea of the home front. The figure of Mrs Croft is even more revealing in this respect in that she directly oversteps the traditional division of private and public into separate spheres on the basis of gender. She takes the domestic beyond the separate spheres in so far as she turns her husband's ship into a home and actually braves the hardships of naval life. The fact that she is a relatively peripheral figure who is often presented with broad-edged comedy—although I do not suggest that Austen encourages the reader to laugh at her, for the exploration is serious even if her situation is ultimately not put forward as a model—suggests that Austen is tentatively exploring the limits of female patriotism. Mrs Croft may be admirable, but she is not completely central to Austen's narrative. Women such as Hannah More were similarly careful about tracing the boundaries of their new role in defending the nation's well-being. A role *within* conservative ideology was being sought which would not actually overturn traditional institutions, but re-inhabit them.

Thus, in a sense, novels such as *Mansfield Park* do end with a kind of restoration of order, even if the nature of that order has been transformed. What all this means is that it is necessary to reconsider the idea of Austen as a domestic novelist and as a conservative writer. I think that both categories do serve to describe Austen, but only if we are careful to see how they were ideas undergoing a transformation at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Colley's account of female patriotism in the period is one in which domestic virtues properly and rationally exercised are granted moral and public importance. The conduct of 'domestic Life in Country Villages', even William Windham, future Secretary of State for War, was prepared to grant, was essential to the fate of the nation, and was in the hands of women. Burkean conservatism appealed to the 'little platoon' (Burke 1989:97) of the family as a building-block of national identity and security, but Burke's own formulation of this idea was subsequently expanded beyond the confines of upper-class paternalism in the decade or so after

*Reflections on the Revolution in France* was written. I think this helps explain why some critics—such as Marilyn Butler (1987)—see *Mansfield Park* as so Burkean, while others regard it as a subversion of Burke's values. *Mansfield Park* is in fact a transformation of Burkeanism through the agency of female virtue, but a transformation paradoxically concerned with the perpetuation of tradition. Thus suspicion of 'improvement' in the novel coincides with the reform or improvement of Sir Thomas at Fanny's hands. If this statement is a paradox, it is one at the heart of the dogged and dreary success of the English ruling classes over the past two centuries.

Where does this leave Said's account of *Mansfield Park*? How is a view of Austen as a female patriot in Linda Colley's terms to be mapped on to the question of Empire? Does it mean that Said was essentially correct in his reading of the correlation of nation and Empire, but negligent in failing to see the ways in which Austen sought to reform the institutions she wished to preserve? Does the novel imagine reformed Englishness being extended out into the Empire by female patriotism? One problem that has to be addressed in relation to these issues is the question of slavery and its fleeting appearances in *Mansfield Park* and Austen's writing more generally. There is no doubt that Said is right in his assertion that Sir Thomas's Antiguan plantation 'sustains this life [of Mansfield Park] materially' (102). The concerns of his West Indian property' (5) are introduced as essential to the prosperity of Mansfield Park at the very beginning of the novel (when the possibility of finding employment there for Fanny's eldest brother, William, is mooted). 'Sustaining' it may be, but the support is not as stable as Said implies. Far from being a comfortable extension of the orderliness of Mansfield Park, the West Indian properties appear as a distant and unstable economic necessity: 'Sir Thomas's means will be rather straitened, if the Antigua estate is to make such poor returns' (30). 'His eldest son's extravagance' is also to blame—part of the novel's patriotic critique of upper-class idleness—but it is 'some recent losses on his West India estate' (24) which mean that this profligacy cannot be absorbed and force the second son, Edmund, to join the Church. The historical context of this uncertainty has been outlined recently by Brian Southam (1995) who shows that the basic time-frame of the novel covers the years 1810 to 1813. These were years in which the profitability of West Indian estates was declining for a number of reasons, and in which the slave trade, only recently abolished in 1807, was still being hotly debated (Southam 1995; Lew 1994:279).

Whereas Said suggests that this context generally and the issue of slavery more particularly are 'sublimated' in *Mansfield Park*, several feminist critics have argued that the novel contains an indirect critique of slavery which serves to further undermine Sir Thomas's moral standing in the novel. The very title of the book may be read as a reference to the Mansfield judgement of 1772, which declared that slavery was illegal on British soil (Kirkham 1983:116–19). Support for the idea that Austen was in favour of abolition has also been gleaned from a passing word of praise for Thomas Clarkson, the leading abolitionist, in a letter

to her sister in 1813 (Austen 1995:198), and from Jane Fairfax's comparison of the slave trade and governessing in *Emma*:

There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would soon produce something—Offices for the sale—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect.

(Austen 1988, IV:300)

It should be emphasized that these references can hardly be taken as an indication of Jane Austen's subversiveness when it is remembered, as Linda Colley (1994:293) has pointed out, that the heavy involvement of women in the abolition movement was taken as a sign of their role as the nation's conscience and a triumph for evangelical values more generally. Female abolitionism could be respectable rather than subversive and figures such as Hannah More, who named her own circle 'the Anti-Slavery Junta', played a large part in it (Lew 1994:275). Indeed Mrs Elton's hurried reply to Jane suggests she fears that to appear unfriendly to abolition—which by the time the novel was in print was a legal fact—might be decidedly unrespectable:

Oh! my dear, human flesh! You quite shock me; if you mean a fling at the slave trade, I assure you Mr. Suckling was always rather a friend to the abolition.

(Austen 1988, IV:300)

Where *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* might have been taken to be 'subversive' by some of Austen's contemporaries—and this is surely why Mrs Elton is shocked by Jane's remark—is in suggesting that the governess trade could be as great an evil as the horrors of the slave trade. I think this point is an important one, as it suggests Austen's real concerns are less with the terrible sufferings of the slaves on West Indian plantations than with the role of women within English society. Female patriotism for Austen meant that women—especially gentlewomen—ought to be recognized as part of the nation and not as slaves.

Slavery is mentioned in *Mansfield Park* only once directly, at a point when Fanny asks Sir Thomas about the slave trade on his return from the West Indies. Critics such as Susan Fraiman have suggested that this question and the 'dead silence' (198) with which the novel tells us it is greeted are signs of Austen's repudiation of the slave economy of Antigua (Fraiman 1995:812). It must be noted, however, that the passage in which this information is reported suggests not so much that Sir Thomas is hostile, as Fraiman implies, but that his morally indifferent children (bar Edmund) are shocked or even bored by Fanny's question (Fanny describes them as 'sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject'). Edmund in fact tells Fanny later that 'it would have pleased your uncle to have been inquired of farther' (198). The silence, then, cannot be the product of Sir Thomas's indignation. Austen takes care

to have Edmund effectively tell the reader that. The whole incident might just as easily be taken to imply that Sir Thomas would have welcomed the opportunity to criticize the trade but defend his own enlightened slave-owning practice (not an uncommon position after 1807, painfully hypocritical though it seems to us). Certainly the fact that Austen tells the reader that Fanny loved to hear Sir Thomas 'talk of the West Indies' (197) and that she tells Edmund of her 'curiosity and pleasure in his [her Uncle's] information' (198) indicates that she is far from outraged by his connection with a slave economy. The novel simply does not make Sir Thomas's exact position nor its own position in relation to him clear on the matter of slavery. The unanswered question is a kind of Machereyan silence which 'uncovers what it cannot say' (Macherey 1978:84). Slavery may haunt the novel as a negative presence—in the title, in Fanny's preference for Cowper's poetry, a noted abolitionist poet, and so on—but Austen keeps it off-stage (as she does with Antigua more generally). Austen's view of the integrity of Englishness cannot easily incorporate its dependency on colonial trade, but neither can the nationalist—which is what I take Austen to be—easily impugn Empire.

Where I think Fraiman is right is in going on to suggest that the novel introduces the idea of slavery as a 'convenient metaphor' and does not take 'much interest in Antigua and its labourers per se' (Fraiman 1995:812–3). Fraiman seems blithely indifferent to the consequences of this claim for her argument with Said over Austen's attitudes to the colonies, but surely it implies that Austen privileges the condition of white gentlewomen over any concern about black slaves. In *The White Slave Trade* (1792), More had urged 'the abolition of slavery at home—a slavery the more interesting' (Coleman 1994: 354).<sup>7</sup> More's attack is on the marriage market and its 'coming out' season, an institution which Edmund implicitly criticizes in *Mansfield Park*, but, as with Jane Fairfax, who in *Emma* also implies that it is the governesses who bear the 'greater misery' (Austen 1988, IV:300–1), the trope of slavery was regularly applied to the plight of educated or genteel Englishwomen in the period. In *Mansfield Park*, black slavery functions, like Fanny's gold chain, as a metaphor for female enslavement in Sir Thomas's household.

From this perspective the question of slavery in Antigua is sublimated (to adopt Said's term) into the issue of female participation in the nation, but this process does not necessarily mean that Austen's female patriotism is in some kind of comfortable alliance with imperial expansion. The problem with Said's analysis is not just that it leaves aside questions of nation and gender, but that it is historically inexact and over-generalized in terms of its account of the development of imperialist ideology. He explains Austen's use of Antigua in *Mansfield Park* in terms of J.S.Mill's complacent perspective on colonial trade from his *Principles of Political Economy* (1848):

These are hardly to be looked upon as countries, carrying on an exchange of commodities with other countries, but more properly as outlying

agricultural or manufacturing estates belonging to a larger community. Our West Indian colonies, for example, cannot be regarded as countries with a productive capital of their own...[but are rather] the place where England finds it convenient to carry on the production of sugar, coffee and a few other tropical commodities.

(Quoted in Said 1993:108)

Austen was writing in a period when nation and Empire were not always supposed to have such a cosy fit and, moreover, a period when this discomfort had a particular gendered dimension. In terms of the semiotics of inside and outside in *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas's colonial properties are associated with the uncertainties of outside rather than the virtues Fanny brings from within herself and within the nation. The treatment of slavery in the novel may have origins in Austen's own abolitionist sentiments, but it is also a product—less palatable to the liberal critic seeking to save Austen's humanist reputation—of this more general distrust of the Other.

Linda Colley has pointed out that prior to the American War of Independence the outcome of British imperial expansion was 'popularly perceived as a trading empire, as the beneficent creation of a liberty-loving and commercial people' (1994: 109). In the decades following that period and prior to the Victorian confidence reflected in Mill's sentiments, 'the British were in the grip of collective agoraphobia, captivated by, but also adrift and at odds in a vast empire abroad and a new political world at home which few of them properly understood' (Colley 1994:112). The uneasy tension between Austen's female patriotism and the policy of imperial expansion I have been outlining suggests that she participated in just this kind of 'agoraphobia'. The claim of women to a role in the nation was after all founded on the gendered understanding of domestic virtues. The idea of the home and hearth as a place of essential Englishness granted women a special authority in the years of national crisis between 1793 and 1815 (an authority that was perhaps eroded in succeeding decades). Part of Fanny's symbolic virtue is precisely that she is ignorant of the wider world. Austen emphasizes her Englishness by this negative trait as much as by the positive response to the landscape discussed earlier. The worldly Bertram children guffaw at the idea that 'she had never heard of Asia Minor', but this ignorance is used by Austen to contrast Fanny's innocence with the nastiness of her cousins. It is true that she does eventually learn all about Britain's commercial interests around the globe. Edmund, for instance, discovers her reading an account of Lord McCartney's embassy to China (120). But this kind of interest reflects the ideal of female patriotism propounded by writers such as Hannah More, which stressed the need to be aware of the world in which one was living in order to be of practical service. Whether she asks them of William or Sir Thomas, Fanny's questions could be understood as part of a domestic scenario in which the woman is seeking to give support and solace to the imperial adventurer, precisely to ameliorate the effects of outside influence.

The need to know of the world while somehow not exactly being immersed in it is typical of the difficult and perhaps impossible roles demanded of women by writers who wanted autonomy with respectability, such as More and Austen. What is important for my purposes is the fact that, while these places have to be known by Fanny, they are not marked as cosy extensions of Englishness, but as dubious and dangerous places that potentially undermine the domestic ideal. Fanny's eyes fill with tears when she thinks of her brother's long absence in foreign stations (60); Sir Thomas is 'in some degree of constant danger' (125) while overseas; but nowhere is this threat clearer than at the end of *Persuasion* where the domestic felicity of the newly-weds is contrasted with the potential disruptions of Wentworth's career in the navy.

It might seem that what I am doing is returning to the idea of the timid Austen trapped within a regard for the local and familiar, but I hope that I have already established that domestic virtue in the novels is intimately connected with a practical concern for the national interest via the idea of 'female patriotism'. Far from modesty or acquiescence, such female patriotism can be seen as an assertion of a kind of female agency in the public sphere. It is not public issues as such, I would suggest, which the novels are ambivalent about. They are quite precise interventions into debates about who and what constituted the nation and where its best interests lay, interventions which suggest that in order to perform its function as a building block of national identity, as Burke had suggested, the family needed to take full account of the moral and rational capacities of women. In *Mansfield Park* Fanny is bringing from within the margins of the nation a restorative dose of female virtue into an ailing world where a struggling paternalism needs female support in order to fulfil its traditional role in society. Edward Said sees a correlation between the 'wealth derived from a West Indian plantation and a poor provincial relative, both brought in to Mansfield Park and set to work' (1993:110). I would suggest that these trajectories do not parallel each other in the novel. In fact, if anything, the provincial nature of the poor relative operates so as to insulate Mansfield Park from what are presented as the dangers of a larger, more uncertain, and un-English world. An ideal of female agency in the novel comes, we might say, with an ideal of English autonomy. Marrying Edmund and living in Thornton Lacey as a vicar's wife, Fanny's utopia is local and provincial. She remains separate from the large house which is built on the proceeds of trade with the outside world. Firmly planted within the heart of England at the end of the novel, like the heroine of Austen's next novel, *Emma*, Fanny's ambit is decidedly English only.

It is the worldliness of her upper-class relatives and their friends the Crawfords that threatens to overthrow everything that Fanny holds dear. They are associated with the 'outside' of superficial emotions and the world of trade and commerce. The natural habitat of the Crawfords, London, is always an object of suspicion in *Mansfield Park* and Austen's novels more generally. It is Mary who informs us, only half-ironically, of 'the true London maxim, that every thing is to be got with money' (58), and who also recognizes the lack of

'heart' among her London friends (359); but she cannot sufficiently resist their values to accept a country parson as her husband. It is Fanny instead, 'disposed to think of London very much at war with all respectable attachments' (433), who settles with Edmund in the geographical and, by the end of the novel, symbolic heart of England. London is tainted in the novel with the moral relativities of money. It is London which is the scene of Maria's affair with Henry Crawford and Julia's elopement with Mr Yates. It is a place in which emotional and moral matters are reduced, as Mary Crawford says of marriage early on in the novel, to 'transactions' (46). London was the capital of a growing trading empire, its 'transactions' of all kinds were at the heart of the process of imperial expansion discussed by Said, but the city often appears in the literature of the period as the site of 'a symbolic but haunting return...of repressed imperial presences' (Makdisi 1998:31). In Book vii of *The Prelude* (1805), for instance, Wordsworth imagines a London in which his own English identity is threatened by the overwhelming presence of all the races of the Empire (Makdisi 1998:31). *Mansfield Park* and Austen's novels more generally share Wordsworth's sense that the capital is not the 'heart' of the nation. For both writers it is commercial 'transactions' which are to blame for London's trading away its English identity. It is Fanny who is the moral centre of *Mansfield Park* and she brings her virtues with her from the English littoral, Portsmouth, a place associated with the triumphs of the navy which protects the nation, a place which, for all the chaos of her family home, sets the geographical boundaries of English identity in the novel. Indeed the chaos in the Price household serves to highlight Portsmouth's role as a defining boundary or the limit of Englishness. Boundaries are both inside and outside. Portsmouth is in touch both with the orderliness associated with England—always a feature of Sir Thomas's Mansfield when he is there, whatever its coldness—and with the uncertainties of the world beyond. The differences are affirmed by Fanny's movement into the heart of England, a movement that attempts to give more substance to the boundary which she leaves.

What this affirmation of boundaries should suggest is that the two trajectories identified by Said—from plantation to Mansfield and from Portsmouth to Mansfield—cannot simply be mapped on to each other. Rather the Englishness of Fanny is represented by Austen as repairing the damage done to Mansfield Park by the worldliness (both literal and metaphorical) of her more refined relatives. It is a pattern which recurs in nineteenth-century fiction. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* provides a more dramatic example of the social outsider who brings a renovating supply of middle-class and specifically English virtue, also grounded in an appreciation of the beauties of a peculiarly English landscape, to a land-owning gentleman tainted by his association with foreign parts. Rochester might be more obviously corrupted by adventures abroad than Sir Thomas, who never actually neglects his responsibilities, however coldly he may perform them, and is scarcely an adventurer, but there is no doubt that the problems of distance in the latter's domestic arrangements are not simply an emotional or even social

matter. The problems with Sir Thomas's domestic arrangements are also a product of the fact that his authority is grounded in the possession of far-away colonial property to which the English domestic order does not stretch (neither his wife nor any female member of his family accompanies Sir Thomas). Indeed it is possible that Austen's response to Sir Thomas's plantations is structured by the image, common to much of abolitionist writing (Coleman 1994:356), of the colonial planter indulging his sexual desires among his female slaves, a fear of miscegenation which *Jane Eyre* brings much closer to the surface of its text. In both *Jane Eyre* and *Mansfield Park*, there is a moral transformation brought about by a middle-class outsider, but it is a transformation whose concern with the perpetuation of national integrity is always suspicious of foreignness in a way that makes its relations with colonial wealth anxious ones. *Jane Eyre* cannot go to India with St John Rivers because her primary duty is with the reform of domestic authority in England through her love for Rochester. The possibility of such an overseas adventure is never even raised for Fanny. The female missionary was much less common in 1814 than in 1847.

The issue of the role of domestic ideology in the Empire is a complex one which is currently being productively pursued by feminist scholarship. Sara Suleri has suggested that at the height of the British Empire in India 'British women in the colonized subcontinent were required to remain on the periphery of colonization...[within] the confines of domesticity' (Suleri 1992:75). Rosemary Marangoly George's more recent work on British women in India suggests that Suleri is too quick to dismiss the empowering aspects of domestic ideology. George argues that 'the colonies provided a contemporary situation in which housework and home management were valuable national contributions' (George 1996:37). Both Suleri and George are primarily concerned with India and the Victorian age, a place and a period that were the scene of a different kind of imperial enterprise from the one of which Austen was writing. English women were less directly involved in colonial expansion early in the century, a point used by Henry Brougham in his *Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers* (1802) to explain the lack of domestic virtues among the planter population in the West Indies: 'The want of female society, while it brutalizes the minds and manners of men, necessarily deprives them of the virtuous pleasures of domestic life' (Lew 1994:289). There is evidence that when Austen was writing, those relatively few women who were involved directly in Empire were represented negatively in domestic ideology. Deirdre Coleman (1994:353–4) has shown that Anna Laetitia Barbauld, More, and others, for instance, represented the wives of West Indian plantation owners in terms of a 'union of barbarity and voluptuousness'. In so far as it was acknowledged to exist at all, family life in the West Indies—which included the possibility of the patriarch dividing sexual relations between an English wife and an African slave—was viewed as a species of upper-class degeneracy which middle-class evangelicalism sought to cure. It is no wonder, then, that Sir Thomas's Antigua estates function in *Mansfield Park* as a kind of spectral double which saps his English domestic

arrangements even as it sustains them economically. The absence of an idea of domesticity in Empire may explain the sense of tension between domestic virtue and colonial possessions in Austen's novel. Female patriotism offered women opportunities for direct participation in the moral life of the nation in a way in which, in 1814 at least, Empire could not.

Empire and colonial trade do play an important role in *Mansfield Park*. The expansion of British commercial interests in the eighteenth century provides the economic base on which the superstructure of the house is raised, but it is not presented as a steady foundation. Abroad is a place of suspicion for Austen. More reliable, it seems, are Fanny's 'warm and genuine' feelings. She trades in the English goods of her sensibility, which the novel represents as a more reliable commerce than the colonial produce upon which Sir Thomas depends. She does have to learn about the world, it is part of her coming of age, but she never succumbs to the 'motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom' (461) that threaten to undermine, as he himself acknowledges, the solidity of Sir Thomas's authority. There may be a kind of 'worlding' (Spivak 1985:243) of the novel in *Mansfield Park*, which at least acknowledges the relationship between the shires of England and distant colonial property, but it is not the comfortable relationship which Edward Said describes. Empire exists as only a spectral presence in the novel, represented by the uncertainties of an unanswered question, perhaps an allusive title, and a colonial property which remains ominously off-stage throughout. This virtual presence in the text, I suggest, indicates an anxiety centred on the tension between the dependency on colonial wealth and the perpetuation of what Austen presents as authentically English character.

Jane Austen's own novels may have owed their commercial success in some measure to the wealth of a book-buying public which drew its economic power from the expansion of colonial trade, but this world of expanding 'transactions' is not really trusted by the books themselves. The economic ivory that supports her domestic portraits is glimpsed in *Mansfield Park* and, to a lesser extent, in her other novels such as *Persuasion*, but these fictions scarcely embrace the exotic in the way that the writings of the cosmopolitan Orientalists recently discussed by critics such as Marilyn Butler (1990) and Nigel Leask (1992) do. The point of this contrast is not simply to reproduce on an imperial stage the old divide between Scott's 'Big Bow-wow strain' of male writers (Southam 1968: 106), and Austen's miniaturist's art. Austen was deeply engaged with issues of national importance in her fiction in terms of female patriotism, but she seems to have regarded Empire as a 'treacherously slippery' arena. The analogy with the little piece of ivory shows only that this enterprise was not necessarily as smoothly correlated with imperial ideology as Edward Said suggests. Nor do I think that humanist admirers of Austen can in any simple sense salve their consciences by reading into *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* a critique of the slave trade. Slavery is a virtual presence in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. It plays its part in a critique of patriarchy which seeks to preserve an idea of Englishness, but it

is also invoked as a part of a larger discourse which structures nearly everything Austen wrote. This discourse suggests that what lies beyond the boundaries of the nation is morally dubious and dangerously uncertain, that is, a threat to domestic virtue. Jane Austen's novel suggests that Mansfield Park is best sustained not by contact with the outside, but by an English 'active principle' for which colonial transactions are at best only uncertain allies. The concern has nothing to do with any dubious notion of Austen's personal timidity, and everything to do with a historical moment at which the nation in general and female patriots in particular were struggling with what Nigel Leask (1992) has called 'anxieties of Empire'.

### Notes

- 1 Although Bertelsen seizes on Jane Austen's mention of 'Ivory' in the letter to her nephew, he immediately collapses the word into a more general discussion of miniatures and does not consider the exotic origin of the material in his otherwise extremely interesting discussion of the domesticity of the art form.
- 2 For details of the Royal African Company, see Davies 1957. The company lost its monopoly in 1698, although until 1712 other traders had to pay a levy on their outgoing cargoes, but the trade seems to have carried on in much the same way in private hands—using the forts and factories set up by the company on the coast—up to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.
- 3 The picture of Jane Austen as an anti-Jacobin is given its most authoritative statement in Butler 1987.
- 4 Johnson quotes from Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1989:97).
- 5 It was Lionel Trilling who famously said of Emma Woodhouse: 'The extraordinary thing about Emma is that she has a moral life as a man has a moral life' (1991: 124).
- 6 Kathryn Sutherland's discussion of Hannah More points out that Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* played an important part in the process of replacing civic humanist definitions of citizenship on the basis of military activism with a more middle-class version which put domestic economy at the centre of the national interest (Sutherland 1991:52–3).
- 7 Coleman shows that More was not alone in suggesting that African slaves suffered less than English women. She also suggests that Jane's speech in *Emma* implies that it is the governesses who bear the 'greater misery' (Coleman 1994:354–5).

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## 5

# Domestic retrenchment and imperial expansion

## The property plots of *Mansfield Park*

Clara Tuite

One of the most significant re-examinations of the canonical Austen has been the postcolonial mapping of Austen which has occurred predominantly in relation to *Mansfield Park* (1814), initiated by Edward Said in his groundbreaking essay ‘Jane Austen and empire’ (Said 1994). Before Said’s essay, traditional Austen criticism had canvassed, as the title of Frank W. Gibbon’s article discreetly puts it, ‘The Antigua connection’ (1982:298). However, these traditional readings engaged such colonial ‘connections’ as background or anecdotal details which worked to illuminate rather than interrogate the canonical literary text—to throw ‘some new light on *Mansfield Park*’, as the subtitle of Gibbon’s article puts it. Postcolonial criticism, on the other hand, seeks to interrogate the canonical text through its colonial ‘connections’. It does this by reading such colonial ‘connections’ as instantiating a continuity between the literary text and the colonialist project—between the literary text and the world. Furthermore, it does this by recasting the accidental colonial ‘connections’ of traditional criticism as sites of aporia and ambivalence, as connections which are reluctantly inscribed or more meaningfully read as moments of dis-connection and disavowal. As Said points out, ‘the emergence of a post-colonial consciousness’ means that ‘[i]n order to more accurately read works like *Mansfield Park*, we have to see them in the main as resisting or avoiding that other setting’ (Said 1994:115). In *Mansfield Park*, that ‘other setting’ is of course the colonial setting of the sugar estates of Antigua, produced largely off-stage in relation to the emphatically on-stage domestic setting of the country-house estate of Mansfield Park, in Northamptonshire. In my reading of *Mansfield Park* in this essay, I wish to examine some of the resistances which mark Austen’s strategies of representation of these two—colonial and domestic—settings.

As the editors of this volume point out in their introduction, postcolonial critics such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Gauri Viswanathan have now clearly established the position that ‘British literature of the nineteenth century cannot be separated from British imperial activity in the period, and must therefore be regarded... as constituting a *colonial discourse*’ (see ‘Introduction’, p. 8). It is from this perspective that the key terms of my title, ‘domestic retrenchment’ and ‘colonial expansion’, function with reference to the narrative, generic and ideological ‘plots’ of *Mansfield Park*. This essay explores the ways in which the

plots of domestic retrenchment are critically implicated within those of colonial expansion; it explores

how they are necessarily and structurally rather than coincidentally related, and how they function, therefore, as strategic plots within the larger plot of British imperialism. In these terms, I am interested in extending Said's reading of *Mansfield Park*, but I also wish to critically engage with this reading itself.

Said's reading of *Mansfield Park* in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) has produced opposition from both traditional Janeites and particular liberal-feminist critics. Both of these modes of opposition can be seen to be predicated to a certain extent on an investment in the canonical authority of Austen, and are produced as defence or vindication of Austen against what is perceived to be an iconoclastic attack by Said. To take an interesting example, Susan Fraiman's liberal-feminist response to Said, 'Jane Austen and Edward Said: gender, culture, and imperialism' (see Fraiman 1995), usefully exemplifies a certain kind of problematics of contemporary liberal-feminist canon-formation in that it seems to engage a somewhat idealized category of gender in its defence of Austen against the terms of Said's postcolonial critique. In this way, it is located within a particular kind of opposition between feminism and post-/Marxist and postcolonial critique in Austen studies and British literary studies more generally. As such, it can be seen to instantiate an institutional, post-Romantic version of the fraught and complex Romantic-period dialectic of opposition and identification between feminism and abolitionist discourse, which has recently been interrogated so astutely by Deirdre Coleman in her reading of the uneasy and chiasmic relation between women and slaves within Romantic-period feminist and abolitionist rhetoric (see Coleman 1994). And Coleman, like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, is concerned to track the ways in which 'the emergent perspective of feminist criticism reproduces the axioms of imperialism' (Spivak 1986:262).

Said's essay was originally published in 1989 in a Festschrift for Raymond Williams, edited by Terry Eagleton (Said 1989) (although it was the revised and extended version of Said's reading of *Mansfield Park*, republished as part of the brilliant *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), which scandalized those traditional 'Janeite' readers invested in the canonical figure of Austen, producing for instance a flurry of correspondence in the *London Review of Books*). In this sense, then, the original context of production for Said's essay is a nexus of postcolonial and Marxist cultural critique.

What I seek to do in this essay is to link Said's critique of *Mansfield Park*, and the major project of identifying British literature as a critical component of both the discourse and material practices of imperialism, more closely with the terms of this first context of production—the Festschrift for Williams edited by Eagleton—in order to thereby more clearly engage the genealogies which link left-tending and post-/Marxist criticism with postcolonial critique, and with and against certain contemporary forms of feminist critique, in an attempt to produce

a reading of *Mansfield Park* that might bring these different modes of critique, and categories of class, gender and empire, more productively together.

Unlike Susan Fraiman, however, I do not wish to proclaim an ‘investment in the woman writer that feminist critics have variously and laboriously wrested from the fray’ (Fraiman 1995:807). Instead I wish to resist this strategic positioning of feminist critique against postcolonial critique, which as I see it reproduces a series of problematic gestures which mark the relationship between Romantic-period feminism and abolitionism that was continued in the Victorian period of high imperialism in such works as J.S.Mill’s *On the Subjection of Women* (1869). I am interested, rather, in offering an account of how considerations of gender—and the prerogatives of gender—work to implicate Austen’s text further within the fray of colonial discourse and within the historical prerogatives of class and empire. In terms of engaging in its own form of feminist critique, this essay starts from the assumption that Austen—as canonized author, set of texts, subject of criticism and authorizing source of a canonized version of bourgeois female authority and subjectivity—names a set of cultural artefacts and institutional practices which need to be used ‘to situate feminist individualism in its historical determination rather than simply canonize it as feminism as such’ (Spivak 1986:263).

### **Town, country, empire**

In his reading of *Mansfield Park*, Edward Said adopts J.S.Mill’s formulation of the relationship between England and the West Indies as the model for his own analysis of relations between imperial England and its West Indian colonies as mapped in Austen’s novel:

The trade with the West Indies is hardly to be considered an external trade, but more resembles the traffic between town and country.

(J.S.Mill, quoted in Said 1994:108)

By engaging the town and country topos, Said situates his reading of *Mansfield Park* and empire within the terms first sketched out by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* (1973). As another major postcolonial critic, Gauri Viswanathan, has pointed out, Williams’s book is ‘the exemplary text linking English social formation with the economics of imperialism’ (Viswanathan 1991: 50).<sup>1</sup> Said pursues ‘the curious alternation of outside and inside [which] follows the pattern identified by Mill of the outside becoming the inside’ (1994:160), by suggesting that Austen’s Antigua offers a ‘way of marking the outer limits of what Williams calls “domestic improvements”’ (162).

These ‘domestic improvements’ are the economic, aesthetic and symbolic improvements of the country estate which are so ambivalently inscribed within Austen’s novel. They are at once the merely superficial, cosmetic improvements of landscape associated with the landscape gardener Humphrey Repton and

enthusiastically championed by the recklessly modernizing Rushworth, and the 'symbolic' or 'moral' improvements which are carried out, as both Williams and Said neglect to point out, as specifically feminine-gendered improvements and by the specifically feminine-gendered agency of Fanny Price. In these terms, then, the 'domestic' is that political entity of the landed estate positioned within a domestic-foreign or domestic-colonial nexus; it is also this entity as it was undergoing reconstitution as a private and gender-specific feminine space within the terms of the so-called bourgeois 'domestic ideology' which is associated with the consolidation of middle-class hegemony during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The 'domestic improvements' that *Mansfield Park* undergoes are therefore specifically middle-classed and feminine-gendered improvements. These 'domestic improvements' are also to some extent the recognition of the improvements of 'domesticity' itself as a positive ideological value. The 'domestic' as a signifier of femininity may be engaged in order to juxtapose issues of class and gender with those of empire, and to consider the significance of femininity and domesticity in the context of colonial exchange. A specifically imperial relationship between the inside of the domestic country estate and the outside of the colonial estate can be mapped within *Mansfield Park* with reference to the imperial entailments of the country-house genre. In Austen's novel, the country-house genre intersects in significant ways with the genre of the domestic novel, which I understand as a primary cultural formation associated with the consolidation of this bourgeois ideology of domesticity.<sup>2</sup>

*Mansfield Park* romantically reconfigures that town and country topos which Williams's brilliant study identified as a pervasive category of literary production for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As an initiatory and canonical example of the genre of country-house novel, I would argue, *Mansfield Park* involves a generic refunctioning of the country-house poem of the first half of the seventeenth century. This genre intersects with the genre of georgic, which privileges labour and enculturation and associates these activities with nation-formation.<sup>3</sup> Austen's country-house novel refunctions this patrician georgic problematic of virtue, property and 'use'<sup>4</sup> that informs the country-house poem. Within the country-house poem, this exploration of use is predicated on a moment of aristocratic crisis. It launches a pre-emptive apologia for claims of hereditary privilege under attack, through the reflective mechanism of the poet as conscience that registers the correlation between responsibility, benevolence and property. In its explicit quotation of one of the paradigmatic late eighteenth-century georgic poems, William Cowper's *The Task* (1785), *Mansfield Park* uses the ambivalent figure of 'improvement' to elaborate this problematic of 'use'. Fanny's cry in resistance to Rushworth's proposed Reptonian improvements—"Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does it not make you think of Cowper? 'Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited'" (Austen 1990:50)—registers this conscience of the landed gentry. However, it also stages the enculturated perspective of the bourgeois female as the appropriate subject to esteem and vindicate this aristocratic culture of landed hereditary privilege; and

in this way landed privilege and a kind of Tory feminism of upward bourgeois female mobility are mutually vindicating in Austen's country-house romance.

It is this epiphany of tradition as cultivated nature which *Mansfield Park* opposes to an ambivalent figure of 'improvement' which in the hands of Rushworth means a tampering with the past. And it works as an historical updating of the seventeenth-century figure of 'use' recast both positively as genuine improvement and negatively as mis-use. This form of sanctioned critique, which is part of the country-house genre, marks Austen's novel within the terms of specifically conservative satire. A primary function of conservative satire is correction, renovation and restoration. In this way, satire is predicated upon an ideological distinction between the individual and the general social class, in terms of which the castigation of the individual who departs from an expected moral or social code occurs precisely in order to uphold and recuperate that larger social code. This distinction is critical to understanding the function of satire in terms of the cultural politics of class, which is to offer a critique of the individual in order to preserve and correct and strengthen the class.

How we read Austen's satire has obvious implications for the novel's critique of the colonial regime of Antigua and the ways in which Austen's novel itself might be subjected to the terms of postcolonial critique. Both traditional and progressive critics have sought to defend Austen against the terms of Said's critique by invoking (either explicitly or implicitly) a conception of satire. For traditional Janeite readings, the invocation of the 'moral' is predicated upon an understanding of satire as a strategy of moral correction. A letter to the *London Review of Books* entitled 'Dead Silence', by D.G. Wright, offers a leading example of the kind of defence occasioned by Said's critique. It claims that Austen acknowledged 'the public debate on the morality of the slave trade, if not slavery *per se*', and that this acknowledgement is what makes Austen great: Fanny's question to Sir Thomas on the slave trade 'is precisely why Fanny is Jane Austen's heroine and the moral centre of her masterpiece' (Wright 1993:4).

Progressive critics, too, often invoke a misplaced conception of satire predicated upon a reading of Austen's satire as a kind of structural critique rather than as a conservative, diagnostic and recuperative genre. Susan Fraiman's liberal-feminist reading is a case in point. In stressing Austen's 'critique of the moral blight underlying Mansfield's beauty' (Fraiman 1995:810), it ignores the fact that this 'critique' of 'moral blight' is entirely sanctioned within the terms of a conservative tradition of satire, that the very function of satire is the diagnosis of 'moral blight'. Fraiman's reliance on the vocabulary of 'moral blight' renders her account indistinguishable from the traditional understanding of satire which informs the more traditional reading of Austen, such as Wright's. In this sense, her terminology reproduces—rather than reads—the Augustan and conservative discourse of satire as diagnosis, cure and correction of moral decay which *Mansfield Park* clearly instantiates. Austen's satire is not engaged in an outright denunciation of these institutions of empire and aristocracy (as Fraiman's account would seem to suggest) but is an attempt to renovate them. I'll return shortly to

the issue of satire in relation to Austen's colonial critique, but in order to get to that I need first to pursue the novel's satire in terms of the issue of the novel's ideology of domesticity.

I suggested earlier that *Mansfield Park* is implicated within the terms of the so-called bourgeois 'domestic ideology' associated with the consolidation of the cultural hegemony of the middle classes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The argument I wish to make is that *Mansfield Park* combines bourgeois polemic against an aristocracy identified as anti-domestic, together with aristocratic domestic instruction—diagnostically satirizing the Bertram order whilst intervening on the aristocracy's behalf with the cure of didactic example.

Given that this reading is predicated upon an opposition of bourgeois and aristocratic class terms, I wish to explain these terms as I am working with them in relation to the notoriously slippery class-location of the Bertram family. Kathryn Sutherland has commented:

What is fruitfully unclear throughout the novel is the nature of the Bertrams' family identity, and hence the problem of how we are to interpret the threats to undermine it. Is it an old established landed elite, a linearly ordered model drawing its nourishment exteriorly; or is it a 'new' commercial family, inward-looking and defensive?

(Sutherland 1992:415)

As I see it, the question of how we read the class-location of the Bertram family raises two separate but interrelated questions: to what class in historical terms does the family most closely correspond? and what marks Austen's textual representation and production of this identity?

To take the question of what class they can be said to correspond to in material terms, Sir Thomas of course as the head of the family occupies the rank of baronet—the lowest title, and the only title that is not of the nobility. In this sense, the Bertrams are not technically aristocratic, but of the landed gentry. They are, however, liminally aristocratic. As Raymond Williams points out, Austen's novels are not about the stable entity and 'single tradition of the cultivated rural gentry', but about 'the continual making and remaking of these houses and their families' (Williams 1993:113). And this is partly because Austen was writing at a time when aristocratic and bourgeois families, landed and landless gentry families, were in a state of transition. In this way, therefore, the instability of the Bertrams' class position has a claim to a kind of 'realism': the Bertram family represents the landed gentry at an uncertain and unstable historical moment.

However, this instability is also produced by particular strategies of Austen's text: the ways in which the text represents this unstable or liminally aristocratic landed family. The detail of class nomenclature that the Bertrams are gentry rather than aristocracy becomes more academic when we consider the fact that

Austen seemed to privilege the untitled gentry *above* the titled, aristocratic landowning classes. As Juliet McMaster reminds us in her essay on ‘Class’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*—in rather idealizing tones—‘the long-established but untitled landowning family does seem to gather Austen’s deep respect’ (McMaster 1997: 117). However, Austen’s privileging of the untitled gentry seems to me to be less significant as a sign that Austen is critical of title than as a marker of how invested she is in the signifier of *land*. This differentiation of land from title produces land and landlessness as a meaningful distinction, which can be mapped onto the distinctions of aristocratic and bourgeois. Here, the very fact that Austen so clearly and consistently differentiates between the titled and untitled landed gentry works to produce land itself as an even greater currency of value than title, and to fetishize the aristocratic culture of land even more by working to distinguish it from title. It is the landed-ness of the landed gentry that is critical here. Given that what I am identifying as the culture of the aristocracy is primarily a culture and mystique of land, then the landed gentry can be said meaningfully to be participants within an aristocratic culture.

In her insightful reading of Austen in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong argues against placing Austen with ‘the liberal Tories of her day’ (Armstrong 1987: 159) and argues that ‘Austen’s writing implies the presence of a new linguistic community, a class that was neither gentry nor nobility as the eighteenth century knew them, yet one that was clearly a leisure class and thus a paradoxical configuration that can only be called a middle-class aristocracy’ (Armstrong 1987:160). Far from being paradoxical, however, this doubleness is a symptom of precisely the impulses of critique and emulation that inform Austen’s satirical country-house romance. What most clearly marks this novel as a middle-class form of aristocracy is its investment in the mystique of patrimony, which is consolidated through the generic conventions of the country-house novel, including the critical-renovatory impulses of satire.

Austen’s fictions often offer representations of the aristocracy which are clearly legible as anti-aristocratic in terms of contemporary bourgeois discourse. However, these representations are part of that conflicted and vicarious bourgeois or middle-class project which marks the period: the attempt to appropriate the trappings of aristocratic authority for the middle classes whilst simultaneously making over the aristocratic class in the image of bourgeois virtue. (Hence Armstrong’s identification of Austen’s texts with a ‘middle-class aristocracy’.) It is this attempt at a bourgeois domestic makeover that informs the novel’s satiric and didactic status.

### **Entropy and extra-territoriality**

One of the ‘lessons’ which the aristocratic Bertram family has to learn through the novel’s didactic satire is the value of the family, where family is understood as a bourgeois-companionate rather than aristocratic-dynastic grouping.

*Mansfield Park*, which instantiates the canonical country-house novel genre, can be seen to allegorize the transition of the aristocratic family throughout the eighteenth century from a patriarchal to a domestic, 'affectionate', patrilineal structure (see Trumbach 1978, Stone 1979 and, for a complicating view, Maza 1997). The central drama of *Mansfield Park* is the aristocratic drama of domestic retrenchment and excision. *Mansfield Park* narrates the tight and reluctant squeeze of the aristocratic family during the period of the Napoleonic Wars into the smaller, narrower space of the familial configuration more akin to the bourgeois-identified nuclear family. *Mansfield Park* narrates not so much the qualified rise of the bourgeoisie as this tight squeeze of the aristocracy into the confines of the bourgeois ideology of domesticity. In this sense, then, the genres of the country-house novel and the domestic novel are interimplicated in *Mansfield Park* in this combination of critique and satire and instruction in the values of domesticity.

This retrenchment and diminution of the aristocratic Bertram family coincide with a period of imperial expansion which is marked by the abolition of the slave trade and mediated by Anglo-French colonial rivalry in the Caribbean. *Mansfield Park* registers these coincidences in its superimposition of 1790s anti-Jacobin and counter-revolutionary plots with Napoleonic War plots which are marked by this colonial rivalry. Moira Ferguson's reading of the novel has identified *Mansfield Park* as a specifically post-abolition and pre-emancipation narrative.<sup>5</sup> This is an important identification because it situates Austen's novel within the terms of a specific historical and political context, and thereby works to extend Said's postcolonial analysis beyond the terms of a more general (and spatialized) Machereyan critical model of textual gaps and absences to incorporate Austen's specific historical (and temporal) moment of production.<sup>6</sup> This post-abolition and pre-emancipation context offers an historical and political pretext for the specific dialectic of acknowledgement and disavowal that informs the novel's representation of the Antiguan colony and its slave trade. For, to extend Said's account, it is not simply that the novel is constructed through 'absences' and 'gaps', but that it is engaged in a strategy of representation which veers between presentation and repression or occlusion, a strategy of representation which corresponds to the way in which abolition forced a particular kind of recognition and representation of the slave trade, but one which still occluded the spectre or prospect of emancipation.

We might further complicate Said's account of textual 'absences' by correlating textual absence with the historical specificity of the text's ideological plot of absenteeism. The ideological plot of *Mansfield Park* is predicated on the temporary absence of Sir Thomas from the estate, which, if we engage the historical context of the novel's setting, suggests that it occurs as a direct result of the effects of the Abolition Act of 1807, which made the physical presence of customary absentee landlords expedient (see Ferguson 1991:120). Whilst imperial expansion was thereby to some extent regulated by abolition, in that slave holdings were no longer permitted to expand through trade, the practice of

exploiting slave labour none the less continued. The abolition of the trade in slaves necessitated a turn inward on the part of slave holders. Slavers were faced with having to encourage reproduction of slave labour through the available pool of labour, which meant that the condition of the slaves had to be improved.

Improvement, then, is both a critical discourse and practical *techne* instrumental to the ends of empire. In Austen's novel the domestic and colonial forms of improvement are critically interimplicated. There is a direct correlation between the novel's regime of familial incorporation and retrenchment, and the post-abolition and pre-emancipation imperial regime, which we could refer to as a regime characterized also by the discourse of improvement and of investment. Austen's novel registers or enacts this coincidence between British imperial expansion and the diminution of the aristocratic family, I would argue, through the specific generic prerogatives of the country-house and domestic novel genre. Within the town and country topos, which privileges country above town and above colony, the country-house novel has always been predicated upon the disavowal of capital—largely imperial, mercantile capital—or the expulsion of capital into the town. Austen's novel crosses country-house with domestic novel through the explicit thematization and recommendation of the domestic turn inward, the turn away from dynastic expansion to the cultivation and consolidation of the smaller circle. The elision of the imperial economy of colonial slavery is part of a larger process of consolidating the country estate as a space of order and retirement.

This strategy of imperial disavowal has been examined by the cultural historian Tom Nairn, who argues that since the Glorious Revolution of 1688 Britain's outward-looking, commercial and imperial and 'extra-territorial' interests have been disguised by a cultural romance of the 'backward-looking' (Nairn 1988:246). Discussing the forms of British nationalism as established through the long eighteenth-century colonial regime established well before the Victorian period of 'Empire' as such,<sup>7</sup> he argues that British 'traditionalism is ultimately configured by economic extrusion: the backward-looking has derived both its covert logic and its real dynamism from the outward-looking' (Nairn 1988:247). A primary genre within the production of this romance of the 'backward-looking' is the country-house novel. In this sense, I would argue that *Mansfield Park* is an initiatory fiction of what is a primary English genre, the country-house novel, within the larger cultural formation of the romance of the 'backward-looking'.<sup>8</sup> *Mansfield Park's* turn inward to the family, and, moreover, to a specifically endogamic family structure, can be seen within these terms to be a strategy of domestic retrenchment—not only as a form of economic and ideological 'making and remaking', but as a screen that deflects attention away from colonial expansion.

In that *Mansfield's* turn inward represents an endorsement of the values of bourgeois domesticity and femininity represented by Fanny, we can gauge the critical significance of bourgeois femininity and domesticity in the context of imperial expansion and colonial exchange by mapping the novel's endogamic

marriage plot onto its colonial plot of post-abolition and pre-emancipation. Both Edward Said and Moira Ferguson have argued that the removal of Fanny Price engineered by Sir Thomas and Mrs Norris dramatizes the transportation of an indentured servant or slave (see Said 1994:106, and Ferguson 1991:122). However, we can elaborate this homology further by taking account of the complicating operations of a class-specific domestic economy in terms of which the adoption is a favour granted a matrilineal relation of the outer familial circle. In this sense, the adoption functions within conventional social practices not so much as an abduction but as an act of patronage, that system which the historian, Leonore Davidoff, has referred to as a 'reciprocal but highly inequalitarian form of social linkage' (Davidoff 1995:208). This adoption from the fringes to the centre of the landed gentry family is so favourable to Fanny's future prospects, that this movement has to be regulated initially by a rhetorical instantiation of the laws of exogamy and endogamy. And this has to be done to prepare the ground for naturalizing the novel's female upward social mobility plot. This occurs in the conversation on the adoption of Fanny between Aunt Norris and Sir Thomas, where Aunt Norris attempts to foreclose the scenario of a cousin-marriage between Fanny and Tom or Edmund Bertram. The acceptance of Fanny into the household becomes conditional then upon the institution of a fictive, figurative 'like brothers and sisters' relationship between Edmund and Fanny (Austen 1990: 4), and the disavowal of precisely the endogamic marriage-plot which the novel eventually ratifies. For whilst two marriage-plots for Fanny are played out against one another—one exogamic (with Crawford) and the other endogamic (with Edmund)—only one is chosen and naturalized by the marriage-ending.

This endogamic marriage-plot is ratified because it crowns the discourse of familial incorporation, retrenchment and improvement which is enacted throughout the novel at the level of both domestic and colonial relations. As I've been suggesting, improvement is an ambivalent category throughout the novel; and the form of improvement which is embodied in Fanny is very heavily qualified.<sup>9</sup> Endogamy in *Mansfield Park* symptomatizes both a desire and a fear of self-closure on the part of an aristocracy whose social, cultural and economic ascendancy is becoming increasingly tenuous in the early nineteenth century, due to the rise of the bourgeois class to economic, cultural and social power. This is not, therefore, the old kind of aristocratic survival strategy of improvement through dynastic alliance and aggrandizement; it is a defensive patrilineal plot of regeneration and incorporation. When Fanny asserts that "In my opinion, my uncle would not like *any* addition. I think he values the very quietness you speak of, and that the repose of his own family circle is all [Sir Thomas] wants" (Austen 1990:177), she is referring to those other aristocratic families who would be eligible for dynastic alliances with the Bertrams—the Crawfords and the Rushworths—who have all been excluded. In this sense, then, to reformulate Sutherland's terms—'Is [the Bertram family] an old established landed elite, a linearly ordered model drawing its nourishment exteriorly; or is it a "new" commercial family, inward-looking and defensive?'—we can say that the

Bertram family is an established landed elite which adopts the inward-looking bourgeois or commercial discourse of domesticity.

As Said and Ferguson both suggest, *Mansfield Park* allegorizes the transition in the colonial system from an economy of transport commodities to the development of the imperial site as an ongoing concern. Originally a transported commodity, Fanny is invested in and improves. The cutting of expenses in Antigua prefigures the cutting down and closing in of the family circle at Mansfield. The post-abolition prohibition against trade (importation of labour power) which forced investment in the available workforce is refigured in the novel through cousin-marriage as a positive incentive against trade in the wider marriage market. *Mansfield Park* is an evangelical sermon which shows reluctant slave-owners how to make a virtue out of an economic necessity. Sir Thomas brings the abolition of the slave trade home to Mansfield, enforces a programme of retrenchment, and eventually realizes that it is in his best interest *not* to trade, reversing the incest taboo so that trade outside the family circle becomes highly undesirable. In this way, the colonial drama of post-abolition is displaced from Antigua onto the domestic estate and played out as a drama of familial retrenchment and endogamy. All this occurs satirically and critically, yet is all fully recuperable within the modes of conservative satire as instruction and renovation.

In *Mansfield Park*, the transition of the aristocratic family structure from the patriarchal extended family to the small, more nuclear 'family circle', and the revision of the aristocratic marriage-plot from alliance and improvement (exogamy) to incorporation and retrenchment (endogamy), depend upon the projection of the breakdown of the paternal law and stability onto the female aristocrat, embodied in the Bertram women. Aristocratic dissipation is symbolically avenged on the female of the species. Part of what is involved here is the standard bourgeois critique of aristocratic femininity which we see in Austen's novels, and which functions as a dialectical vindication of an alternative, appropriate kind of bourgeois femininity and its upwardly mobile aspirations. In order to make downwardly mobile marriage attractive to aristocratic males, besides supplementing material loss (or no gain) with symbolic, moral or spiritual gain, the alternative has to appear not only unattractive but obsolete. The text endorses this obsolescence by casting Lady Bertram as the representative of that economy of marriage for economic 'improvement' which is presented as scandalous and mercenary. Lady Bertram offers a kind of personification of the (original Spanish) meaning of the name 'Antigua'—old and out-of-date.

From the novel's opening paragraph, Lady Bertram is put under stern satiric scrutiny, as she is used to represent the wrong kind of bourgeois female upward social mobility, with the emphasis on 'luck' and captivation, and the suggestion that she would have—if only she could have—purchased her baronet:

About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady, with all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income.

(Austen 1990:1)

Notice here that the Bertram baronetage itself is never put under interrogation, occluded as it is in this opening passage by the satiric recital of Maria Ward's origins. However, as numerous contemporary commentators noted, the baronetage was the most unstable peerage, having been the last one created, only two centuries before, in 1611, when it was put on the market by a desperate James I strapped for cash. As the historian Lawrence Stone argues, the scramble for precedence when these titles were announced was greatest amongst the families of Salisbury and Northampton—Sir Thomas's county (see Stone 1967: 37–61). What was originally intended as an hereditary title soon fell victim to corruption, and was sold to the highest bidder, regardless of birth-entitlements. After the creation of the titles, the ensuing period of competition which saw a great increase in the titles until 1629, followed by a short period of restraint and then by another epidemic of sales after 1641, coincides with the establishment of Antigua as a settler colony in 1632.<sup>10</sup>

The novel moves on to extrapolate this bourgeois critique of aristocratic feminine excess, luxury and decline through the persistent identification of Lady Bertram with the sofa, which extends the novel's range of allusion to *The Task*: in the section entitled 'The Sofa' Cowper engages an abolitionist rhetoric in conjoining female desire for commodities with an imperial mercantile excess. In this figure, the novel reproduces those satirical conventions by which 'luxury' and imperial and mercantile excess have historically been identified with and avenged upon an aristocratic femininity (see Brown 1993:103–34). In a subtle and discreet rehearsal of one of the primary gestures of contemporary abolitionist rhetoric, which attacked women as the sources of desire that generated the production of commodities through slave labour (see Coleman 1994:253–4), the novel makes Lady Bertram the scapegoat of an imperial economic order symbolically avenged on her.

If, as Ferguson suggests, Maria Ward can be read as 'slatternly plantation mistress' (Ferguson 1991:125),<sup>11</sup> Sir Thomas Bertram is spared a corresponding satirical representation. The text studiously avoids the stock figure of the West Indian which already had a long literary history by the time Austen began the novel in 1811.<sup>12</sup> A softening and disguising of the stock figure of the West Indian mark this text's strategy of political deflection by screening out contemporary abolitionist polemic and caricature. In any case, to the degree that Sir Thomas can or might be claimed as a subtle satirical critique of the West Indian planter, he is reformed.

Sir Thomas is of course the most implicated in the colonial excesses of the West Indies in that critical textual moment which generates Said's reading of the colonial relations of the novel, when 'Fanny Price reminds her cousin that after asking Sir Thomas about the slave trade, "There was such a dead silence"' (Said 1994:115). I would like to engage this moment in detail, in order to return to the issue of Austen's 'critique' of empire.

Said argues that 'Fanny Price reminds her cousin that after asking Sir Thomas about the slave trade, "There was such a dead silence" as to suggest that one world could not be connected with the other since there simply is no common language for both' (Said 1994:115). It is difficult to know what degree of colonial critique Said attributes to Austen's text at this point, as it is throughout his essay. In any case, this moment can be engaged and complicated a little more fully than it is in Said's analysis, which seems to identify the 'dead silence' that Fanny attributes to Sir Thomas with the text itself, thereby flattening out the respective 'points of view' of Fanny, Sir Thomas and the text itself. However, this moment is not a 'silence' *in* or on the part of the text but a pointed representation of silence—Sir Thomas's silence on the subject of slavery. The point is that Fanny problematizes Sir Thomas's silence. Also of significance here is the issue of how swiftly this pointed representation is displaced by the text. No sooner has the text announced and problematized Sir Thomas's silence than it rushes to fill this silence—and implicitly rescue Sir Thomas from the critical implications of this silence—through a drama of abject filial submission, which stages Fanny's desire for approval from Sir Thomas: "I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel" (Austen 1990:178). In this way, this momentary gesture of outward-looking, worldly, colonial critique is subordinated to and chastised by the impulses of domestic drama: whatever political and colonial critique might have been implied by Fanny's statement about Sir Thomas's silence is subordinated to the familial drama of surrogacy and marriage and parenting. In this way, the novel offers a leading example of the strategy of the domestic novel in recasting political relations as domestic relations. This gesture also demonstrates the way in which the plot of colonial expansion is critically implicated within—and in fact structured by—the plot of domestic retrenchment and consolidation. The world of the colonies is represented or subsumed by the terms of representation by the other world of the domestic.

### Gender and discretion

Interestingly, despite the controversy Said's reading of *Mansfield Park* produced, and despite the fact that the discussion of the dead silence is an addition to the later version of the essay in *Culture and Imperialism*, this newer, extended version of the essay is actually less critical of Austen's text and less iconoclastic than the earlier version. This is partially because it offers a kind of

palinode to this earlier version, by elaborating a critique of a ‘rhetoric of blame, so often now employed by subaltern, minority, or disadvantaged voices’ (Said 1994:115). However, whilst it may seem counter-intuitive within the terms of Said’s political critique to position itself against a so-called ‘rhetoric of blame’, this reference can be seen to function, more importantly I think, as part of an acknowledgement of the fraught institutional context of the so-called ‘Culture Wars’ of the North American academy of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which saw a strong conservative backlash against the liberal critique and liberal ‘opening’ of the literary canon to so-called ‘minority’ voices (see Guillory 1993: 3). Said’s reading, and this particular reference to the ‘rhetoric of blame’, can in this way be read as an attempt to move postcolonial critique beyond the terms both of the conservative opposition to the liberal opening of the canon, and of the liberal critique and opening of the canon itself, that is, beyond a rhetoric of blame and vindication, and beyond a liberal-pluralist framework in which ‘minority voices’, in this case women and colonial subjects, are forced to compete against one another for recognition.

What does seem somewhat counter-intuitive in the context of the critique of Austen, however, is the fact that this gesture occurs within the context of an appeal to the canonical reading of *Mansfield Park* as an aesthetic ‘masterpiece’ (Said 1994: 114). It is precisely this kind of canonical authority which Said’s detractors produce in opposition to his reading, and which underlies the universalist, humanist model of literature as an autonomous space—separate from the world—which Said is working against. What I am suggesting is that Said’s insistence on the ‘worldliness’ of Austen’s text (Said 1994:116) in his fascinating reading of the text is undermined by a kind of residual, nagging or even rhetorical appeal to literary autonomy and Austen’s canonical authority. Said produces this appeal to Austen’s canonical authority in this rhetorical Q&A:

Austen belonged to a slave-owning society, but do we therefore jettison her novels as so many trivial exercises in aesthetic frumpery? Not at all. *Mansfield Park* is a rich work in that its aesthetic intellectual complexity requires that longer and slower analysis that is also required by its geographical problematic, a novel based in England relying for the maintenance of its style on a Caribbean island.

(Said 1994:115)

Of interest here are the terms themselves of Said’s rhetorical question—‘aesthetic frumpery’ and ‘aesthetic intellectual complexity’—as the terms which present two options—parodically iconoclastic and subtly canonizing—for reading Austen. The formulation of ‘aesthetic frumpery’ is particularly interesting in terms of gender, canonicity and specifically female canonicity.

The term ‘frumpery’, a gender-specific form of lack of style, enacts a characteristically male-gendered iconoclastic gesture, I would suggest, even as it is clearly parodic and rhetorical, and even as it is contrasted with the masculine-

gendered figure of ‘aesthetic intellectual complexity’. The accusation of ‘frumpery’ is the strongest, in a sense, that can be made against the Austen text, which has always been identified with a kind of style *tout court*. Originally published, as I’ve pointed out, under the aegis of those two leading male heavyweights of the British left, Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton, Said’s reading reproduces some characteristic features of a particular kind of iconoclastic tendency in the critiques of Austen by these figures.

This iconoclasm takes the form of a satirical reproduction of a kind of scandalous femininity, which slips between a bourgeois and aristocratic class-location. Writing about the nineteenth-century Arnoldian religion of culture, Terry Eagleton suggests that ‘if it had not been for this dramatic crisis...we might not today have had such a plentiful supply of Jane Austen casebooks’ (Eagleton 1983:23), invoking the Jane Austen casebook as a synecdoche of a commodified—that is, feminized—literary culture. As another example, take Williams’s famous reading of Austen from *The Country and the City*:<sup>13</sup>

Neighbours in Jane Austen are not the people actually living nearby; they are the people living a little less nearby who, in social recognition, can be visited. What she sees across the land is a network of propertied houses and families, and through the holes of this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen.

(Williams 1993:166)

Here, Williams’s figure of ‘network’ is transformed into the specifically feminine detail of ‘mesh’, to figure a particularly female form of social exclusivity. Here, as the great but scandalous foremother of the English literary canon,<sup>14</sup> Austen functions as a synecdoche of the ‘propertied’ aristocratic or landed-gentry femininity she satirizes. However, she is also produced as bourgeois or middle-class, which would seem to be the effect of Said’s figure of ‘aesthetic frumpery’, since frumpishness is not only gender-specific but class-specific too—denoting a middle-class failure of (canonical) aristocratic style. (And Williams’s association of Austen with the ‘rural backwater’ may be seen in relation to the Said figure of frumpery as a charge of specifically *provincial* frumpery.)

Within these iconoclastic critiques, Austen’s scandalous femininity and scandalous canonicity are interimplicating, and marked by a class slippage in terms of which Austen is identified with both an aristocratic prerogative of style over politics *and* a middle-class frumpishness which privileges politics over style. The critical relationship that is being negotiated here is between style and politics: the move from ‘aesthetic frumpery’ to ‘aesthetic intellectual complexity’ seems to suggest the negotiation of a relationship between ‘style’ (or aesthetics) and ‘worldliness’ (or politics), except that this negotiation is undermined by the overarching category of the ‘aesthetic’. To take up Said’s rhetorical question, if we were to ‘jettison the Austen text as an exercise in aesthetic frumpery’—and to the extent that it is an exercise in aesthetic frumpery—

it would be because it is not sufficiently sophisticated as an exercise in political critique. In this sense, and in the context of the argument and of the political positioning of Austen within 'slave-owning society', 'aesthetic frumpiness' actually seems to mean *political* frumpiness. Austen's text is frumpish to the extent that it is not explicitly abolitionist. (So a certain kind of political critique is necessarily implicated in 'aesthetic intellectual complexity', but this is not made clear.) For the traditional Janeite, like D.G. Wright, Austen's work is a 'masterpiece' because it has the special insight of abolitionist sentiment—not that it is named as such because there is no need to engage politics when genius itself can divine human injustice. (And this is presumably why we have 'masterpieces', so that politics can be disguised or transformed or transfigured into the 'moral' complexities of art.) In Said's reading, Austen is desired as being the site both of a canonical, aristocratic style and of a middle-class abolitionist politics, but is produced as being neither, or made instead to slip between these two categories, between an aristocratic femininity identified with style, and a middle-class 'frumpiness' identified with lack of style.

Said may opt for 'aesthetic intellectual complexity' over 'aesthetic frumpiness', but the reading is still somewhat limited by its failure to offer any point beyond the either/or terms of 'aesthetic frumpiness' or 'aesthetic intellectual complexity', and the category of the aesthetic. In this way, a troubling identification between canonical authority and scandalous femininity is curiously suspended by these terms of opposition rather than being renegotiated. For these terms of opposition themselves need to be worked through and renegotiated. This residual appeal to the aesthetic is also complicated by an intentionalism that undermines Said's reading of the text's 'gaps' and 'absences'.

Clearly, Said's account is somewhat limited in terms of gender, but not simply through its reliance on what Susan Fraiman interestingly refers to as the 'available myth of "feminine" nearsightedness' (Fraiman 1995:808), if only because Said relies on this myth strategically and only some of the time. For in Said's account the attribution of lack of knowledge swerves just as easily into attributions of knowledge. The problem is, rather, the reliance on the very categories of knowledge and intention themselves. As I pointed out earlier, Said draws upon Pierre Macherey's project of ideology critique. However, whereas Macherey's project was a structuralist project predicated upon the move away from the idealist category of authorial intention, Said reimports a version of intentionalism into his version of ideology critique. This intentionalism is manifested in a series of references to what 'Austen sees', what 'Austen speaks', to 'Austen's awareness of empire', and what 'Austen seems only vaguely aware of', and the production of an Austen that 'reveals herself to be assuming the importance of an empire to the situation at home' (Said 1994:106).

One of the most extreme of these intentionalizing gestures is Said's claim that 'it would be silly to expect Jane Austen to treat slavery with anything like the passion of an abolitionist or a newly liberated slave' (Said 1994:115). But Said gives no reason why this would be silly. Is it because Austen is a canonical

writer? Is it because she is a bourgeois writer? Is it because she is a female writer? (Anna Laetitia Barbauld treated slavery with the passion of an abolitionist, as did Austen's favourite poet, William Cowper, who is quoted throughout *Mansfield Park*.) Abolitionism was a contemporary option readily available to bourgeois Anglican women which Austen simply did not take up. Said's statement quite counter-intuitively de-historicizes Austen. It also ends up by replicating the traditional Janeite position which is to ineffectually conflate canonicity with abolitionist sentiment (although of course in the Janeite reading abolitionist sentiment is never named as such—it goes by the name of 'moral outrage'). Austen's texts enact different rhetorical, stylistic, aesthetic and ideological choices, the most successful and notorious of which was her famous discretion, the strategy for which Austen was so celebrated by contemporary reviewers such as Richard Whately and Walter Scott.

Said refers to *Mansfield Park*'s 'limited references' (Said 1994:104), 'few references' (106), 'lightly stressed allusions to work, process, and class' (104–5), 'clues' (105), 'what is hidden or allusive in Austen' (162), 'aesthetic silence' and 'discretion' (163). However, Said's analysis does not really engage or historicize this strategy of 'discretion'. We might refer to this highly strategic aesthetic style as the aesthetic form of a particular kind of anti-courtly bourgeois femininity which Austen attempts to vindicate through such characters as Fanny Price.

What Said refers to—albeit ironically—as 'aesthetic frumpery' might be formulated as the strategy of discretion as a kind of preference for the strategic presentation of domestic detail over the exposure of the colonial detail of that other setting. There is another way in which we can map this rhetoric of discretion and the feminine detail in terms of colonial relations. Austen's 'discretion' might be engaged within the context of the relations between domesticity and empire by considering a particular aesthetic and feminine detail of the text: the green curtain, used for the staging of the home theatricals. This is both a realist detail and a metonymy which can be brought into focus to offer a miniaturizing and microanalytic perspective on the familial, colonial, sexual and racial relations engaged by the text. The green curtain is a detail which connects domestic estate to colony via the figure of Mrs Norris.<sup>15</sup>

Aunt Norris's association with the green curtain instantiates a whole chain of metonymic associations that link Northamptonshire hedgerows with Antigua, and figure the interrelations between the domestic and feminine-identified estate of Mansfield Park and the Antigua colony. The Northamptonshire hedgerows are a local georgic detail that prefigures the green curtain in suggesting this relation. However, this relation is often disavowed, through a deflective eye which registers the guilty, collusive underside of abolitionist rhetoric, and thereby manifests how deeply if ambivalently acclimatized English culture had become to the ambience of empire even by as relatively early a period in nineteenth-century imperial expansion as the 1810s.

The detail of the green curtain functions also as a pastoral and georgic fragment which simultaneously screens and infects the noble avenues of trees,

English georgic, with the imperial georgic both of slave labour and of slave insurrection. If georgic is that genre which connects agricultural labour with the founding of a nation, imperial georgic concerns the expansion of that nation and the agricultural slave labour required to do it. The green curtain metonymizes the estate in Antigua, and the colony exploited for its natural resources behind the scenes. And Aunt Norris, domestic tyrant—who doubles as John Norris the slaver's henchman—is the figure who works then to join the endogamic marriage plot with the post-abolition and pre-emancipation slavery plot. The relationship between estate and colony can be figured through the correlation of the green curtain (as Antigua) with the avenue of trees. The green curtain as the green chain of islands that include Antigua works to rejuvenate the green avenue of trees of England, to keep Fanny's 'wonderful evergreen!' (Austen 1990:188) evergreen, dependent upon the proceeds of the green islands.

### The island

The island is a particularly potent symbolic figure in English culture. The green curtain of Caribbean islands is curtailed by the country-house mystique of the avenue of trees and the nationalist trope of Britain as an island, invoked ubiquitously during the Napoleonic Wars with the repeated threat of invasion. Primarily a utopic figure of British nationalist discourse, the island works also as a dystopic trope which figures the menace of the Napoleonic threat of a sea blockade that would force the country into agricultural self-sufficiency and cut off supplies from the empire.

The mythology of the island is implicated within the nationalist and imperial strategy which Suvendrini Perera has referred to as 'the invention or reification of a green and rural core, which serves as the touchstone of the truly "English"' (Perera 1991:35). Peripheral nations assimilated by acts of Union, such as Wales, Scotland and Ireland, are on the outer periphery as a protective buffer of this green core of 'country', and the global colonies ring it at another remove. The trope of England as an island also works chiasmically and synecdochically to figure the provincial neighbourhood, in this case Mansfield Park in Northamptonshire—which is, as Marilyn Butler points out, 'the most midland county in the heart of England' (Butler 1990:xiii), the precious, threatened core itself- as an island. Mrs Norris's green curtain figures that 'green core'.

Enacting a watertight provincial isolationism, focusing on her '3 or 4 Families in a Country Village' (Austen 1952:401), Austen's limited sphere is the already domestic, interiorized, insulated version of the island. This provincial isolationism explains why, as Nancy Armstrong points out, Austen's novels are 'some of the most demographically limited novels ever to be taken into the literary canon' (Armstrong 1990:229). This demographic concision is implicated in the strategy of the domestic turn inward which shuns incriminating imperial details, domestic retrenchment as a form of imperial expansion.

An important function of the contemporary British mythology of the island and romance of the sea, and one that bears particularly heavily on the novel's West Indian and Napoleonic Wars plots, is its disavowal of the competing imperial interests in the Caribbean as a motivating factor in England's protracted campaign against the French. This Napoleonic narrative is important in the novel because it reproduces a contemporary discourse in terms of which the fight against Napoleon offered a kind of occluding pretext for the elaboration of a rhetoric of British imperial right and might. In this sense, one important contemporary colonial plot the novel enacts is this specifically anti-Napoleonic imperial plot. *Mansfield Park* is a colonial narrative which occludes the colony by a representation of colonial rivalry. In this sense, then, the novel engages what Fredric Jameson has referred to as that older 'modern' sense of imperialism as 'the rivalry of the various imperial and metropolitan nation-states among themselves' (Jameson 1990:47).

The ideology of island is a repressive structure that works to disguise and deflect attention away from England's colonial tentacles, to disavow that defining characteristic of the English that Nairn has termed 'extra-territoriality', the claiming of ownership and influence through projection onto the 'offshore', a 'retention of an England outside itself', through location at the crossroads of international exchange (Nairn 1988:256). This disavowing of extra-territoriality accounts for and figures those major repressions and contradictions within the text that bear precisely upon the way in which the island is seen and then hidden, the curtain upon it opened and then closed. These deflections cast the imperial and proprietorial eye towards and over the horizon of colonial expansion, which then guiltily shuns the direct view of the peripheries emblemized by Antigua. In this sense, this strategy of deflection is not particular to the 'discretion' of Austen's text, or to female-authored texts, but is a structuring and constitutive feature of the colonial and imperial enterprise.

In Fanny's regeneration of the English state, her career is an apotheosis of the nationalist project of scripting the imperial as the domestic, the career of William Price figures this extra-territoriality as nation-saving enterprise. William's drawing of his ship, the Antwerp, proudly displayed by Fanny in her little schoolroom, emblemizes their common role as patronized outsiders used to prop up the empire. Napoleon referred to the port city of Antwerp as the pistol pointed at England; in *Mansfield Park*, written in the flush of British victory over Napoleonic France, the ship named 'Antwerp' is pointed triumphantly at France. Fanny and William figure the lower classes as the outer periphery that protects the aristocratic inhabitants of the threatened green core. As Fanny enables the continuation of the family line, William Price triumphantly dramatizes the unbroken shoreline of England since the Conquest. What is also being protected here, together with the green core, are the profits that derive from the commodities produced in the colonial margins of the sugar estates of the West Indies. Britain's maritime control during the Napoleonic period meant that it

could exact whatever prices it wished from its rival France and other European powers for such West Indian imports.

William Price's naval-imperial heroism, celebrated by mementoes in Fanny's schoolroom, supplements and vindicates the lack of geographical mastery that Fanny demonstrates to her cousins in the Mansfield schoolroom:

'But, aunt, she is really so very ignorant!—Do you know, we asked her last night, which way she would go to get to Ireland; and she said, she should cross to the Isle of Wight. She thinks of nothing but the Isle of Wight, and she calls it the Island, as if there were no other island in the world.'

(Austen 1990:15)

This pedagogical drama engages the English nationalist and imperialist mythology of the island in such a way as to adumbrate the colonial range and scope of the novel, and extend the way in which class domination replicates itself at the level of colonial conquest. The Bertram girls' reference to Fanny's 'ignorance' asserts their power through knowledge over a range of colonized global regions. The significant islands here are the 'Isle of Wight' and Ireland. The Isle of Wight is marked by its geographical proximity to Portsmouth, and thereby situated midway between town and country, between the British nation and colony which are the islands of England and Antigua, also engaged here. The other island referred to in this passage is Ireland. This figure of Ireland introduces a site of domestic colonialism, and offers a variation on the J.S. Mill model of colonial exchange as the economic traffic between town and country traffic, in the form of Britain's prevention of the free circulation of Irish produce on the global market.

### Conclusion

The geographical green 'core' figured in *Mansfield Park* through the avenue of oaks and evergreens that functions as island is homologous, I would suggest, not only to Mrs Norris's green curtain but also to the British agrarian Romantic canon of which Austen is such a central part. The canon serves the same insulating function as the core/island, working as the synecdochic green shrine of English romantic agrarianism, the fetishized sacralization and supplement of green British land. The canon is that national and nationalist creation that serves to regenerate the aristocracy by refashioning as national culture the culture of the ruling classes. Conventional Austen criticism is littered with metonymies of the Austen text and the biographical Austen as this fetishized green core. (And iconoclastic Austen criticism is littered with such metonyms, as in Williams's figure of the landed estate as a 'rural backwater'.) In 1820, the *New Monthly Magazine* could only attribute the most docile, retiring kind of pastoral to Austen, in its recommendation of the pastoral otium of the '[repose on the] soft green of

Miss Austen's sweet and unambitious creations' (*New Monthly Magazine* 1820: 637). Later, in the high-imperialist Victorian period, Austin Dobson's *The Civil Service Handbook of English Literature: for the use of candidates for examinations, public schools and students generally* (1874, republished 1880, 1897), a set text for those who were to be sent out to administer Britain's then 'East' Indian colonies, lifts Austen out of pastoral otium, supplies her with genius, and puts her into symbolic service in the colonies, where her job is precisely to signify for those in the colonies the ideal of English retirement and rural seclusion:

The sketch of her life...makes more wonderful the genius of the quiet and placid clergyman's daughter, who, living in the retirement of a secluded rural parsonage and a remote rural home, a retirement broken only by the mild dissipation of a four years' residence in Bath,—not brilliant, not bookish,—contrived to write a series of novels which (on her own ground) have not even yet been surpassed.

(Quoted in Southam 1987:1, 5)

Here, even as an imperial pedagogical tool, taken out into the world, Austen's function is to signify the green core, to function as an entropic model of the backward look to the green core. This early canonizing gesture, which promulgates the miraculous enigma of Austen's exceptional 'genius' as a worldliness despite rural seclusion and non-bookishness, involves the preparatory planting of Austen as the benign female signature of nostalgic agrarian Romanticism that is inscribed so pervasively in the elegiac, valedictory and entropic mode of so much early twentieth-century English literary history, and canonizing criticism of Austen (see Lynch 1996: 159–64).

Locating Austen in the world necessitates locating Austen beyond the aesthetic oppositions of iconoclasm and canonical authority, and beyond the terms of the 'miracle' of literary production via pastoral otium and rural seclusion. Austen's domestic and country-house novel involves a sophisticated form of Napoleonic imperial georgic, which is a formidable ideological labour and traffic of aristocratic domestic improvement and retrenchment, and of colonial expansion and occlusion, a labour which connects through this occlusion the domestic country estate to the imperial colony.

### Notes

I wish to thank Judith Barbour, Deirdre Coleman, Susan Conley, and the editors of this volume, for their extremely helpful suggestions in the preparation of this essay.

1 Viswanathan also points out, however, that Williams's reading involves a conflation of nation and empire which is characteristic of British Marxist cultural

- analysis, and which demonstrates a ‘failure of the British left to conceptualize cultural practices in relation to imperialism’ (Viswanathan 1991:47).
- 2 On the genre of the domestic novel and the middle-class ideology of domesticity, associated with a newly empowered female subject, see Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987).
  - 3 On eighteenth-century georgic and nation-foundation, see Griffin 1990.
  - 4 For an elaboration of the idea of ‘use’, see Hibberd 1956.
  - 5 Ferguson refers to the novel as ‘a post-abolition narrative’ (Ferguson 1991:118) in which ‘emancipation still cannot be named’ (136).
  - 6 Arguing that ‘the inherent mode of this counterpoint [between empire and colony] is not temporal, but spatial’ (Said 1994:151), Said’s strategy of mapping the spatial relations between empire and colony engages a Machereyan textual rhetoric which could itself be characterized as a spatial model of textuality. Macherey formulates a model of textual repression, of the ideological unconscious, elaborated through a tropology of gaps and omissions. Macherey’s work is critically important as the first formulation of the Marxist Louis Althusser’s idea of ideology to specifically literary forms of textual production.
  - 7 Here, Nairn would seem to be working with the period-based distinction between colonialism and imperialism, formulated recently by Tim Fulford and Peter J.Kitson in *Romanticism and Colonialism* as a ‘post-Althusserian’ distinction which understands colonialism as ‘a material system of conquest and control, and imperialism as a form of colonialism buttressed by hegemonic and ideological imperatives’ (see Fulford and Kitson 1998:3).
  - 8 A similar romance of the ‘backward-looking’ is implied in the formation Patrick Wright has referred to as the ‘sense of history as entropic decline’ (Wright 1985: 70).
  - 9 For another reading of the domestic and colonial relations between endogamy and post-abolition in *Mansfield Park*, which does not however take ‘improvement’ as a problematic category within the novel, see Eileen Cleere’s fascinating ‘Reinvesting nieces: *Mansfield Park* and the economics of endogamy’ (1995).
  - 10 On the settlement of Antigua, see J.H.Parry and P.M.Sherlock, *A Short History of the West Indies* (1956:52).
  - 11 For the grand historical narrative of English aristocratic decline and decadence with a specific West Indian inflection, see Lowell Joseph Ragatz’s *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763–1834* (1928) and Brooks Adams’s ‘England’s decadence in the West Indies’ (1900). Brooks Adams is not concerned to denounce slavery, but rather to announce that England has fallen victim to a systemic entropy which makes it unfit for (conversion to) the race of capitalist competition. This essay was collected together with ‘The decay of England’ under the title *America’s Economic Supremacy*, the republication of which in 1947 asserts America’s post-Second World War political and economic supremacy. See Brooks Adams 1947.
  - 12 For an overview of this literary history, see Sypher 1939.
  - 13 For a recent and very persuasive critique of Raymond Williams in terms of gender, see Deirdre Lynch (1996:191, fn. 6).
  - 14 On the propensity of middle-class feminism to produce emphatically *aristocratic* literary foremothers, see Donna Landry (1991:181).

- 15 That the green veil is an important signifier metonymically associated with Mrs Norris is suggested by Austen in a collection of contemporary opinions of *Mansfield Park* transcribed by her, where she mentions ‘Mrs Anna Harwood delighted with Mrs Norris and the green curtain’. Quoted in Southam (ed.) (1976: 202). As Gibbon and Ferguson have pointed out, one of the ways in which *Mansfield Park* registers Austen’s response to the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson’s *History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade* (1808), published in the wake of the 1807 Act of Abolition, is by its naming of Mrs Norris after the villain of Clarkson’s piece, an infamous slaver’s myrmidon named John Norris (see Ferguson 1991:121 and Gibbon 1982:303). Aunt Norris’s lack of a Christian name, which recalls the typecasting of Restoration farce, would bear out this villain status. This explicit allegorical naming is emphasized also, I would suggest, by the text’s persistent association of Aunt Norris with the green curtain — ‘[t]he curtain over which she had presided with such talent and such success’ (Austen 1990:176).

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## 6

### Of windows and country walks

#### Frames of space and movement in 1990s Austen adaptations

*Julianne Pidduck*

##### **The woman at the window**

The recurring moment of the woman at the window captures a particular quality of feminine stillness, constraint, and longing that runs through 1990s film and television adaptations of Jane Austen's novels. Consider, for instance, the sequence in Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) where Elinor Dashwood (Emma Thompson) sits at a writing desk facing the window. Muted sunlight streams in through the thick glass, bathing her face in a soft golden light; her startling cornflower-blue eyes exactly match her simple frock. Cut to an over-the-shoulder shot from Elinor's point of view as she glances out the window. In a pre-framed vignette set in the landscaped garden, her younger sister Margaret appears with Edward Ferrars (Hugh Grant). Fencing with long sticks, they play at pirates duelling on the high seas. Edward demonstrates the 'lunge' for the precocious Margaret, who promptly guts him when he's not prepared. Elinor glances up to watch them, smiles indulgently, then returns to her letters.

With its frames within frames, this sequence indicates the importance of gendered interior and exterior space at work in contemporary film and television adaptations of Jane Austen's novels. Elinor, the responsible older sister, sits demurely indoors, attending to the tasks at hand for the small fatherless family living in genteel poverty. Meanwhile, Mrs Dashwood and her daughters commonly hover by the window, hoping for the arrival of some eligible suitor. *Sense and Sensibility's* male characters (Edward, Willoughby, Colonel Brandon), in contrast, tend to come and go, moving freely through the countryside—indeed, Brandon's robust and 'worldly' masculinity arises in part from his military adventures abroad. This brief sketch brings into relief a gendered spatial play between a mannered treatment of interiors, and the more 'natural' blocking of outdoor sequences (country walks, picnics, coach rides). Against the precise dialogue and intricate human interaction condensed into Austen's parlours, libraries, and balls, exterior sequences (often heightened by swelling orchestral scores) tend to create a sense of spatial and emotional expansiveness, not unlike the role of dance numbers in the musical.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile,

just off the screen lurk the liminal vistas of pirates, imperial adventure and profit. I will return to these shadowy vistas later.

A hinge in this topography, the window marks the threshold of inside and outside. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the threshold is ‘highly charged with emotion and value... whose fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life’ (Bakhtin 1981:248). In a cycle of works organized around female characters who are both actually and metaphorically ‘house-bound’, windows and doors where arrivals and departures occur provide focal points of narrative interest. Through the sleepy embroidering days of the Misses Dashwood, the Misses Bennet, Anne Elliot, Catherine Morland, or to a lesser degree Emma Woodhouse, the arrivals of suitors are highly anticipated events. A formal and narrative framing device, the window marks a transparent filter between the ordered, confined lives of Austen’s female protagonists, and the comings and goings of visitors. From the Dashwoods, to Emma’s startled rush to the window at the outset of *Jane Austen’s Emma* (1996), to the Bennet girls’ ongoing vigilance from their windows in *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), to Fanny Price’s wistful lingering at the windows in *Mansfield Park* (1990), to Catherine Morland’s and Anne Elliot’s respective confinements in Bath town houses in *Northanger Abbey* (1987) and *Persuasion* (1995), the woman at the window encapsulates a gendered ‘structure of feeling’ at work in Austen and in costume drama more generally<sup>2</sup>—a generic spatiotemporal economy of physical and sexual constraint, a sumptuous waiting barely papering over a baroque yet attenuated register of longing.<sup>3</sup> This intriguingly persistent ‘movement-image’ offers a metonymic point of departure to consider a series of representational power relations from gender to class to colonialism.

What then are we to make of the woman at the window, poised so graciously at this threshold? At first blush, this recurring moment often implies a lingering quality of anticipation, a poignant desire—the digressing yet inexorable pull of the romance narrative toward the inevitable double weddings concluding *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Indeed, the spatial compression of feminine interiors bottled up against the lush green, ‘natural’ offerings of the wider world works as an audiovisual condensation of the tremendous force of repressed female desire at work more generally in costume drama. As Claire Monk suggests of *A Room with a View* (1986), the woman at the window may be read as a cinematic instance of ‘active female sexual agency and active female looking’ (Monk 1994:20). In the Austen adaptations, the apparently passive women at the window, wistfully waiting, suggest a polite, yet coyly lascivious, desiring female gaze. Along with the predominantly if not exclusively female audiences, these figures fully appreciate Hugh Grant’s (Ferrars’s) tight period trousers with that soft bulge at the crotch, Crispin Bonham-Carter’s (Bingley’s) shapely calf, or the manly, slightly overblown, square-shouldered cut of Ciaran Hinds’s (Wentworth’s) uniform.

Yet rather than undertake a psychoanalytic reading of the female gaze, in this essay I shall trace issues of power and desire in the Austen adaptations through

the audiovisual plotting of space and movement. Psychoanalysis has furnished feminist film theory with a powerful, if problematic, vocabulary for sexual difference and desire; however, all too often the binary psychoanalytic imagination excludes other axes of difference. Drawing in part from the insights of literary criticism, the 'topographical' approach developed in this essay seeks to extend the gaze of feminist film theory toward class and colonial relations, which cohabit the screen.

Returning to Austen in adaptation, the camera with its careful, mannered *mise-en-scène*, rests undoubtedly *inside* with the female protagonist, looking out. However, to follow the trajectory of that desiring gaze *outward*, I extend the question: besides Hugh Grant, Colin Firth or the others, what *do* these women want? Recalling the careful framing of the garden outside, our eye is drawn outdoors, where Norland's picturesque grounds come into sharp relief as the Dashwood daughters' rightful inheritance denied them by patriarchal law. Similarly, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth finds herself gazing out of an upper window of Darcy's Pemberley estate after refusing his offer of marriage. In a classically ironic Austen moment (heightened by Andrew Davies's knowing screenplay), she muses to herself, 'Of all this I might have been mistress.'

I would suggest that the 1990s adaptations refigure Austen's characters and situations through a contemporary liberal feminist sensibility. These works highlight the precariousness of their heroines' situations through their exclusion from property ownership; the romance's desiring narrative tug toward heterosexual courtship and marriage is inextricable from historical property relations. In this sense, the gaze from the window may also be read as acquisitive, a retrospective yearning for the middle-class entitlements of citizenship denied Austen's female protagonists by accident of sex. Considered from a slightly different angle, the woman at the window might imply not only social or sexual *constraint*—but also a certain retrospective *potentiality*. Within the clearly demarcated limits of Austen's social sphere, this possibility is deeply yearned for if not realized, and represents a whole spectrum of desires for personhood, social mobility, corporeal and sexual freedom. I would argue that, explicitly or implicitly, such aspirations are always relational, gaining resonance only against the respective positions and horizons of other social groups. In this vein, Toni Morrison describes 'the interdependence of slavery and freedom' in American literature with reference to *Huckleberry Finni*; not only is slavery understood as the worst form of human constraint, but Huck Finn's own process of becoming a social individual, of gaining agency, can only be measured against the static figure of Jim the slave. 'Freedom has no meaning to Huck or to the text without the spectre of enslavement, the anodyne to individualism' (Morrison 1993:56). To tease out the contemporary yearnings afoot in the Austen adaptations is to foreground the supporting figures of servants and country folk—and to consider the structuring absences of colonial peoples and places lingering just outside of the frame.

Some two hundred years after the novels' publication, the multiple and contradictory power relations negotiated in the Austen adaptations continue to matter as these texts are transformed by new generations of cultural producers, viewers and readers. The novels have been widely adapted for film and television alike, from Robert Z. Leonard's 1940 *Pride and Prejudice* featuring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier, to the same work scripted by Fay Weldon in 1979 as a television serial. More recently, cinematic adaptations have gained an international (notably North American) audience built on the 1980s success of the Merchant-Ivory production, *A Room with a View* and David Lean's *A Passage to India*. In the 1990s, art films like *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), *Howards End* (1992), *The Remains of the Day* (1993), and *The Wings of the Dove* (1998) offer the 'quality'<sup>4</sup> credentials of classic literature and British acting.<sup>5</sup> The hallmark of 'quality' has carried over into television adaptations. Long a staple of British television, the classic serial has recently become an export product. Andrew Davies's lively 1995 version of *Pride and Prejudice*, a BBC/Arts & Entertainment Network co-production, exemplifies this trend. As art films, television serials, or telefilms, the 1990s Austen adaptations considered here belong to a broader industrial shift toward the niche marketing of British 'quality' culture to an international, primarily female and English-speaking audience.<sup>6</sup>

Amidst this fascination with British heritage on screen, Austen takes her place not only as a seminal English novelist, but as a cherished figure in the feminist literary canon. With their indelible heroines, incisive wit, and complex interplay of social convention, individual choice, and romance, Austen's novels offer fertile ground for contemporary feminist reworkings.<sup>7</sup> A guiding worldview, which I call 'liberal feminism', understands the historical feminine condition as one of genteel social constraint which is perfectly captured by the woman at the window. This influential account tends to collapse historical differences among women into a familiar middleclass, white, and Western 'quest for self' which reads somewhat like a novel by Jane Austen, or by the Brontë sisters. In her influential discussion of *Jane Eyre*, Gayatri Spivak notes the historical genesis of this feminist self: 'What is at stake, for feminist individualism in the age of imperialism, is precisely the making of human beings, the constitution and "interpellation" of the subject not only as individual but as "individualist"' (1985: 263). As a counterpoint to these twinned narrative trajectories, in this essay I read, rather perversely, around the edges of the core thematics of character development and heterosexual romance. Without losing, I hope, the many subtle pleasures of these texts, I explore how they project gender, class, and colonial relations of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England for contemporary consumption.

The topographical approach to textual analysis developed here derives implicitly yet centrally from the thought of Gilles Deleuze, as well as the insights of critical geography, literary criticism, and art history. In *Cinema I*, Deleuze posits a distinctive spatiotemporal approach to the cinema using the notion of 'movement-image'.<sup>8</sup> To imagine audiovisual texts as the splicing together of

‘mobile sections of duration’ or ‘movement-image’ is to suggest a dynamic, spatiotemporal approach to the moving image. Working around more familiar cinematic theories of narrative, psychoanalytic gaze theory, *mise-en-scène*, or semiotics, Deleuze’s Nietzschean motor of desiring movement transforms the cinematic frame into a field of force characterized by movement and transformation, by figures and forms traversing and interacting with a social ‘milieu’. In the course of this chapter, I will discuss three movement-images which recur through the Austen cycle: the woman at the window, the country walk, and the sailing ship. These moments crystallize key ‘structures of feeling’ in Austen’s world; each one encapsulates a generic set piece used to dramatize nineteenth-century literature for the screen. I have selected these movement-images from a broader set (other fertile possibilities include the writing desk, the piano recital, or the ball) as they are crucial to how the adaptations reimagine the spatial conditions of historical femininity—and, by extension, of class and colonialism.

### **Interiors and exteriors: reading Austen’s landscapes**

To be face-to-face in this world is already to belong to a class. No other community, in physical presence or in social reality, is by any means knowable. And it is not only most of the people who have disappeared...it is also most of the country, which becomes real only as it relates to the houses which are the real modes; for the rest of the country is weather or a place for a walk.

(Williams 1973:166)

Raymond Williams’s class-based reading of the English novel points out the partial historical view afforded from the upper windows of Austen’s Great Houses. Although the woman at the window may be persuasively read through a narrative of female sexual repression and desire, her very *location*, and, by implication, her desiring gaze, are polysemic. The spatial confinement of Austen’s interiors, so achingly and self-consciously framed by the window, gains resonance only in relation to some ‘outside’. If costume drama may be read as a spatiotemporal plotting of social, sexual, physical, and emotional constraint, then such ‘constraint’ figures only against an implied release, movement, expression. I have read the woman at the window in relation to Austen’s mobile male protagonists, and also toward the surrounding countryside as offering more spontaneous and meaningful human interaction, romance, or contemplation. However, these iconic English landscapes have as their referent the historical countrysides of Improvement and Enclosure; as Williams insists, these exteriors are as manicured and carefully constructed as the interiors.

The adaptations characteristically render Austen’s interiors dense with rich furnishings, heavy oil paintings, expensive ornaments. This *mise-en-scène*

orchestrates a sumptuous longed-for experience of gracious nineteenth-century living, what has been called ‘museum pleasures’ (Dyer 1994:16). Yet, this panoply of detail at times evokes the claustrophobic weight of history, oppressive patriarchal laws of inheritance, the strict codes of comportment that Austen at once problematizes and upholds. In audiovisual language, this ordered world transpires through the subtle densities of dialogue, gesture, glance. A sense of confinement emerges most poignantly in the Norland sequences of *Sense and Sensibility*, in Fanny Price’s pious confinement in *Mansfield Park*, and throughout *Persuasion*’s claustrophobic depiction of hypocritical aristocratic social convention. Particularly marked in these three texts, the cycle as a whole tends to contrast mannered interior spaces with the more spontaneous interactions in the countryside—although these boundaries are fluid, as mannered dialogue can continue apace outdoors, even while the film language opens up.

Contemporary adaptations increasingly favour picturesque exteriors over the interior sound stages of earlier works.<sup>9</sup> Particularly noticeable in Merchant-Ivory films *A Room with a View* and *Howards End* (1992), or Kenneth Branagh’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), iconic English and European landscapes figure increasingly in 1990s period drama. Indeed, in the debates around ‘heritage’ cinema, what Andrew Higson calls the ‘alluring spectacle of iconographic stability, providing an impression of an unchanging, traditional, and always delightful and desirable England’ (Higson 1996:239–40) aptly describes the quiet countryside and peaceful Georgian houses of the Austen adaptations. These are the vistas enjoyed by Austen’s heroines as they gaze hopefully out the window awaiting male suitors, or throw open the shutters to air their still and quiet rooms. An important aspect of the spatial economy of these texts, coach rides, horse rides, picnics, and, especially, country walks, offer moments of respite and respiration, away from the pressures of social convention. From Lizzie’s constitutional ramblings in *Pride and Prejudice*, to *Emma*’s matchmaking strolls with Harriet Smith, to *Persuasion*’s seaside strolls, country walks figure centrally in the Austen adaptations. If the woman at the window poignantly dramatizes a certain quality of feminine constraint and longing, the movement-image of the country walk draws Austen’s protagonists out into the broader social space of the countryside.

Consider, for instance, the sequence in *Sense and Sensibility* where Elinor and Edward walk out from Norland Park. Leaving behind the prying eyes and listening walls of Norland, the pair’s first private tête-à-tête transpires as they walk out into a gentle green field with the Great House in the background. The line of the hill draws the eye toward the manor, nestled cosily behind a stand of trees. The film’s first extended exterior sequence, this movement-image perfectly sets the nineteenth-century picturesque landscape painting into motion. The protagonists’ walk through the middle ground marks out a sense of depth; their trajectory into the foreground toward frame-right traces a diagonal leading back to the house, which serves as the vanishing point. Marianne’s piano score

follows the pair outside, layering the precise banter, the romantic nuance of the scene.

Accompanied by the camera in a medium travelling shot, they discuss Edward's 'prospects'. Modestly, he states: 'A country living is my ideal.' Then, a cut to a long shot prompts a subtle temporal ellipse, even as the conversation continues seemingly unabated to bridge the edit. Edward and Elinor now proceed on horseback at a leisurely pace (toward the foreground, frame-right, on the same diagonal as their walk) and the landscape opens up to their progress. Norland has receded further behind them, and a shepherd, sheep, and running sheepdog briskly cross their path in the foreground moving in the opposite direction. In a classic cinematic technique for blocking out movement, this brief counter-current of constrasting trajectory and tempo further emphasizes the protagonists' progress. The sheep in the foreground scatter with the riders' approach. The shepherd, his dog, the sheep (Dashwood sheep, most likely) complete the blocking of the shot. Even as tiny riders in the distance, Elinor and Edward's modulated voices project across the mute and obliging countryside.

This moment marks a subtle but important shift of location from Austen's novel, where the conversation about Edward's prospects occurs at breakfast between Edward and Mrs Dashwood. In the adaptation, the scene is transported outside into the 'quiet countryside' idealized by Edward, and by the film's visual language. To Austen's dialogue, scriptwriter Emma Thompson adds the following exchange:

*Elinor:* 'You talk of feeling idle and useless. Imagine how that is compounded when one has no hope or choice of any occupation whatsoever.'

*Edward:* 'Our circumstances then are precisely the same.'

*Elinor:* 'Except that you will inherit your fortune. We cannot even earn ours.'

*Edward:* 'Perhaps Margaret is right. Piracy *is* our only option.'

This leap from Austen's dialogue into the audiovisual trajectory of the walk indicates both a renewed generic interest in iconic English landscapes, and a liberal-feminist 'update' of Austen's narrative. In a moment of godsent simultaneity for the film theorist, Elinor and Edward's near encounter with the shepherd coincides with a significant 'feminist moment' in Thompson's script. In a sense, this exchange superimposes a feminist commentary on land tenure over the mute countryside. Laid out like a feast in the background, the Norland estate is the prize at stake in Elinor's wry commentary. From her comfortable spot by the window, Thompson's script deliberately poses a critique of patriarchal laws of inheritance.

This movement-image highlights certain audiovisual plottings of power in the costume drama, namely the layering of voice (associated with a significant class-bound narrative and subjective authority) with the visual dynamics of corporeal movement and historical landscape aesthetics. The cultural encoding of these 'natural' landscapes has been explored in a substantial body of work in literary theory, art history and geography that examines how capitalist and patriarchal

relations of ownership inform the British landscape painting tradition.<sup>10</sup> For instance, referring to Thomas Gainsborough's painting 'Mr and Mrs Andrews', Gillian Rose writes:

Their ownership of land is celebrated in the substantiality of the oil paints used to represent it, and in the vista opening up beyond them, which echoes in visual form the freedom to move over property which only landowners could enjoy. The absence in the painting's content of the people who work the fields...denies the relations of waged labour under capitalism.

(Rose 1993:91)

Rose goes on to point out the further *gender* relations of landscape implied in this painting, noting Mr and Mrs Andrews's differential implied access to physical mobility. Mrs Andrews appears rooted to the spot, under the shadow of the oak tree's symbol of generations. 'Like the fields she sits beside, her role was to reproduce and this role is itself naturalized by the references to trees and fields' (93). Reading this eighteenth-century painting against the contemporary *Sense and Sensibility*, however, we find a deliberately egalitarian blocking of the couple's walk. Thompson's Elinor banter with Edward as they move 'freely' across the countryside, side by side. Through the characters' voices and physical trajectories, this sequence seeks both to visually include Elinor Dashwood in the proprietarian surveying of Norland's grounds—and explicitly to record her exclusion from her apparent birthright, through dialogue.

This sequence demonstrates how such a feminist critique relies on class-specific conceptions of space and movement. Returning to the shepherd, in audiovisual terms this man, the sheep, the dog are designated as visual details of landscape lending a backdrop, a counter-current to the steady progression of the film's middle-class protagonists. Seemingly digressing and without purpose, the country walks and constant matchmaking of Austen's characters, as Williams points out, correspond to a historical flurry of changes in property relations. If marriage marks the culmination of the digressing romantic narrative, in the historical context of the Industrial Revolution, and against the embattled rural context of Improvement and the Enclosure Acts, these alliances cannot be separated from the middle class's ascendant wealth. In this vein, Edward Said situates the narrative momentum of the nineteenth-century English novel within a broader middle-class 'consolidation of power'.

The novelistic hero and heroine exhibit the restlessness and energy characteristic of the enterprising bourgeoisie, and they are permitted adventures in which their experiences reveal to them the limits of what they can aspire to, where they can go, what they can become. Novels therefore end either with the death of a hero or heroine (Julien Sorel, Emma Bovary, Bazarov, Jude the Obscure) who by virtue of overflowing



Figure 6.1 'Mr and Mrs Andrews' by Thomas Gainsborough, © National Gallery, London

energy does not fit into the orderly scheme of things, or with the protagonists' accession to stability (usually in the form of marriage or confirmed identity as is the case with novels of Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot).

(Said 1992:71)

My reading of *Sense and Sensibility's* country walk suggests how the 'restlessness and energy' of Austen's protagonists is conveyed in film language. The pretty countryside affords an empty, dumb space, always-already available to open up to the eye, to the wanderings and wonderings of Austen's protagonists.

To return from the country walk to the woman at the window, these audiovisual plottings of space and movement are clearly bound up in complex ways with gender. Where Williams and Said do not distinguish between male and female middle-class mobility, for a feminist reading, the Austen adaptations map out the *limits* of historical feminine middle-class mobility and aspiration, while seeking to overcome them. Rendered through the heightened feminist sensibility of the 1990s adaptations, Austen's female protagonists retrospectively long to partake in the acquisitive ramblings of their male class counterparts.

### **A walk in the country: class and gender mobility**

Elinor and Edward's walk implicitly raises questions of gendered and classed physical mobility. From the static place of the woman at the window, this movement-image wishfully projects the female body into motion. A more dynamic audiovisual treatment of Austen's story, this subtle shift in emphasis also evokes a feminist craving for female physical and social mobility that is written directly into the script.<sup>11</sup> Screenwriter Emma Thompson wryly notes the problem of physicality for the Dashwood women: '[I was] pulled out of reverie by James [Schamus, co-producer] asking, yet again, what physical activities can be found for Elinor and Marianne. Painting, sewing, embroidering, writing letters, pressing leaves, it's all depressingly girly. Chin-ups, I suggest, but promise to think further' (Thompson 1995:208).

Thompson's rewriting of Margaret, the youngest Dashwood, as a tomboy, introduces female physical movement to the restrained spatiotemporal economy of the costume drama. Margaret is continually pictured running, playing in the fields outside of Barton Cottage, mucking about in the pond. Often Elinor, Marianne, or Mrs Dashwood watch Margaret play outside from the window—for instance, the fencing sequence with Edward mentioned above. With her tree-house, her atlas, her fearless pirate games, Margaret shifts the film's immobile spatial interior balance outward into the inviting green landscape. In an audiovisual sense, Margaret presents a dynamic, moving detail in the otherwise posed, still shots (and perhaps, more speculatively, the female child as representative of a more dynamic feminist future).<sup>12</sup> For Kristin Fliieger Samuelian, Thompson's Margaret offers the most explicit protest to the injustices suffered by the Dashwood women (notably their eviction from Norland). Her 'healthy nonconformity' is accentuated by the symbol of the tree-house. 'Unlike Norland, it is movable; it can be put up anywhere there is a sturdy tree. Instead of going from father to son, Margaret's house remains with her and becomes a symbol, not of patriarchal law, but of female mobility and independence' (Samuelian 1998:149).

To briefly historicize these questions of gender and class mobility, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall chronicle the emergent middle-class distinction between private and public spheres in the England of 1780–1850. For these authors, the demarcation of the feminine realm of the home corresponds to a broader class-based focus on 'careful regulation of spatial, temporal and social categories' (Davidoff and Hall 1987:319). This social and spatial demarcation was battled out in the countryside through the Enclosure Acts, and through the relegation of middle-class women to the 'private' realm of the family.

Growing constraints on the physical and social mobility of women, especially young girls, is a motif across a range of activities. Into the early nineteenth century, a great deal of enjoyment was still gained through

walking, often combined with dropping in to chat with neighbours or relatives.

(Davidoff and Hall 1987:403)

From this, Austen's, period onward, Davidoff and Hall note how increasing social pressures made it suspect or even dangerous for a respectable young woman to travel unaccompanied through the countryside. The social and physical mobility accorded to middle-class men of the period was imagined and enacted *in relation to* the increasing confinement of their female counterparts—as well as the 'fixed' existence of the working class, or, for that matter, the inviting thresholds of colonial lands and peoples.

Written in this fraught context of embattled mobility, Austen's female protagonists generally walk with a chaperone or in a group. In *Jane Austen's Emma*, the normally empty and inviting countryside twice becomes a place of danger or at least discomfort for ladies out on a walk—when Emma and Harriet Smith are accosted by a ragged group of gypsies, and when their carriage gets stuck in the mud. On both occasions, they are rescued by men on horseback. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne's rainy-weather ramblings precipitate physical peril (the quintessential turned ankle, and two chance downpours) and rescue; and finally, in *Persuasion*, Louisa rashly throws herself over an embankment into the arms of Captain Wentworth, only to incur a concussion. Ultimately, with the possible exception of the chicken thieves outside of Emma Woodhouse's window, these dangers constitute plot points rather than 'real conditions'. These incidents do not fundamentally controvert the countryside's seemingly empty and benevolent nature. In practice, however, the historical struggle for female physical mobility is reworked in the adaptations through the exigencies of shifting generic convention (more exterior sequences) and the corporeal performance of gender roles.

For a liberal-feminist mode of thought, female access to mobility, even for the middle classes, is rarely self-evident. Austen's heroines, framed at the window, resonate now both as symbols of social constraint and repression—and as figures of potentiality. In this light, the mobilization of the active female figure stands out most resoundingly in *Pride and Prejudice*, where Elizabeth (Jennifer Ehle) strides, cheerful and apple-cheeked, through the idyllic countryside. In fact, four out of five of the episodes of this adaptation begin with Elizabeth or her sisters out on a country walk.<sup>13</sup> Lizzie meets with the disapproval of the more aristocratic folk at Netherfield when she arrives for a visit with muddy shoes. At Rosings Park, when admonished to stay inside for her health, Lizzie states, 'I think I've stayed indoors too long. Fresh air and exercise is all I need.' Lizzie's walks evoke an audiovisual and corporeal pleasure in movement and possibility. These pleasures emerge more in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* than in the other Austen adaptations, particularly the sombre *Persuasion*. Embodied in the movement-image of the country walk, Lizzie carries an independent, dynamic, freethinking force as a compelling heroine. Against



Figure 6.2 Jennifer Ehle in *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC/A&E Network, 1995), © BBC

costume drama's predominant compression, Lizzie's enjoyment of the walk with its relative physical freedom, *for its own sake*, becomes particularly poignant. Particularly poignant, that is, in a framing of the past through present exigencies.

Referring to Ehle's portrayal of Elizabeth, John Caughie notes a tension between historical verisimilitude and the contemporaneity of the actor's performance in British classic television serials: 'The furniture may be authentic nineteenth century, but the body of the actor and its gestures are our contemporary' (2000:224). Ehle's Elizabeth (and, by extension, Thompson's Elinor, Kate Beckinsale's Emma, and Amanda Root's Anne) evokes, through her carriage, gestures, and attitude, a late twentieth-century Western female corporeality. In this sense, these British heritage products enact, as Caughie suggests, 'history [as] the present in costume, showing us only human continuities and lingering generalities of tone and style' (221).<sup>14</sup> If the Austen adaptations dramatize the past through the lens of a liberal-feminist present, the 'human continuities' of individualism and aspiration persist in these visions—even as their physical embodiment is updated into a more robust, assertive 1990s female physicality.<sup>15</sup>

For the 1990s feminist viewer—or indeed perhaps as Lionel Trilling suggests for the modern reader, full stop—this dynamic imperative comes into relief against *Mansfield Park*'s relative sluggishness. Trilling traces this novel's ongoing troubled critical reception to its 'cautiousness and constraint.... Most troubling of all is its preference for rest over motion' (1955:210–11). *Mansfield*

*Park*'s stasis persists into its 1990 adaptation, easily the least compelling of the contemporary Austen cycle. For Trilling, Fanny Price, a Christian heroine adhering to duty, peace, and security, is the source of the trouble. In the novels and in adaptation, Fanny (Sylvestra Le Touzel) contrasts unfavourably with the effervescent Lizzie Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice*; this juxtaposition becomes more pointed in Mary Crawford's curious status as anti-heroine in *Mansfield Park*. In relation to Mary's and Elizabeth's sparkling conversational skills, physical and sexual energies, Fanny is plain, unwell, retiring. In a sense, the 'failure' of this adaptation reveals a modern propensity for dynamism, energy, for the 'opposing self' which propels itself into the postmodern moment. This mode of being and, more importantly, acting, resonates powerfully with Western feminism as a movement associated with individualism and what Said calls the 'restlessness and energy' of the middle classes, and of the imperialist project.

If there is an ambivalence in these layered readings of gendered space and movement, it is deliberate. I maintain that there is a tension between a critical reading of representational power relations—and the very pleasurable elements of 'movement' that captivate and transport the viewer. As Pam Cook suggests, fantastical identification and escape are pivotal to the appeal of costume drama generally; these pleasures cannot be simply discounted as 'ideology' in feminist readings (Cook 1996:4–5). (The recurring movement-image of the ball crystallizes costume drama's generic pleasures of costume, *mise-en-scène*, movement. The choreography of the dances themselves, with their stylized, composed, yet deeply erotic steps, their breathless interrupted exchanges, and playful switching of partners, offers a perfect hologram of Austen's ironic twists and turns of courtship and character. In the ball, a set-piece of period drama and adaptation, these narrative turns are rendered in full colour and movement, the bodies fleshed out, flushed, and alive.) Without losing sight of these contradictory pleasures, the woman at the window might be read as condensing several irreducible qualities of desire—a longing for romance and marriage in an age of rapid changes in gender roles and in the family; an acquisitive desire for property, wealth and the rights they impart at a historical moment when the majority of women worldwide continue to face economic hardship and political exclusion; and the dream of (fraught) physical and sexual freedoms. Such retrospective feminist desires are at once complicit with historical power relations—indeed they cannot be conceived except in relation to class-based and colonial forms of constraint and mobility—and a form of potentiality that is at once corporeal, discursive, and deeply felt.

### **Ships and imperialist movement**

In the final section of this chapter, through the movement-image of the sailing ship, I examine the frame of colonial space that lurks off the edge of Austen's novels, just off the screen in the adaptations. Said notes that 'as a reference, as a point of definition, as an easily assumed place of travel, wealth, and service, the

empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction' (Said 1992:75). The colonies provide a significant register of imagined mobility and possibility in the nineteenth-century novel, even as early as Austen's period. By extension, colonialism constitutes a shadowy yet essential aspect of an audiovisual economy of constraint and movement. One way of thinking the role of colonialism in these emphatically domestic English texts is as an 'out-of-field' or *hors-champ*.<sup>16</sup> Thinking of the problem of framing, Deleuze uses this term to describe 'what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present' (Deleuze 1986:16). If reinserting class into Austen requires the deconstructive tactics of amplifying details within the frame, the problem of colonialism necessitates examining the *hors-champ*, what lurks outside the frame altogether.

The raw materials and cheap labours of the colonies indispensable to the emergent wealth and culture of Austen's middle classes are absent entities—like the working classes expelled from the English pastoral novel described by Williams. While the sources of affluence generally escape mention, in *Mansfield Park* Sir Thomas Bertram's holdings in Antigua figure explicitly. These plantations matter not for themselves, but, like *Emma*'s gypsies, exist to facilitate plot development, creating a vacuum of authority by absenting the patriarch. Further, Said suggests that as a source of wealth, and as escape from the constraints of British society, the fortunes of empire, like class, haunt the nineteenth-century novel. In *Mansfield Park*, although we rarely see Fanny's older brother William, his place in the narrative is held through his letters, and through Fanny's devotion to him. In *Persuasion*, Wentworth also joins the navy to escape poverty; initially lacking the capital to marry Anne, he makes his fortune of £20,000 over ten years by bringing privateers to the West Indies. Like Colonel Brandon, William Price and Captain Wentworth represent a robust, worldly masculinity—a weathered and travelled manliness contrasting favourably with the charming yet duplicitous Henry Crawford, Mr Elliot and Willoughby.

Where the empire figures largely across this cycle as a constitutive absence, in *Persuasion* the possibilities of the sea and travel as escapes from the traps of conventional English bourgeois morality are prominent. Consider, then, the haunting movement-image where Anne Elliot (Amanda Root) gazes apprehensively out of a second-storey window of a town house in Bath. Shot from street level outside, the character is symbolically imprisoned behind a wrought-iron grate as she anxiously scans the street below for Captain Wentworth. The most sombre and socially critical of this cycle, *Persuasion* conveys a profound sense of the physical and social constraint of a certain feminine experience. Anne voices her condition explicitly, noting the devotion of the 'weaker sex' to the men who come and go from their lives: 'We do not forget you as soon as you forget us. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey on us. You always have business of some sort or

another to take you back into the world.’ In contrast to the attenuated yet inviting possibilities offered by the idyllic countryside outside of Elinor’s, Emma’s, Fanny’s and Lizzie’s windows, Anne’s confinement is much crueller. From her claustrophobic existence as the ill-favoured younger daughter, Anne looks further afield for her escape toward the spectre of Wentworth’s sailing ship. Roger Michell’s adaptation pointedly foregrounds themes of class and gendered social constraint by juxtaposing the stuffy interiors of mannered society with the inviting, open horizons of the sea.

In a departure from the novel’s domestic early pages, the telefilm *Persuasion* opens on a rowboat coming ashore from a navy ship. Returning from the Napoleonic Wars, Admiral Croft and Wentworth, as well as the sailors at Lyme, extend the restless mobility of the emergent middle class from the English countryside out into the high seas. Aside from their pointed function as foils to the decadent aristocracy, these kindly sailors offer a link with the exotic and exciting possibilities of the colonies—riches, adventure, war. The romance and promise of empire speaks through the idyllic movement-image of the sailing ship that bookends the film.<sup>17</sup> From the navy frigate bringing the eligible sailors home to port at the outset, to Wentworth’s ship bearing the happy newly-married couple off into the sunset, the sea offers a horizon of freedom and possibility. While the sea never directly enters Austen’s novel, the romantic closure of the contemporary adaptation brings Anne on board Wentworth’s ship (whereas at the close of Austen’s novel she is implicitly relegated to port, with another war looming). In the film’s concluding sequence, the gendered dilemma of desire and movement is resolved in an (almost) egalitarian marriage which includes Anne in her husband’s adventures, to a soaring romantic love aria.

An earlier moment of the telefilm dramatizes the romantic possibility of travel for women. Speaking to a circle of intent candlelit faces crowded around the dinner table, Admiral Croft’s wife Sophie recounts her seafaring adventures.

In the fifteen years of my marriage, though many women have done more... I have crossed the Atlantic four times, and have been once to the East Indies, and back again; and only once, besides having been in different places about home—Cork, and Lisbon, and Gibraltar. But I never went beyond the Straits—and never was in the West Indies. We do not call Bermuda or Bahama, you know, the West Indies.

Mrs Croft’s account of her travels marks the arrival of the female adventurer on the high seas—a far cry from the safe and sometimes cloying spot at the window where Anne passes her time. Barely contained in her domestic environment, this emergent modern female subject craves mobility, travel, and adventure. But like the country walk, real and imagined access to such mobility and possibility is ambiguous, and fraught with difficulty. If the woman at the window evokes both constraint and potentiality, the ‘outside’ to this constrained interior space—class

relations, colonialism, and indeed race and ethnicity—impinges on the costume drama's careful interiors.

From spinning globe logos to the use of maps, Ella Shohat (1991) notes how travel and exploration are stitched into the history of film as a social technology. Along these lines, the Austen adaptations, seemingly so rooted in a 'domestic' gendered and class experience of stasis, persistently refer to the colonies, travel, and maps. Like *Persuasion's* seafaring yarns, Margaret's atlas and pirate games bring the *hors champ* of foreign places into the frame of Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility*. Colonel Brandon captivates Margaret with tales of the East Indies where the air 'is full of spices', while the girl's cherished atlas forges an imagined link with distant vistas. The invented pirate motif, a signifier of Margaret's rebellion, offers a fantastical zone of play and possibility to the youngest Dashwood—and, in jest, for Elinor and Edward, when Edward remarks (in the exchange noted above): 'Piracy is our only option.' Samuelian suggests that this motif marks the limits of 'lawful' protest within Austen's late eighteenth-century milieu. For this critic, the 'unanswerable' elements of Austen's time (specifically laws of succession and the rites of courtship)<sup>18</sup> are deflected, in Thompson's script, onto the pirate's zone of escape and fantasy (Samuelian 1998:150). Yet Samuelian stops short of considering how this trope connotes imperial space.

The charming movement-image of Margaret perched on the tree-house surveying the landscape with her glass, or periodic references to imagined foreign adventure for women, halting or humorous, might be seen to extend the view from the window. Uncertain, humorous, or self-conscious, these vantage points suggest positions of mastery over the 'view', actual or imagined. On this theme, Inderpal Grewal considers a passage from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* where Dorothea Casaubon looks out her window at the farm workers below. In an epiphany, she suddenly realizes that she is no mere spectator in class relations, but that her 'luxurious shelter' derives from these people's labours.<sup>19</sup> At this moment, Dorothea participates, however ambivalently, in the nineteenth-century aesthetic trope: 'I am the monarch of all I survey.' Eliot carefully situates her protagonist in an ambivalent relationship with these power structures, even as Austen's heroines rest both inside and outside the entitlements of their class position. Grewal suggests that Dorothea's complex allegiance to structures of mastery, 'a denial of domination and a parody of power', arises in late nineteenth-century feminine rhetoric to create 'a subject-position for middle-class Englishwomen that is gendered through discourses of class and imperialism' (Grewal 1996:24).

Although Grewal's reading of Eliot evokes a later historical period, her insights none the less illuminate the implicit treatment of colonialism in the Austen adaptations, and are rendered explicit in *Persuasion*. This influential 'subject-position for middle-class Englishwomen' may still be identified within the contradictory liberal-feminist longing for mobility at work in the Austen

adaptations. Another way of considering the colonial *hors champ* is as a dark twin of Williams's 'knowable community'.

In projecting what Raymond Williams calls a 'knowable community' of Englishmen and women, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Mrs. Gaskell shaped the idea of England in such a way as to give it identity, presence, ways of reusable articulation. And part of such an idea was the relationship between 'home' and 'abroad'. Thus England was surveyed, evaluated, made known, whereas 'abroad' was only referred to or shown briefly without the kind of presence or immediacy lavished on London, the countryside, or northern industrial centers such as Manchester or Birmingham.

(Said 1992:72)

The iconic Englishness shaped by writers such as Austen resonates against the unspoken dark expanses of empire. Further, as Dyer notes in his discussion of whiteness and imperialism, the domestic chronotope of the white woman is particularly resonant in historical discourses of imperialism. The geographical structure of imperial narrative confirms the binarism...[of] the white woman as the locus of true whiteness, white men in struggle, yearning for home and whiteness, facing the dangers and allures of darkness' (Dyer 1997:36). Her whiteness is so obvious I almost overlooked it, the woman at the window also symbolizes nationhood, domesticity, purity, the ground zero of imperial expansion. How contemporary global audiences can 'know' Austen's 'knowable community' remains an open question. Yet, from the corner of the screen, or from outside of the frame altogether, inherited cultural codes of whiteness, geography, gendered, class, and colonial authority indisputably inform the film language of adaptation—and of audiovisual media generally.

### ***Persuasion: reprise***

A series of observations on the representational significances of space and movement are condensed in one movement-image from *Persuasion*. Reminiscent of *Sense and Sensibility*'s country stroll, this moment transpires during a sea walk at Lyme. Anne and Henrietta stroll at a deliberate pace toward frame-right along the sea wall. This long shot sets them against a luminous, wide-open seascape, the glorious morning animated by a lively piano score. Away from the prying eyes of Kellynch Hall, the women's every step is both freer, and somehow more weighty with things unsaid. In the midst of this leisurely stroll, there is a remarkable moment: the camera, almost bored with the slowness, the agony of this romance that cannot seem to get started, deserts the narrative to follow a ragged young boy's headlong run as he passes them, moving swiftly to the right all the way along a pier. Digressing for a moment on this detail of pure movement, the camera briefly lights on another journey distinct from that of the



Figure 6.3 *The sea walk at Lyme*, Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (BBC, 1995), © BBC

narrative. In keeping with *Persuasion's* persistent foregrounding of the sea and its possibilities for respiration, equality, movement, this shot opens up the breadth of the seaside horizon as the boy runs past a tiny wooden sailing ship. This panning shot ends abruptly as the boy passes Captain Wentworth and Louisa walking in the other direction. At this point, the camera halts, deserting the boy who runs off-frame, to follow the protagonists back toward their encounter with Anne. At this juncture, the camera's liminal movement gets drawn back into the narrative.

This movement-image expresses several intersecting spatial power relations. Like the scattering sheep, this boy's headlong run (what or who was he running from or to?) functions within the visual economy of the shot as a kinetic counterpoint in the plodding narrative progression, the class-designated perambulation of the protagonists. A few remarks about genre, tempo, and movement are fitting here. Austen's deliberate country walks and dinner-table conversations function visually (and audibly also) against carefully backgrounded landscapes and people. These narratives unfold largely through careful conversation, and in precise diction; consequently, Austen's protagonists can never move too quickly. This narrative economy, in concert with the genre's constitutive pleasures of costume and *mise-en-scène*, contributes to costume drama's characteristic stillness. For the spatial choreography of scenes, we commonly enter and leave the library conversation on the coat-tails of a servant carrying a tray. In this way, the adaptation situates the novels' rather disembodied conversations and interior monologues, and inserts movement, passages between scenes. In class terms, the entire set-up, the beautifully-

choreographed balls, the mouth-watering feasts, are anticipated through the frenetic bustling of servants; even the pointed dinner conversations are facilitated, ‘moved along’ by the gloved hand that reaches into the frame at the right moment to pour, to clear away.<sup>20</sup> In a sense, all of these precise, leisurely narrative moments are brought to us, both literally and formally, by the backgrounded or absented labours of servants and working people.

As suggested, film tempo and timing are inseparable from the soundtrack. Thomas Elsaesser describes this layering of image and sound as ‘orchestration’, a layering of diegetic and extra-diegetic sound and music that creates immediacy and depth for the image. In period adaptation, musical interludes provide refuges, moments of passage, or expressive outlets from a barrage of socially-monitored, precise speech. In fact, Elsaesser stresses the ‘expressive use of diction and the plasticity of the human voice’ as a crucial cinematic element. The link between the classic novel and the adaptation lies largely in the dialogue which forms the core of Austen’s narrative. One of the greatest pleasures of period adaptation lies in the understated expressiveness and irony of its modulated voices, in precise diction, and sparkling repartee. As we saw with Elinor and Edward’s Norland walk, dialogue tends to dominate the aural space (and indeed the landscapes and interiors) of period drama. Language, of course, is fraught with encodings of authority. For instance, Williams points out that, for Austen, the country gentleman commonly emerges as the privileged voice of ‘natural law’ (and the ‘correct’ love object). Absent or ineffectual fathers, from Sir Thomas Bertram to Mr Woodhouse, give way to the rightful authority of Knightley, Edmund Bertram, or Mr Darcy. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr Bennet’s incisive wit cuts through the constant prattle of his ridiculous wife and his younger daughters, ‘three of the silliest girls in England’. But the preferred voice in this film (as critics have suggested, perhaps the voice closest to Austen’s own) is Lizzie’s vivacious, witty, and outspoken one. Overall, however, aural codes of narrative coherence require the audibility, the distinctness of each of these voices; other voices, perhaps less articulate, less polished, are attenuated or silenced to foreground the conversations of Austen’s ‘outstandingly face-to-face’ community.

This account of the political stakes of presence and absence, the subtlety of audiovisual layering and emphasis, resonates with debates on heritage cinema. For instance, Higson argues that heritage *mise-en-scène* overwhelms the social commentary carried by the dialogue, that ‘at the level of image, narrative instability [the hybrid quality of Englishness] was overwhelmed by the alluring spectacle of iconographic stability’ (Higson 1996:240). But where this author posits a contradiction between visual spectacle and the aural (and often ironic) level of narrative, I would suggest that there are continuities in the class-based treatment of voice and character movement. Further, in detailing the contents of these ‘alluring spectacles’, I have sought to untangle particular trajectories of desire related to class, gender, and colonialism—desiring-movements that are not monolithic, but ambivalent and contradictory. In the process, I have sought to

think beyond the usual terms of national identity and sexual difference, towards a broader consideration of the ongoing and contradictory productivity of space and movement in representation.

A topographical approach to the analysis of cultural texts perceives the work of representation as continuous, restless charting of geographical, social, and corporeal spaces. Michel de Certeau suggests that the work of the story is constantly to mark off space, symbolically to produce (and demolish) imagined social spatial structures. More than mere description, the story becomes a creative act of delimitation.

It even has distributive power and performative force (it does what it says) when an ensemble of circumstances is brought together. Then it founds spaces. Reciprocally, where stories are disappearing (or else are being reduced to museographical objects), there is a loss of space.... By considering the role of stories in delimitation, one can see that the primary function is to *authorize* the establishment, displacement, or transcendence of limits.

(de Certeau 1984:123)

In this vein, the contemporary Austen adaptations may be seen as the latest charting of sedimented literary, painterly, and audiovisual cultural traditions. At each telling, the story symbolically reconfigures the social spaces of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England and its colonies through the ever-shifting demands of the present. In adapting Austen's *oeuvre*, these works operate, in de Certeau's terms, to 'found' or even 'authorize' the exploration of gendered places and experiences within a representational field still dominated by masculine stories. Given the durability and cultural authority of Austen's worldview for generations of audiences, especially female and feminist audiences, it is illuminating to consider the overlapping spaces, voices, and historical trajectories that impinge on the view and the desires of the woman at the window.

### Notes

I would like to thank Richard Dyer, Adrian Heathfield, Annette Kuhn, Kim Sawchuk and Jackie Stacey for their helpful comments at different stages of this work.

- 1 Richard Dyer suggests that, in the musical, dance numbers offer the possibility of abundance, release, and intensity as an antidote to the 'social tensions' explored in the narrative. This article, as well as his work on 'whiteness', has provided an important conceptual grounding for this chapter's interest in the social significance of textual space and movement. See Dyer 1992 and 1997.

- 2 Other film theorists have pointed to the recurring image of the woman at the window in related genres and historical cycles of film. For instance, see Doane 1987:288, and Elsasser 1987:61–2.
- 3 For a discussion of costume drama’s spatiotemporal economy of constraint, see Pidduck 1997. This treatment of *Orlando*, along with this present essay, forms part of a larger investigation into questions of genre, gender, space, and movement in contemporary feminine costume drama.
- 4 Historically, the term ‘quality’ has been used in the UK to evoke ‘the best of British cinema’. ‘Quality’ as both industrial and critical term is often connected with classic literature in adaptation, and the projection of a nostalgic version of British history. More recently, Charlotte Brunsdon has described ‘quality television’ as evoking four key elements: ‘literary source’, ‘the best of British acting’, ‘money’ (lush landscapes, costumes, and period interiors), and ‘heritage export’. See Brunsdon 1990.
- 5 These qualities are profitably underlined by critical success at the Academy Awards such as Emma Thompson’s awards for best actress in *Howards End* (James Ivory, 1992) and for her screenplay adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*. In 1998, a slightly different crop of ‘quality’ dominated the Oscars with *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1997) capturing both best picture and best actress (Gwyneth Paltrow). These more recent art films mark divergences in the profitable period drama, from straight literary adaptation, toward historical biography—films like *The Madness of King George* (Nicholas Hytner, 1994), *Mrs Brown* (John Madden, 1997), and *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998)—and more fanciful, hybrid adaptations, like *An Ideal Husband* (Oliver Parker, 1999) and *Shakespeare in Love*. Recent successes in marketing ‘quality cinema’ have popularized international co-productions featuring American stars. As a vehicle for Gwyneth Paltrow, Douglas McGrath’s *Emma* fits into this latter category. I discuss this film only minimally here, as it varies stylistically somewhat from the British period tradition of the other works.
- 6 For a predominantly American feminist view of the critical and marketing dimensions of the Austen adaptations, see Troost and Greenfield 1998.
- 7 Of course, explicitly feminist art films which work from classic feminine literary texts and genres abound in the 1990s. Examples include, importantly, Sally Potter’s *Orlando* (1993), Jane Campion’s *The Piano* (1993) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1997) Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Agnieszka Holland’s *The Secret Garden* (1993) and *Washington Square* (1997).
- 8 My use of the ‘movement-image’ adapts some of the insights of the first volume of Deleuze’s *Cinema* diptych. Readers familiar with this project will notice that I have taken many liberties—liberties encouraged, I believe, by Deleuze’s irreverent and hybrid approach. My topographical approach, influenced by critical geography and postcolonial theory, engages more with the spatial dimensions of Deleuzian thought; the many fascinating insights of the ‘time-image’ must be left to another time, to consider the implications of time and duration for literary adaptation and period drama.
- 9 For instance, two influential earlier versions of *Pride and Prejudice*—Robert Z. Leonard’s classic 1940 film and the 1979 television serial scripted by Fay Weldon—situate the drama substantially indoors, in stark contrast to Simon Langton’s 1995 version, adapted by Andrew Davies. Davies’s robust touch, his predilection

for increased exterior sequences, physicality, and sexual tension, have shifted the feel of British adaptation. His credits include *Middlemarch* (Anthony Page, BBC, 1994), *Sense and Sensibility*, *Jane Austen's Emma*, and *Vanity Fair* (Marc Munden, BBC/A & E Network, 1998).

- 10 See, for instance, Berger 1972 and Cosgrove 1984.
- 11 For a phenomenological account of feminine motility, see Young 1990.
- 12 Significantly, the figure of the (kinetic) female child as a torch-bearer for a feminist future recurs in other contemporary feminist costume dramas such as *The Piano*, *Orlando*, *Daughters of the Dust*, and *Moll Flanders* (Pen Densham, 1996).
- 13 At a public lecture, screenwriter Andrew Davies remarked that the robustness of Elizabeth's and Darcy's characters offers a more dynamic treatment of the novel, heightening the physicality and sexual tension at the heart of their relationship. ('On adapting the classics for television', University of Warwick, January 27, 1998.)
- 14 Caughie's point about history and heritage is much more complex than allowed for here. Like other scholars of the dominant aesthetics of British period drama and adaptation, Caughie is troubled by a presentist bias which airbrushes historical contradiction into a pervasive postmodern nostalgic past. In his discussion of classic television serials, Caughie suggests how historical dialectics can occasionally rupture the glossy surface of the text through 'details' of irony (often lost in an address to diverse international audiences), *mise-en-scène*, and performance. This Marxist concern with a rhetorical violence toward the past reminds me of Lionel Trilling's meditations in 'Why we read Jane Austen': 'Humanism takes for granted that any culture of the past out of which has come a work of art that commands our interest must be the product, and also, of course, the shaping condition, of minds which are essentially our own' (1982:212). Trilling discusses how the fleetingness and motion of the past (what Deleuze or Bergson would call 'duration', or time as becoming) are necessarily *fixed* in representation. Drawing from Clifford Geertz, Trilling's critique of the humanist levelling of difference in time in some ways parallels the difficulties of interpretation across cultural and geographical divides.
- 15 Corporeal subjectivity, of course, implies not only articulations of gender and class, but also of race. Richard Dyer describes 'whiteness' as both embodiment and spirit, an ethos encapsulated by 'enterprise'. "'Enterprise" is an aspect of both spirit itself—energy, will, ambition, the ability to think and see things through—discovery science, business, wealth creation, the building of nations, the organisation of labour' (Dyer 1997:31). These qualities of 'spirit' might be seen to be performed by Austen's upstanding 'country gentlemen' (Knightley, Wentworth, Brandon, Edmund Bertram). Like the fraught question of property, the feminine relationship to 'enterprise' is ambivalent in these texts, but a purposeful mode of movement encapsulated in the brisk country walk might be read, speculatively, as 'performing' a version of embodied male whiteness—perhaps 'trying on for size' some of the entitlements and enterprise that come with it.
- 16 Following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's logic (queer) sexuality forms another intriguing *hors-champ* in Austen. See her intriguing discussion of onanism and same-sex desire in *Sense and Sensibility* (Sedgwick 1993).

- 17 The romantic possibilities of the sailboat for female escape and adventure recur in two other contemporary costume dramas, *Angels and Insects* (Philip Haas, 1996) and *Moll Flanders*.
- 18 Samuelian further suggests that Thompson's version of *Sense and Sensibility* is 'postfeminist' in that she renders romantic courtship somehow reconcilable with a sympathetic masculinity. In the process, the film loses the ironic bite of Austen's novel, which presents romance (Willoughby's sexual attractiveness) as incommensurable with the economic and social pressures of courtship and marriage. If the novel's central contradiction is somehow lost, Thompson's invention of a rebellious protofeminist piracy exports the energy and impulse of social critique beyond the frame of the story (Samuelian 1998: 151–6).
- 19 Anthony Page's 1994 adaptation of *Middlemarch* includes frequent shots of Dorothea at the window. However, her attitude is much more one of confinement than mastery, or even reverie. Dorothea's social awareness is amply voiced in dialogue, but the adaptation, with its drive toward the romantic plot, does not imbue this moment with the same subtlety as the novel.
- 20 For a fascinating study of the nuanced relations between master and servant in the English novel, see Robbins 1986.

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### **Appendix:** **1990s Austen adaptations**

*Jane Austen's Emma* (Diarmuid Lawrence, United Film and Television/Meridian Broadcasting/Chestermead/A & E Network, UK 1996). Adapted by Andrew Davies. Starring Kate Beckinsale, Bernard Hepton, Mark Strong, Raymond Coulthard.

*Mansfield Park* (David Giles, BBC, UK, 1990). Adapted by David Giles. Starring Bernard Hepton, Anna Massey, Angela Pleasence, Nicholas Farrell, Sylvestra Le Touzel.

*Emma* (Douglas McGrath, US, 1996). Adapted by Douglas McGrath. Starring Gwyneth Paltrow, Jeremy Northam, Toni Collette, Greta Scacchi, Ewan McGregor.

*Pride and Prejudice* (Simon Langton, BBC/A & E Network, UK/US, 1995). Adapted by Andrew Davies. Starring Jennifer Ehle, Colin Firth, David Bamber, Crispin Bonham Carter, Susannah Harker.

*Northanger Abbey* (Giles Foster, BBC/A & E Network, US/UK, 1987). Adapted by Maggie Wadey. Starring Peter Firth, Googie Withers, Robert Hardy, Katharine Schlesinger.

*Persuasion* (Roger Michell, BBC, UK, 1995). Adapted by Nick Dear. Starring Amanda Root, Ciaran Hinds.

*Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, US/UK, 1995). Adapted by Emma Thompson. Starring Emma Thompson, Kate Winslet, Hugh Grant, Alan Rickman.

## **Part III**

### **Austen abroad**

## Reluctant Janeites

### Daughterly value in Jane Austen and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's

*Swami*

*Nalini Natarajan*

This essay hopes to foreground some of the issues and difficulties in an intercultural comparison of Jane Austen texts, long institutionalized in curricula in India, with a 1915 Bengali novel. A 'commonsense' perception on the popularity of Austen in India would point to the translatability of Austenian situations into the context of the emergent Indian middle class (Ruth Vanita 1992:92–8). Using the notion of daughterly value as a critical notion in recent Austen criticism suggestive for understanding the rise of daughters in the period of Reform in late colonial India, the essay attempts to map an 'abstracted' Austen on to a reading of an early twentieth-century Bengali text. The issues raised by my metacritique, or reading of recent criticism of the Austenian daughter, while quite removed from the specificities of women's reform and its narrativization in colonial Bengal, suggest a paradigm within which to discuss the interlocking of two cultures. The texts of Austen, prevailing criticisms of Austen highlighting the daughter, and Hindu specificities in the reform and modernization of women are thus brought together in a critical discourse which seeks to understand the intercultural space of Indian modernity and its implications for women.

#### Introduction

Recent criticism on Austen has foregrounded a hitherto neglected passage in *Emma*:

She had been decided in wishing for a Miss Weston...she was convinced that a daughter would suit both mother and father best. It would be a great comfort to Mr. Weston as he grew older...to have his fireside enlivened by the sports and the nonsense, the freaks and fancies of a child never banished from home; and Mrs. Weston—no one could doubt that a daughter would be most to her.

(Austen 1966:444)

The passage, only recently noticed in Jane Austen criticism (Zwinger 1991:117–40), presents a startling sentiment of daughterly value in an author whose narratives otherwise show a sharp awareness of the economic burdens associated with daughters. I am going to use the above quotation's suggestion both of the infantilization ('freaks and fancies', 'sports and the nonsense')<sup>1</sup> and of the value of women, as an entry into the exciting ambiguities of Austen's work with respect to daughters. I then want to examine this value in the context of colonial cultural exchange between Britain and India.

On the one hand, the above quotation expresses Emma's naïvety about the realities of women's lives. Such a naïvety has been best expressed in the narrative through her unrealistic meddling with Harriet's future, and her fanciful misreading of Jane Fairfax's life. On the other hand, in this very naïvety and indulgence exemplified by her matchmaking, Emma charts a space of value in the text. For even though Emma's opinions in the quotation are meant to be read ironically, Emma herself stands as a figure to reckon with throughout the book. Moreover, to be a child 'never banished from home' is Emma's own final destiny in the novel, when she marries the local man of property, Mr Knightley, and has him move to her natal home, Hartfield. I read the daughterly value of Emma and that of other Austen heroines as a phenomenon of historical significance, not only in Regency England, but as an idea transported across the seas to far-off colonial India. This essay reads the cultural significance of daughters and the role of literature in representing and containing both the potential and the threat posed by daughters.

My essay attempts to map three fields relevant to such an examination of daughterly value across the two cultures connected by imperialism. First, in order to clarify the paradigm I am posing, I map the field surrounding my claim of daughterly Value' in Austen. This section will consider the patriarchal as well as feminist implications of daughterly value, asserting that daughterly value is not inherently indicative of either conservative or progressive norms for women. Rather, it offers a textual concept for considering women which has historical implications for the rise of the middle class and the role of women as companionate wives within it. It emphasizes a subject-position distinct both from feminist readings of daughterly submission/rebellion in the nineteenth century (Gilbert and Gubar 1979), and from more historical readings which assert a cultural role for women even if only as guardians of domestic ideology. For example, the daughter I study is distinct from the one that Nancy Armstrong has identified as the 'domestic woman', although my perspective is indebted to Armstrong's insight into the gendering of historical processes (Armstrong 1987: 3–27).

Second, in order to transpose the notion of daughterly value in the context of colonially mediated modernity (in late colonial and postcolonial India), I map a second field. This is the field of social 'modernity' and reform in India. This section consists of two parts. First, I consider the historical presence of daughters in late colonial India as significant socio-cultural entities. Second, I consider the

'fit' between the Austenian literary method, content and ideology for representing women, and Brahmo (reformist sect of the Bengali middle class) prescriptions for modernizing women. Austenian influence is discussed as conflictual for the emerging Indian middle classes as they reconcile forces of reform with forces of patriarchal tradition.<sup>2</sup>

Finally the chapter analyses the text and film of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's novella in Bengali, *Swami* (1918). In its time, *Swami* was widely translated and known in the country for its portrayal of a modern heroine (Kumaraswami 1949; Anantanarayana 1946).<sup>3</sup> Although the debates around reform are synchronic with the literary text of *Swami*, my textual reading will refer to the film version. As the film was made in Hindi, it made the story accessible to an all-India audience. Moreover, the film emerged at a time (1977) when Austen was still a significant pedagogical influence in postcolonial India. From the early 1950s, when women's colleges abounded in modern India, Austen was a regular component in syllabuses.<sup>4</sup> This was not the case in the early twentieth century when Austen's influence first became apparent through translations. By reading the film version, I hope to engage directly with the issue of Austen as a pedagogical presence at the time. In the late 1970s, when I was a student at Delhi University, I read *Emma* as one of three texts in a course on the nineteenth-century novel; in the hours after college, I also watched a New Wave adaptation of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's novel featuring two figures associated with the new art cinema, Shabana Azmi and Girish Karnad. Yet the pedagogical separation at the time of English text from Indian context offered no discursive or critical space to link the reading experience of *Emma* or other Austen novels with the viewing experience of *Swami*. Recent studies have documented this alienation of English Studies in India from everyday Indian experience (Sunder Rajan 1992; Joshi 1991). In fact, the juxtaposition offers a pretext for examining a Western genre, the novel of manners, in the context of late colonial and modern India. How does the model of the English narrative of secular manners interpellate the representation of woman in companionate marriage that was an important phase in women's reform in late colonial India?

A quick summary of the novella in its film adaptation will highlight its relevance to my subject of literary daughters. The daughter in question, known as Minnie for short (her real name, in the classical Sanskrit, is Saudhamini, which, in Sanskrit, means lightning), grows up genteel but unpropertied, with her mother and maternal uncle. Her father dies soon after her birth. She majors in English Literature and reads English novels. Her interest in literature is associated with a freedom generally rare in unmarried women. She discusses novels with her uncle and a young man in her village, Naren. Naren is the local landowner's son. He brings her novels from Calcutta, the large city where he is a student. The uncle, who shares her literary interest, supports her friendship with the young man. But at the insistence of the mother a marriage is arranged for Minnie, with a relatively uneducated and unliterary man, Ghanashyam. After a rocky marital start, Minnie adapts to wifedom. The rest of the story traces

Minnie's realization that literary values cannot match the solid, recognizably 'Hindu' values (as opposed to the modern values of the lover) embodied in her husband.

Even a cursory look reveals plot similarities to Austen, although the context is unmistakably Indian. At first glance, Sarat Chandra's Saudhamini does remind one of an Austen heroine. Like Catherine Morland, she reads books, but, like Elizabeth and Emma, she is lively and witty. Occasionally, her conversation attests to a philosophical gravity reminiscent of Elinor Dashwood or Fanny Price. Her mother's anxiety about her marriage is a Hindu version of Mrs Bennet's or Mrs Dashwood's. Her young lover is the potential rake of Austen's novels represented by characters such as Wickham, Henry Crawford, Willoughby. Her uncle is the likeable though somewhat irresponsible father figure common in Austen. Several young women in Austen and Chatterjee set in relief the superiority of the heroine —Harriet Smith is to Emma as the uneducated and silly sisters-in-law are to Saudhamini, when she moves to her husband's home. Like many a lively heroine in Austen, Saudhamini eventually appreciates the value of the stable conventional hero.

### **Daughterly value in Austen**

In so far as the author is one such 'daughter of value', her own letters testify to the focal position in which she saw herself. Jane Austen's letters may be usefully read as reflecting the particular effort of a daughter in a family to combine a personal definition of subjectivity, filial responsibility and a social role in the community. Her letters alternately describe her own state of mind, a parent's state of health, the well-being of sisters and brothers, nieces and nephews, and detailed social commentary on the polite circle in which she moved (Chapman (ed.) 1932). I read Austen's letters as indicating a sub-textual preoccupation in her novels with daughters as mediating forces in society and, as such, as catalytic agents in the processes of social transition.

Daughters occupy centre-stage in many of the novels. Daughters outnumber sons —there are five in *Pride and Prejudice*, three in *Sense and Sensibility* and three in *Persuasion*. These numbers reinforce the sense of a greater textual space granted to daughters. Conversations among daughters occupy many pages of Austen novels. Many of these conversations consider questions of crucial import to the society—why a woman should or should not marry, how to distinguish true from fake gentility, and so on. While these topics seem inescapably patriarchal or elitist (posing marriage or gentility as values), the agency of daughters in posing these questions is noteworthy. Transposed across the ocean to India where pre-Reform middle-class daughters scarcely heard their own voices, the participation of daughters in debate upon these questions could have radical consequences.

A close look at recent criticism on Austen helps focus some of the questions that may be applied to a reading of Sarat Chandra. Examining the notion of

daughterly value, one discerns what may be seen as two critical poles in post-humanist readings of *Emma*, an exemplary text in Austen for its representation of a brilliant but flawed daughter. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar were the first to appropriate *Emma* for feminist purposes. Their reading, while acknowledging the Austen heroine's wit, creativity and daughterly confidence, sees her eventual humbling as reflective of the woman writer's anxiety of authorship (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:158–60). But Gilbert and Gubar do not historicize that particular moment in English history: Emma, the exemplary 'daughter of value', is not merely any woman writer's lively creation. She is also a female representative (as are other Austen heroines) of a class (the non-aristocratic gentry) which is to come into its own in the century. Gilbert and Gubar, then, while acknowledging the subversive (and anxious) authorial psychology underlying *Emma*'s obvious brilliance and its narrative fate, do not attempt to investigate their meaning in historical terms.<sup>5</sup> My argument of daughterly value relies more heavily on the perspectives supplied by Nancy Armstrong.

At the other critical pole, Nancy Armstrong reads Austen's novel in terms of the 'paradox' of modern culture (Armstrong 1987:3) which simultaneously empowers and disempowers women, and where the field of gender is ever in the making. In Armstrong's reading of what she terms 'domestic fiction', women writers helped produce a culture of women that was 'just as instrumental in bringing the middle-classes into power and maintaining their dominance as well as all the economic takeoffs and political breakthroughs we automatically ascribe to men' (Armstrong 1987:26). Her reading concentrates primarily on domesticity as an institution and on the role of language in fiction. The interaction between speech and writing, women's and men's languages, establishes a uniform norm for civic community essential to the rise of the middle class. Discussing the Emma-Knightley relation in these terms, she shows how their romance allows different speech and communication patterns to help map social norms. In Armstrong's terms, women's value is crucial to the process. 'Austen...grants priority to the verbal practices of women' 'who are nevertheless essential to maintaining polite relationships within the community' (1987:150). I am interested in Armstrong's claim, in another essay, that it was the new domestic woman who 'encroached upon aristocratic culture and seized authority from it' (Armstrong 1991:894). However, Armstrong's Foucaultian account, while claiming an important role for women, could be read as allying them within the repressive disciplinary strategies whereby Bakhtinian carnival elements (of disorderly or lower classes) were ejected from middle-class culture (Duckworth 1991:77–90). Part of this repressive strategy may be seen to work within the Austenian 'binary' conception of daughters and in the role of plot in taming over-energetic daughters. A similar argument can be made for the emergence of female modernity in *Swami* and the narrative's containment of disorderly elements in this modernity.

We have in these Austen readings two kinds of daughters. One kind has internalized the strategies of 'polite' existence (Elinor, Fanny, Anne), while the

other is still in the process of doing so (Emma, Elizabeth). Austen's dilemma concerning daughters is expressed by her neat division in her novels between the 'steadfast' daughters and daughter-surrogates like Fanny Price (Stewart 1993: 72), and the witty ones. Daughterly value must be considered as the sum of both of these groups. It is the witty daughter who spearheads the attempts at class mobility (Elizabeth's friendship with Wickham or indifference to the aristocrat Darcy, and Emma's encouragement of the 'nobody' Harriet Smith, are examples) and suggests the dynamism of the future. But it is the steadfast daughter who acts, in Maaja Stewart's terms, as 'moral insurance' (Stewart 1993: 73). For my purposes, both kinds represent daughterly value. For the cumulative meaning of daughters in Austen we must consider the relationship between the two. The potential of the daughter and the problem of the daughter articulate provocatively in both representations.<sup>6</sup> The steadfast daughter risks effacement and oblivion while the witty one risks misjudgement and failure. But these differences are minimal when compared to the plot space of daughters in relation to other subject-positions—of sons, of fathers or of mothers. Having considered the debate around daughterly value, in the next section I attempt to see how it is narrativized.

Another way of approaching the potential of the daughter and the problem of the daughter is through genre. One role is contained in the *Bildung* plot in the novels, where the heroine's growth to maturity, or to better knowledge of her world, is presented as that of an independent being. The second plot, the marriage plot, would link this growth to her relation with her male protagonist and to the ultimate end of marriage. While many feminist critics have seen these two plots as linked—that is, the *Bildung* as subordinated to the marriage plot (Shaffer 1992:51–73)—it is necessary to separate the two in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of daughterly value.

In both *Bildung* and marriage plots, there is a sense in which daughters in Austen exemplify value whether or not they are to marry. This value may be best expressed as cultural capital, a value often opposed to economic capital which would motivate mere prudential behaviour. Such value is expressed in the steadfast daughters as in the witty ones. When Emma declares that she will never marry ('it is not my way or my nature'), the point is not that she is too wealthy to need marriage (although that too is true) but that she values herself too highly. For even Austen's poorer heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, duplicates the sentiment in her famous conversation with Charlotte Lucas. Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot voice many such opinions too. Such value is a deliberate counterpoise to economic capital. Earlier, in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, an inverse relation between economic independence and cultural worth is set up in the daughters. Elizabeth and Elinor may be under-advantaged materially, but they are the cultural arbiters of value in the novel. Even if they err momentarily, as Elizabeth does, they do not capitulate to mere money. The climactic confrontation between Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Elizabeth establishes Elizabeth's value. Even Darcy must modify his propertied pride before Elizabeth

will have him. The code of the novel of manners sets up a scale of values of restrained and polite behaviour which resists the snobberies of money.<sup>7</sup>

The participation of daughterly value in the marriage plot is, however, more problematic. Criticism has been divided on the role of the marriage plot in curtailing daughterly value. This genre has been attacked as only presenting women as 'relational creatures' (Shaffer 1992:51). The witty heroine poses more of a problem than the steadfast one, in the marriage plot. While her wit is a sexually attractive quality and furthers the marriage plot in its ability to attract the most eligible suitor, her energy could stand in for a troubling sexual force in a patriarchal society, and her verbal irreverence could unsettle the hierarchies set up by propertied males (Natarajan 1984). So the marriage plot helps to contain the problem of the daughter embodied in her excessive wit, irreverence to *mores*, or her emotional independence. These characteristics are more heightened in *Emma* than in any of the other novels. But in my reading, the marriage of daughters in Austen does not detract from their potential cultural role as catalysts of change and social mobility.

It can be argued that the value of daughters in the marriage plot has no less a function than that of overseeing a transfer of cultural power from the landed gentry to the more mobile sectors of society.<sup>8</sup> While in the early novels the witty daughter needs to understand feudal values exemplified in her suitor, she has also opened the feudal door for her own more humble father: for after Elizabeth's marriage, Mr Bennet is to read in his son-in-law's library at Pemberley. The steadfast daughter does much the same thing—Fanny Price's calm values enter Mansfield Park, Anne Elliot secures recognition for the new mercantile forces exemplified in Wentworth, and Elinor's maturity offsets the weak economic position of her family when she marries Ferrars. Such a heroine would construct a historical role for the daughter in the new class mobilities of the time.

Discussing an anthropological approach to Austen, Sandra Gilbert has argued that while the daughter is a 'treasure whose potential passage from man to man insures psychological and social well-being', this is not a role of power. The daughter, in this view, will never be a usurper (unlike the son)—she is always an instrument rather than an agent of culture (Gilbert 1985:361). Even if daughters are principally items of exchange among men, daughterly value, I argue, is more agential than would appear. Daughterly value indicates a family's superiority, paving the way for social mobility and an increase in the family's resources. As a result, the daughterly household has more value, not less. A classic case of this increase in value is in that of the Bates household through the individual distinction of Jane Fairfax. The valued daughter also makes sure her father does not lose his place in the new order brought about by her marriage. She thus, borrowing psychological terminology, keeps the nuclear family intact, reducing the potential for family dysfunction. In *Emma* the weak dependent father is strengthened by the presence of a more vigorous, yet non-threatening son-in-law. In each novel, the son-in-law represents a different worldview to the father.

Where they are most allied, as in *Emma*, their personalities are notably different. It is the valued daughter's job to bring these two worlds together.<sup>9</sup>

An interest in daughterly value may also be recovered from recent Austen studies which draw from the analytic perspectives of modern psychoanalysis. In Paula Cohen's analysis, the daughter in nineteenth-century Western literature is 'destined to be the social force behind social organization as the nuclear family breaks down' (1991:23). She explains her claim through the notion of 'triangulation', whereby the daughter's presence in the family triad/triangle (of parents and child) compensates for the inevitable degeneration of the dyad (the husband-wife relationship) into conventional role-playing. The father-daughter bond replaces the husband-wife romantic interlude of courtship. The novels of Austen may be read as installing the daughter in such a role.

We may disentangle three elements of this role of the daughter in restoring the dysfunctional family. In this aspect her role is entirely conventional, that is, she supports patriarchal ideology. The first is her distance from the mother and closeness to the father. The second is her ability to offset the father who, though her ally, is himself dysfunctional. The third is her alliance with a dynamic younger man who stands as a father-surrogate. Although these three elements occur as an implicit acknowledgement of daughterly value, they do in fact satisfy a patriarchal heterosexual desire for a compliant and yet desirable daughter who is at once a potential site for transgression and yet minimizes the threatening otherness of the wife (Zwinger 1991:9). 'Much more successfully than her mother, a young girl could represent the quintessential angel in the house. Unlike an adult woman, a girl could be perceived as a wholly unambiguous model of feminine dependence, childlike simplicity and sexual purity' (Cohen 1991:22; and Goram 1982).

We note in the Austen novels, then, the absent mother-daughter bond and a stronger father-daughter bond, aspects which resonate with *Swami*. In general, the plots register either dysfunctional or absent mothers, and daughters who take their place in the father's affections. For example, Mr Bennet has long realized that his wife is an unworthy mate, as has Sir Thomas. But the father-daughter bond, though reflecting the strains of the nuclear family, is incapable of generating economic options (Stewart 1993:110–13).

The economic weakness of the father allows the daughter to take over his authority. Recently, Maaja Stewart has explained family relations in Austen in terms of the economic transformations of the period. Details in family relationships, such as absent mothers or weak fathers, could be narrative vectors of real socio-economic currents. For example, in Stewart's analysis, the novels demonstrate the conflict between older and younger sons, between older landed interests and the possibilities thrown up by the new mercantile/imperial opportunities.<sup>10</sup> Some fathers are limited by being younger sons and as fathers of daughters are rendered economically impotent by entail laws. Such fathers are often weak, spineless, fallible. This insecurity takes different forms—in Mr Bennet's escapism, in Mr Woodhouse's hypochondria, in Sir Walter Elliot's

vanity. The father figure in *Swami* recalls such figures. Fathers of sons, in *Mansfield Park* or *Sense and Sensibility*, appear more forceful although their force has been seen as deceptive by some critics.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, even the empathy shared by fathers and daughters begins to decline. In Jane Austen's *oeuvre*, the later novels seem unwilling to accept a satisfactory father-daughter bond (as in the wit shared by Elizabeth and Mr Bennet or the sobriety shared by Fanny Price and Sir Thomas) as a value. Sir Walter Elliot and Mr Woodhouse are not available as allies for their daughters, the one a decided impediment to Anne Elliot's settlement and the other hopelessly frail and dependent. Rather, these novels install a female mentor, such as Lady Russell in *Persuasion* or Mrs Weston in *Emma*.

When the father fails to supply the authority required for the sentimental daughter, the daughter, as Zwinger has noted, exerts a 'version' of the patriarchal authority (1991:133). It is debatable whether this temporary transfer of power to the daughter (Fanny Price, Emma, Elizabeth, Anne all, at some point or another, offer advice to father figures) serves the interests of sentimentality by allowing, as Zwinger argues, an endogamous marriage (so a father 'can exchange his daughter and have her too') (1991:133). I see it rather as a negotiating position for the daughter. For the man who enters the scene is the very opposite of the father. Yet he too has been changed and made more manageable.

But, ultimately, it is the more 'manly' younger figure—Darcy, Knightley, Wentworth—to whom this mediating consciousness embodied in the daughter is transferred. Captain Wentworth in the last novel is probably the best exemplar of the new age of mercantile expansion typified in the chosen husband. Clearly Austen's novels do not follow a fixed formula but reflect rather the changing psycho-social loci governing marital choice. Thus, while Elizabeth's choice of Darcy reflects her compromise with feudal values, Anne's marriage to Wentworth represents a move to a more mobile, democratic sense of male worth. Emma, on the other hand, marries a man of her own class, humouring rather than defying (like Anne) or correcting (like Elizabeth) the values represented in her father.

Emma particularly is a good model for daughterly value that has superseded the father as ally. Zwinger discusses the daughterly power of characters such as Emma. She calls them 'endogamy's daughters' and claims they disturb the patriarchal heterosexual economy of desire by contriving never to be banished from the father's home. In representing daughterly value, Emma draws upon and comments on a whole tradition of fictional representation which works out the symbolics of the father-daughter relationship. As opposed to the sentimental heroine who lives 'a life of duress, distress and strangely belied adoration' (Zwinger 1991:4), in the Austen trajectory exemplified by Emma, the daughter is active and engaging, and openly adored, and even undesiring of paternal approval. Emma often expresses concern for her father's comfort but never defers to his wishes. It is significant that *Emma* was written when Jane Austen had returned to

the country after eight miserable years spent in Bath, a move occasioned by paternal whim.

In conclusion, post-humanist readings of Austen have allowed a debate on the daughter which lends itself to application in a period of women's reform in India. The grounds for its applicability will be tracked in the next section, but the above metacritique on the daughter in recent Austenian criticism has highlighted the connection between valued daughters and the companionate wives of modern families; the potential and the problem of the daughter, through a plot which inscribes her daughterly excess, then streamlines that excess into wifely propriety, through marriage with a father-like but more dynamic figure. Psychoanalytic critiques enable us to recognize the ambivalence of mothers, the alliance with fathers, and the nature of the final marital compromise that daughters make.

### ***Bhadralok* reform and Jane Austen: historical presence of daughters in late colonial India**

Daughterly value has a discernible discursive presence in ethnographic studies of Indian women in the nineteenth century, but has not yet entered critical-theoretical discourse (Murshid 1983; Majumdar 1977; Borthwick 1985; Roy 1972; Karlekar 1991).<sup>12</sup> Woman in late colonial India has been read as a frozen image of cultural reaction (Chatterjee 1994:116–58). It has been argued that nationalists wished to embody their resistance to British cultural dominance in the figure of the woman who represented timeless Hindu values. While such a model appears feasible in reading wives and mothers, it is singularly unsatisfactory in reading daughters at a time of social change. The daughter, unlike the mother and wife, is the one who most directly confronts Westernization. As in Austen, she is a mediating force between differing worldviews. She could be seen to exert a catalytic role in the transitions accompanying modernity. Modernity in this context would be connected to the rise of the nuclear couple/family, female education and the shift from a religious, pre-industrial society to a more secular, industrial one. She can also be the focus of much traumatic cultural misunderstanding and confusion: Mercia Eliade's autobiographical narrative on his doomed and forbidden love affair with Maitreyi Devi, one of Calcutta's modernizing daughters in the 1930s, details an example.

Historical and biographical archives testify to the fact that the period saw an increase in affection and sympathy for daughters (Murshid 1983:26). The reform movement, the focus on female education and the gradual increase in upper-caste Hindu families who sent their daughters to schools prompted a more obvious display of interest in and affection towards daughters. Murshid notes that in 1890 in Bengal, there were 2,238 schools and 78,865 girls attending them (43). Daughters lived in the natal family longer and their literary education would encourage a relationship with the father instead of the mother, an identification further strengthened by the mother's superstition and lack of education. Murshid

notes cases of strained relations between couples on account of the husband-wife incompatibility. Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore and Bidyasagar are quoted as examples, where the wife's 'limited mind' came in the way of compatibility (Murshid 1983:26). The father-daughter bond, on the other hand, could have grown stronger with the education of daughters. There were a number of prominent men whose daughters were sent to schools such as the Bethune, and the issue of whose education occupied their fathers' minds. One such was Debendranath Tagore's daughter Saudhamini (Murshid 1983:43), incidentally the namesake of the heroine in *Swami*. Another text of the period, Rabindranath Tagore's short story 'Kabuliwalla', features a doting father as main protagonist (his daughter also called Minnie).

The earlier discussion of the Austenian father-daughter bond and its psycho-social relevance in a changing society resonates with the Bengali *bhadralok*'s new interest in daughters.

### **Grounds for a comparison: literary, social, ideological**

The project of connecting Austen with literary representations of the 'new' woman thrown up by colonialism and reform involves a negotiation of three fields. First, it is necessary to consider the literary/archival field, where Austen's influence is recoverable from archives. Such recovery is possible, but of problematic significance, I argue, because of the ideological preoccupations that surround women's education. That is, vested patriarchal interests might underplay Austen's role. Second, a comparison could be justified on the basis of a similarity in social conditions. The social phenomenon which most bears comparison is the condition of transition, characterized by the mobility between classes, and the new conditions thrown up by the education (institutional or otherwise) of women. In Austen this transition could be understood in terms of industrialization, post-Waterloo Reform, and the rise of woman-conscious thought (in writers like Mary Wollstonecraft).<sup>13</sup> In India, British colonial rule mediated many aspects of the transitional condition of women in the middle classes. I read the transitional nature of both societies as having special significance for women, and I plot daughterly value in relation to this transition. Third, Austen and the *bhadralok* world could be compared on the basis of an identity of ideological and generic interests in allowing daughters an energy and mobility in the larger interests of social change in literature as in life. For the leading Bengali reformers such a case for daughters may be made as furthering the interests of modernity. However, as Brahma influence gained more acceptance within Hindu society in the early twentieth century, for male reformers interested in affirming Hindu values within an allowable modernity, this energy would have to be contained. While in Austen the dilemma is split, as we saw, between different kinds of daughters, and worked out through a mixing of genres—the marriage plot and the *Bildungsroman*—in the *bhadralok* scheme, the problem is more complex. Here the field uncovered is not one of simple

influence, but a site of, in Partha Chatterjee's terms, a 'selection process' (1994: 121). In a later section, under this selection process I uncover factors such as sexual mores (where Austen and the Brahmos are in agreement); the denationalizing nature of English literary education for women (where Austen poses a problem); and the eventual fate in marriage of the daughter (where the Austenian preoccupation with containment emerges). Significant parallels and contrasts also emerge in different plot aspects: the role of mothers and fathers, eligible and ineligible suitors, and the marital adjustments required of the promising but difficult daughter.

How were these debates shaped within the space of literary 'influence'? While there are instances of Austen translations as part of a wave of woman-centred texts, there are reasons for preferring an explanation in terms of a less direct, more filtered Austen influence. A number of woman-centred books written all over the country in the early decades of the nineteenth century reflected the new interest in companionate marriage (Borthwick 1985). These novels reflect the new preoccupation of the middle classes: reform instead of denunciation of atrocities against women.<sup>14</sup> We know that in 1913, Krishnaji Keshava Gokhale wrote an adaptation in Marathi of *Pride and Prejudice* called *Ajapasuna pannasa varshanni*.<sup>15</sup> Also in the early decades of the twentieth century, major Indian bookstores in the cities, such as Higginbothams and Taraporevala's, stocked Austen novels, as did other private booksellers.

Despite the archival material mentioned earlier, one cannot claim an unproblematic influence of Austen on the regional novel. The influence of an author such as Austen on the reformist culture of the middle classes is latent rather than overt. That is, the Austenian model may be seen as 'a collective signature' (Ahmad 1992: 251) for a relevant model for modernizing women. There were aspects of the Austen text that could be read as lending themselves to incorporation into the modernizing *bhadralok* ideology. The cognitive handle on the newly emergent female consciousness supplied by Austen is particularly applicable to the Indian context. Hindu proprieties lend themselves better to Austen's non-denominational, non-erotic ethic for women. In contrast to George Eliot's philosophical moralism or Charlotte Brontë's passionate individualism, Austen's restrained propriety translated well into the indigenous Indian context. The genre of manners perfected in Jane Austen supplied a very effective cognitive structure operating to represent the emerging subjectivities of men and women in the socio-historical formations of late colonial India.

How do such similarities contribute to critique the texts in any meaningful way? This essay claims that Austen's texts set up a 'generic expectation', in Aijaz Ahmad's terms, that helps trace the colonial derivation of many aspects of modern Indian literature.<sup>16</sup> The economy and minimalism of both—a small locale, a finite group of characters—so different from traditional narratives in India, suggest the social novel of manners that was definitely a Western import into Indian literature. Austen's interest in fine points of conduct rather than explosive conflict differentiates her work from Richardson's (Armstrong 1987:

136). Similarly, in the Indian context, novels about atrocities against women in the late nineteenth century, like *Yamuna Paryatan* and *Umrao Jan* (Mukherjee 1985:81), gave place to those dealing with emerging subjectivities, like *Swami* and *Thyagabhoomi*. Austen's novels supplied a model which 'places one individual in relation to another in terms of subjective features that are understood by the community as a whole' (Armstrong 1987: 137–8). The finiteness of the novel means that a community may be represented in terms of a single household. *Swami* has a similarly restricted range. The characters converge upon each other to form a hermetic and 'knowable' set of relationships. The figure from Saudhamini's past, her lover, turns out to be her brother-in-law's friend. The dark secret of her pre-marital liaison, far from wrecking her marriage, is already known to her husband. Men and women, released from a predatory relationship to each other, are free to discriminate on social issues such as discretion, honesty, tact and so on. Nancy Armstrong has discussed this construction of woman as remaking the relations between the sexes in civil society (3–95). The narratives trace how the two come together as normal people whose ability, in Austen's terms, to interpret human behaviour, qualifies them to regulate the conduct of daily life and 'reproduce their form of consciousness'.

If the literary comparisons are striking, it is because a case can be made for similar social roles for women, especially daughters. The role of women in the socio-economic shift from the pre-industrial, joint-family system to a nascent capitalism spearheaded by the national bourgeoisie, supplied the material context in late colonial India for interest in writers such as Austen who were tracing a comparable process of social mobility in nineteenth-century Britain (Stewart 1993). In defining the desirable woman in this context, Austenian values coincided with Brahma values.<sup>17</sup> The ideal family portrayed in Brahma literature was one, says Meredith Borthwick, where 'children were brought up in morality and innocence, men and women could mix freely yet chastely, and the family as a whole would participate in joint activities like picnics and river excursions' (p. 118), a recognizably Austenian model.<sup>18</sup> Writers such as Austen also become more popular with the education of Indian girls in English convent-schools, a phenomenon that coincided with the entry of Indian men into the Indian Civil Service (towards the end of the century). Entry into the ICS required a considerable amount of Anglicization. Thereafter, life in the ICS would require an even greater degree of Anglicization. An Anglicized wife was prized in some circles, although the dilemma of the cultural nationalists as outlined by Partha Chatterjee remained.

Women's education was responsive to the changing socio-legal realities of British India in ways that reflected the debates over women's education in Britain. In fact, the debates over *alpasiksa* (upstart knowledge, often imitative) and the *siksit* woman (one who knew the *Puranas* as well as Western classics) seem to duplicate the debates over the truwit versus the would-be wit, or between bluestockings and others in English courtesy and conduct books.<sup>19</sup> British ideals for courtship were influencing the *bhadralok* choice of wife, even

though, for the reasons Partha Chatterjee has discussed, such an admission could never be made publicly (Chatterjee 1994:128–31).

The Austen novel records both the historical value of the daughter as promoting a middle-class modernity which (in Armstrong's terms) is increasingly dominated by femaleness, and the recognition that this femaleness should be divested of its truly threatening elements. Herein lies the paradoxical power of the daughter. Her value must be asserted even while it is rewritten according to middle-class patriarchal norms. Thus far, translating Austen into indigenous Indian terms would pose no problem. After all, it is exactly this mixture of liberatory potential (for a society bent on reform) and containment that an indigenous male reformer (or writer like Sarat Chandra writing within such a context) might want. But a further wrinkle is added by the self-consciousness with which any Western model was filtered through the emerging modern Indian (male) consciousness.

The cultural 'initiative of the Bengali elite' in the selective acceptance of English education has been noted. Jashodara Bagchi points out that the rising middle classes wanted an institutionalization of English and Western learning that 'would at the same time be capable of upholding' the orthodox social hierarchies (1991:147–8). Novellas played a role in this somewhat schizophrenic process whereby polite women's literature would be both a model for a desirable modernity and a minefield on the perilous path to Westernization.

The model value of Austen gained strength from the fact that the united ideological front upheld as the stance of imperial 'superiority' by the British in India at this stage did not provide more of an inside view of the real condition of women in England (Borthwick 1985:35). This united ideological front emphasized the chivalric, civic, rational norms that governed the relations between the sexes. In colonial India, however, this supposed valuation of women in British culture was taken at face value. Hence Brahmos such as Keshub Chunder Sen exhorted Englishwomen to come to India to educate their more 'benighted' sisters (Borthwick 1985:50–2, 58). As yet the *bhadralok* had no access, says Meredith Borthwick, to 'internal criticism' of the position of women in English society. The 'real' condition of woman question was bypassed altogether in the allegiance to this fictional model.

At the same time, the fictional model needed to be fitted within an emergent Indian bourgeois ideology—and it is this process I call 'reluctance'. I do not wish to suggest that what I call the *bhadralok* 'reluctance' in the use of Austen is part of, in Edward Said's words, a 'pre-existing semi-conspiratorial design', manipulated by cultural nationalists and writers, but that such a 'reluctance' is bound up with the very formation of modern Indian identity in decolonization (Said 1995:30). The selection process is particularly relevant to women. The ambivalence about polite English literature for Indian women is borne out by accounts of women's education. Austen is absent in the historiography of educated women or accounts of women readers.<sup>20</sup> Partha Chatterjee's account of the nationalist view of Indian woman as embodying tradition would suggest the

cultural undesirability (even with the moral suitability discussed above) of influences such as Austen's.

As Borthwick notes, although there had been much debate on the mode of education in the early stages of female education in Bengal, there had been 'little discussion' of its content, so this section can only be speculative (Borthwick 1985: 81). Accounts of female education in the nineteenth century (for example, Ghulam Murshid, Meredith Borthwick and Malavika Karlekar) do not mention Austen. It is significant that ethnographic accounts of the twentieth century (for example, Manisha Roy) are the only ones that do so. This suggests that while interviews with modern women revealed the influence of Austen, official educational ideology in the colonial period preferred to ignore her presence, especially as her appeal to the genteel and secluded women of the upper classes was clear.<sup>21</sup> Austen's Englishness would render her influence 'denationalizing'. As a writer primarily concerned with women and suitable for women readers, her influence on women readers would be considerable. The debate over whether men and women should be educated differently was not really a prominent question, says Meredith Borthwick, until the issue of cultural nationalism became prominent (Borthwick 1985:92). Then, it was the general consensus that women should not be given the 'denationalising English education which is given to the Hindu boy' (Borthwick 1985:93).

Austen's influence would be more visible after independence. In postcolonial academic contexts, Austen's introduction into the curriculum had much to do with Leavisite ideology, for Austen represented the solid Englishness that the Leavises wished to valorize in English literature. It is also possible to contextualize the film reincarnation of *Swami* within the post-Emergency women's movement in India. Feminist activism gained particular strength in the struggles for civil liberties in the Emergency era: the domesticity of *Swami* had a conservative resonance then, in contrast to its radical representation of the daughter in literature a half-century earlier.

### **The film/text of *Swami***

We turn then to *Swami* as a *bhadralok* novel indigenizing an Austenian notion of daughterly value and resulting in a text exemplifying the transitions of modernity. Questions arise which articulate provocatively between two cultures. This representation of daughterly value would ring true to the *bhadralok*. The increase in education of daughters has already been noted. The career requirements of service in the British administration,<sup>22</sup> and the decline in the joint-family system,<sup>23</sup> contributed to the rise of the nuclear family, in which the daughter would increasingly take the mother's place. Not only were the mothers still 'backward', but they were often required to be so by a nationalist ideology making them resistant to reform (Karlekar 1991:72). I claim that the paradox of the modernization of women—how to keep them, in Chatterjee's terms, as exemplars of tradition, embodiments of Hindu spirituality, and, at the same time,

turn them into modern companionate wives— may have been resolved through the father-daughter alliance.<sup>24</sup> For instance, in Tagore's 'Kabulliwalla' the story begins, 'my little daughter Minnie could not stop chattering'. The consciousness narrating the story, that of a proud modern father, is common in Indian novels of the period.<sup>25</sup> There is a space of freedom given the unmarried daughter, which is somewhat short-lived, but significant none the less.

The heroine of *Swami*, Saudhamini, is at the crossroads of the old superstitious culture of the *antahpur* (women's inner quarters),<sup>26</sup> typified by her mother, and the Brahmo-inspired culture of new hyper-literate woman. Saudhamini's reading of 'Victorian' literature—not Austen, but George Eliot, Samuel Butler and Thomas Hardy—and her lively discussion of these texts with her maternal uncle and the local *zamindar*'s son, her first lover, are significant. Here she signifies a modern representation of woman on a secular ideal.<sup>27</sup> One may contrast Saudhamini's literacy and facility in argument with the laziness of Austen's Emma. Emma draws up reading lists but does not follow through with her resolutions. Emma exercises her power through attempted matchmaking, but Minnie's reading denotes her comparative powerlessness. The early scenes of the film reinforce Minnie's passivity, but also affirm a certain strength. Naren, the *zamindar*'s son, brings her books to read. Their literary conversations follow each visit by Naren to the city. But when such discussions do take place, Minnie has the last word. On one occasion, she points out the need to recognize the male sexual double standard. While Emma's intelligence is qualified by laziness and a dangerous imagination, Minnie's is fastidious. But in the Indian context, her reading is itself dangerous, for it produces an overeducated woman, a potential threat to Hindu patriarchal and religious/ritualistic values.<sup>28</sup>

Her literary interest is, significantly, allied with the weak patriarchal principle in her household. The transitional nature of family arrangements is represented by her father's premature death, and her mother's residence with her uncle (played by the actor Utpal Dutt, himself a literary figure in Bengal).<sup>29</sup> English education is represented as an index of daughterly value for Saudhamini but it is a contentious subject between her mother and uncle, who disagree bitterly over her literacy. Her literacy is also wifely value. Saudhamini's value (as a woman educated in English culture) is brought home to her by her husband (the vernacular-educated Ghanashyam)—he sees her as superior to the other women in the household, precisely because her literacy allows her the detachment from petty *antahpur* squabbles.

But if English literacy is valued, it is also of ambiguous value to a nationalist patriarchy anxious to preserve Hindu cultural integrity. The weak patriarchal principle in the family home is suggested not only by the father's death, but also in the uncle's participation in Saudhamini's literary interests and his seemingly weak grip on the cultural reality of their lives. In the first section ending with the uncle's death, the uncle has encouraged, somewhat irresponsibly, Saudhamini's liaison with Naren, the *zamindar*'s son. Their acquaintance has developed through literary discussions. This youth is removed from orthodox Hindu reality

—he lives in Calcutta as a student, wears Western clothes, reads English literature and behaves inappropriately, kissing Saudhamini covertly during a rainstorm and bringing her gifts. Such behaviour is later to be contrasted with that of the more ‘traditional’ Ghanashyam, the husband ‘arranged’ for Saudhamini by her family. After their marriage the camera often focuses on Ghanashyam’s attire (the *dhoti*) while wishing to make a point about his sexual self-control (*‘sanyaasi aadmi’* or man of renunciation, according to his sister-in-law). Borthwick notes that the companionate marriage needed to negotiate the traditional Hindu suspicion that marriages based on choice were subject to carnality in contrast to the more philosophical/spiritual model. Saudhamini’s innocent liaison is later used by the mother-in-law to condemn Saudhamini as an inappropriate daughter-in-law for an orthodox household. Read against Austen, then, a critique of this narrative could situate daughterly value and literacy and weak patriarchy in the context of nationalist cultural anxiety in the wake of Westernization and a reluctant modernization of daughters.

Here, the other significant figures that emerge are Saudhamini’s mother and Ghanashyam, the husband. The mother, unlike in Austen, is a crucial figure in regulating the daughter’s ‘modernity’. While Austenian narrative rejects the mother, *Swami* does not. We have argued that the secular consciousness in woman is a value in *Swami*. Yet the spiritual realm, specifically Hindu religious culture, with woman at the centre, as Partha Chatterjee has argued, was crucial to the project of cultural nationalism. It is through the religious culture embodied in the mother that a text like *Swami* negotiates the embodiment of secular literary modernity in the daughter, on the one hand, and her interpellation into the modern Hindu ethic for woman, on the other. One can see how the Indian novel exploring domesticity had a confusing mission—to pose a heroine on the Austenian secular model and yet retain the religiosity that was the spiritual essence of the counter-colonial cultural resistance. The mother-daughter relationship is developed in these terms. In the film version, Saudhamini’s literary discussions with her uncle and Naren are interspersed with lyrical scenes depicting her acquisition of domestic virtues—washing saris and hanging them to dry, collecting flowers for her mother’s *puja* and so on. When Saudhamini angers her mother by her unladylike behaviour, she makes up to her by bringing her flowers for the *puja* room and observing fasts.

The role of her mother in ‘containing’ Saudhamini’s English literacy is best symbolized by her choice of husband for her daughter. Ghanashyam, as his name suggests, and for which he is mocked by Saudhamini and the uncle, is a vernacular-educated (‘matric-fail’) owner of a small goods store. The uncle reluctantly goes over to meet the suitor and returns impressed by his sober religiosity. In his dying wish, he compares Ghanashyam to the mother and pronounces him a suitable husband for Saudhamini. From now on, the definition of Saudhamini’s modernity falls to the husband.

The social contradiction of woman as both modern and secular on the social level and religious and spiritual on the personal level<sup>30</sup> is expressed in terms of

two narrative conflicts: namely, that between the Mr Bennet-like figure, the 'modern' father (or father-surrogate), and the 'traditional' mother; and that of the daughter's dilemma in choosing a suitor. Both conflicts are part and parcel of the 'generic expectation', in Aijaz Ahmad's terms, that we have characterized throughout this chapter as 'Austenian'. The parental 'dysfunction', in Austen contextualized within the transitions of Regency England and its shifting class borders, has its counterpart in the colonial contradictions of modern India. But if the mother-daughter bond is an acceptable mode of transmission of cultural value to the daughter, the choice between suitors is both more problematic and more crucial.

*Swami* contains a version of the dilemma faced by the Austenian heroine, between the rakish, attractive and comparatively unpropertied lover (Wickham, Willoughby and Frank Churchill) and the propertied, conservative husband. In *Swami*, Saudhamini is divided between her English-educated, Calcutta-dwelling lover who is also the *zamindar*'s son, a member of the feudal, outworn rural hierarchy, and the small-town businessman, the husband, uneducated in Westernized ways, but steeped in Hindu values. While the lover is literary, Ghanashyam is a Vaishnava (a devotional Hindu sect focusing on *Bhakti* or a personal relationship with God), and wishes his sceptical wife to relate to him as he does to his God (hence the double meaning of the title 'Swami' which means both 'god' and 'husband'). In their conversations, Saudhamini asserts a secular humanist ethic while his is religious. For instance, when he reminds her that she must not speak a falsehood before her 'Swami' (God/husband), she retorts that in her village, a falsehood was not spoken in anyone's presence. Thus she deflates his patriarchy and his godliness. It is a kind of deflation we associate with Elizabeth Bennet when she puts the aristocratic Darcy in his place.

The 'taming' of the daughter follows a trajectory that both recalls and departs from Austen. The scenes depicting conversations between Ghanashyam and Saudhamini seem to demarcate an Indian version of manners. Ghanashyam often makes distinctions about behaviour where Saudhamini is contrasted to the 'uneducated' women in the household. Ghanashyam, however, is the final arbiter in disputes about behaviour. For instance, he demands an apology from his wife when she speaks sharply toward her mother-in-law. This could be a version of Knightley's rebuke to Emma when she speaks unkindly to Miss Bates. But while in the Austenian text the principle upheld is that of communal politeness over individual (female) verbal vivacity, here in *Swami* it is the hierarchical order of the Hindu joint family that is upheld. In this order, as Sudhir Kakar (1981:73) has described, the young daughter-in-law is the lowest of the low. Ghanashyam's demeanour with Saudhamini—appreciative of her 'cultivation' and education, but demanding that she observe her subservient place in the family hierarchy—reinforces our sense of the problematic value given the daughter.

The 'problem' of the daughter is resolved in what I read as a particularly Hindu way. In other words, a larger field of Hindu meaning may be read in the narrative 'taming' of Saudhamini. The religious/conjugal conversion in the

heroine comes about by Saudhamini's recognition of a certain vulnerability in her husband, a vulnerability that situates her wifely role securely within Hindu ideology. Ghanashyam is the oldest son, but a stepson. The device of making him a stepson highlights an implicit element in family relations in India, that of the oldest son's self-sacrifice and patience. In Hinduism, as Goldman has pointed out, the oldest son (along with the *brahmana* and the *guru*) is often a father-substitute (Goldman 1978: 325–92). The oldest son in the Hindu family is very different from the generic model of a Darcy or a Knightley. His representation is underwritten by religious undertones. Ghanashyam, for instance, calls to mind the mythological king and folk-hero Rama.<sup>31</sup> His attitude to his discriminatory stepmother is unfailingly courteous and respectful. Through his earnings, he supports his superstitious stepmother, his spoilt college-educated younger brother and his wife, and his younger sister. When Saudhamini arrives as a bride she notices that Ghanashyam is treated with a neglect usually reserved for the weaker, feminine members (the new daughter-in-law, for instance) in the household. Thus identification between Saudhamini and Ghanashyam becomes possible, but only by Saudhamini's induction into the wifely duties she earlier scorned. On several occasions, Ghanashyam returns from a day's work to find that no one will fetch him his bath water or his meals. When Saudhamini, roused from apathy by this, protests, she is informed by her mother-in-law that the low status of the husband—that is, as one who will not command women's (and servants') labour—stems primarily from the fact that his wife will not serve him. It is only when she, in empathy with his marginalization, fetches him his bath water and supervises his meals, that his status in the family (and consequently hers) is secured. Ghanashyam's weakness, then, and not any patriarchal strength, prompts Saudhamini's willing adaptation to the Hindu status quo. In turn, her own vulnerability when her 'past' is discovered, gives him a chance to forgive her. Here the 'modern' husband repudiates an action associated in the Hindu consciousness with the otherwise perfect Rama—the rejection of a blameless wife to preserve public repute. Ghanashyam's progressive attitude to women, within an otherwise traditional and religious persona, has been established earlier, when he will not agree to the 'barter' of his younger sister for dowry. In the late 1970s, dowry deaths were very much in the news, and Ghanashyam's patriarchy is thus shown as 'modern'.

To conclude: I have attempted to uncover the trajectory of the valued daughter in companionate marriage in middle-class colonial India as it both relates to and departs from the model in an Austenian novel. Hindu '*dharma*' is narrativized as an alliance between the self-sacrificing older son and his once haughty, now humbled wife. Daughterly value is acknowledged, then contained in the larger arc of cultural indigenization. Daughters may be read, in Austen, as in the milieu of reform in India, as a way of thinking through some of the contradictions of modernity. Daughters seem to allow, structurally, a way for the changes of modernity to enter, then be contained to suit the contradictions in patriarchal ideology.

The articulation of such a paradoxical value for daughters, in Jane Austen and in Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, is mediated by the ideological sieve through which English Literature passes in India. This is only partly considered through the Showalterian notion of feminist critique—that is, through the trajectory of the male reformer who uses texts/genres to contain the potential of women. Rather, the male writer is implicated in a complex process in which the semiotics of woman in a moment of modernity is worked out. The male reformist vision, like that of Sarat Chandra, places a historically recognizable and meaningful type of woman, the vivacious daughter, in order to suggest a new figure. But at the same time, he finds this representation an effective site to affirm patriarchal Hinduness. I am less interested in arguing the containment strategies of the male reformist vision than in the semiotic potential of the figure itself. My emphasis, then, is on the cultural meaning of the daughter, as a potential for change, and as a site for battles over modernity and tradition. In this sense, the daughter is the quintessential modern.

### Notes

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- 1 I thank You-me Park for suggesting the term ‘infantilization’ to me in this context.
- 2 The Brahmo Samaj spearheaded the campaign for women’s reform in the late nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century Hindus had begun to accept some of the changes, but in a filtered form. For the traumas that accompanied the attempt to modernize, see Mercia Eliade’s account *Bengali Nights* (1994) and Maitreyi Devi’s answering *It Does Not Die* (1994).
- 3 Some of Sarat Chandra’s other novels have been translated into English by Orient paperbacks and Jaico books. *Swami* was translated into other Indian languages. It was translated into Tamil as *Saudhamini*, into Kannada as *Svami*. On the difficulty in translating Sarat Chandra into English and other European languages, see Sudipto Chatterjee, ‘Twentieth-century Bengali literature’ (Natarajan (ed.) 1996: 49–50). See also T.N.Kumaraswami (1977).
- 4 Other writers have referred to Austen’s influence on the subcontinent. See Sara Suleri’s *Meatless Days* (1989:151–3). Suvendrini Perera remembers reading Austen with her mother in the Tamil upcountry in Sri Lanka (1991: dedication page). Interestingly, both writers connect Austen with the mother-daughter bond.
- 5 For useful critiques of Gilbert and Gubar, see Toril Moi 1985:57–69; and Armstrong 1987:7–8.
- 6 I thank Rajeswari Sunder Rajan for urging me to consider this question.
- 7 Kaufmann discusses this resistance as being analogous in the social sphere to law in the public sphere (1992:386).
- 8 On class mobility and younger sons, see Stewart 1993:1–10.

- 9 See Maaja Stewart on the role of daughters (1993:72–5); also Kaufmann on women and manners. It is significant that both these critics focus on ‘psychological and ethical’ capital embodied in daughters like Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price and Anne Elliot (Stewart 1993:73). In these representations the daughter is divested of her ‘dangerous’ traits of sexuality and wit.
- 10 See Maaja Stewart who expands on this point (1993:1–10).
- 11 See Maaja Stewart who argues that Sir Thomas’s failure to control female sexuality in England reflects the wider vulnerability of his authority as a West Indian planter (1993: 110).
- 12 Of these, Manisha Roy’s study deals with the early twentieth century and is the only one to mention Austen directly.
- 13 For relevant background studies of Austen, see Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C.Fawtier Stone (1984) and Butler (1975). Both discuss the transitional nature of the time.
- 14 Late nineteenth-century novels represent the struggle to free women from feudal, patriarchal practices unsuited to the emergent bourgeois consciousness of the late eighteenth century. Novels of the eighteenth century deal with the social evils in traditional male-dominated society. Nambudiri (upper caste) double standards, Lakhnawi prostitution and cruelty to widows are some of the themes. Occasionally novels depicted a utopian role for English literature, suggesting that regressive practices could be countered by English education (see Mukherjee 1985:68–100).
- 15 This is an abbreviated title. The full title is given in the reference section.
- 16 For an extended analysis, see Meenakshi Mukherjee (1985:69).
- 17 The Brahmos spearheaded social reform for women in India, but they formed only a small section of the *bhadralok* (generalized term for the Bengali gentlefolk, including non-Brahmo Hindus). For a history of Brahmos and their role in larger Bengali society, see Borthwick’s study (1985). Modernization meant an inevitable adoption of Brahmo *mores* (for example, all Hindus eventually adopted the Brahmika sari, worn with a blouse, instead of the seamless garment favoured by the orthodox), but the more traditional sections of the upwardly mobile *bhadralok* continued to resist many Brahmo precepts.
- 18 Mercia Eliade’s *Bengali Nights*, first published in 1933, details the non-recognition of a sexual force between men and women in Hindu modernizing families. In his story, a developing passionate life in the young woman Maitreyi Devi becomes her undoing (and that of her European lover whom she was encouraged to treat as a brother) in her family’s eyes. Austen too avoids sexuality much in the manner of the modernizing Brahmos.
- 19 Partha Chatterjee discusses the fear of women ‘aping’ Western manners (Chatterjee 1994:122).
- 20 This observation is based on a perusal of accounts of women’s history and journalism as recounted in Murshid, Borthwick, Karlekar and Roy. In the area of literary history Sisir Kumar Das’s authoritative account of literature in India up to 1910 contains no mention of Austen (Das 1991). Yet only a few years later Austen was translated into Marathi by Krishnaji Gokhale (1913).
- 21 Roy (1975:58–65) mentions Austen’s novels and Hollywood films for their effect on the fantasy lives of women.
- 22 Meenakshi Mukherjee points out the peculiarity of this requirement in the Indian bourgeoisie (1985:69).

- 23 See Y.B.Mathur (1973) for other factors affecting the education of women. The field is contradictory and expresses progress as well as reaction. For instance, Mathur mentions both increasing secularism (23) and race-conscious Aryanism which saw education as an ancient Indian feature lost 'after the entry of the non-Aryan wife into the Aryan household' (2). One can see how forces of Hindu reaction could seek to appropriate the issue of women's education to their own cause.
- 24 There were, indeed, many men who encouraged an aggressive modernity in their wives. But there were wives like Keshub Sen's or Debendranath Tagore's who resented their husbands' too-rapid modernization. Many daughters, however, figure prominently in the lives of the *bhadralok*.
- 25 The oldest daughter as 'grihalakshmi'—harbinger of prosperity—was traditionally both auspicious and a focus for superstitious anxiety, whose dowry requirements obsessed parents. In the modernizing families we are examining, attempts were made to focus on the intellectual potential of the daughter. This is similar to the Austenian father-daughter bond.
- 26 For an account of '*bratas*' (fasts and vows undertaken for religious purposes, often to ensure the longevity and health of husbands) and other elements in the life of the *antahpur*, see Borthwick 1985:3–21.
- 27 Malavika Karlekar notes the concerted attempt, in the introduction of English education to Indian women, to wean them away from the indigenous religious culture of '*bratas*' (vows). A secular culture of femininity (ignored, Karlekar points out, in Partha Chatterjee's account) was emphasized in order to wean women away from excessive ritualism (Karlekar 1991:72). Literature was obviously important to this secular modern consciousness. The English polite novel, in particular, posed a subjectivity unmoored from the religious worldview. It presented female happiness as 'resolutely secular' and 'fiercely apolitical'. Novels of manners, in particular, avoid 'providential' plot devices that refer back to God. 'The location of hope in this world and in the social sphere—that is, in the realm of economic and sexual reproduction'—has, it has been argued, a connection to the ideology of domesticity (Kaufmann 1992:395).
- 28 A Hindu superstition which effectively curbed women's education linked literacy in women to widowhood. See Mathur 1973:19.
- 29 See Sudipto Chatterjee, 'Twentieth-century Bengali literature', in Natarajan (ed.) 1996: 65.
- 30 Mathur notes that while a secular approach was crucial to women's education, since literacy traditionally was a prognosis for widowhood, the fear of daughters converting to Christianity urged a religious anxiety on Hindu patriarchy. In 1842, several girl students asked for baptism (Mathur 1973:19, 23).
- 31 Rama, the *avatar-purusha* or ideal man/God incarnate lived a life of filial sacrifice and patience. Rama cheerfully accepted a life of exile as a filial duty. He successfully rescued his abducted and chaste wife Sita from the Rakshasa Ravana. But his unfeeling repudiation of his wife Sita (done in order to satisfy wagging tongues in his kingdom) remains a problem for his devotees.

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## 8

### Jane Austen goes to India

Emily Eden's semi-detached home thoughts from abroad

*Judith Plotz*

'You take it from me, Brethren, there's no one to touch Jane when you're in a tight place. Gawd bless 'er, whoever she was.'

Kipling, 'The Janeites'

#### Emily Eden and the Jane Function

Emily Eden is something of a phenomenon in English literature. As author of two small-scale novels of English manners and four volumes of Indian letters and drawings,<sup>1</sup> she occupies an anomalously privileged position among nineteenth-century women writers—privileged both in the narrowness and in the breadth of her spheres of operation. On the one hand, as member of a politically powerful Whig family, as a key political hostess and as Lord Melbourne's intimate friend, she was the consummate insider with access to England's most exclusive, sophisticated, and powerful aristocratic caste.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, her six years in India (1836–42) as confidante and hostess for the Governor General—George, Lord Auckland, her brother—gave Emily Eden the most wide-ranging colonial experience of any nineteenth-century British woman writer. In particular, she had the experience of colonial travel and engagement in imperial administration which Eden's novelistic mentor and literary presider, Jane Austen, so notoriously did not. In this essay, I wish to float the hypothesis that Eden, long regarded by English critics as a surrogate Jane Austen, might profitably be examined as a 'Jane Austen in India'<sup>3</sup> whose writing vigorously engaged both colonial and, in her second novel, postcolonial issues.

Eden's limited reputation as a novelist, both in her own time and today, is principally as a Jane Austen substitute, 'one, who, though not the Rose, has lived with the Rose' (Gore 1924:105). When twentieth-century re-issues of Eden's books appeared, reviewers fell upon this 'idyllic, mid-Victorian' 'rival to Jane Austen' (Baker 1948:108; Gore 1924:105). *New York Times* book reviewers for almost sixty years consistently located Eden 'In Jane Austen's England' (Gore 1924:106–7) and 'Taking Up Where Jane Austen Left Off' (Rose 1982:110–11). Virtually all twentieth-century essays on the subject emphasize Eden's similarity

and/or inferiority to Austen and frequently go on to offer her up as a kind of literary methadone for the Austen addiction:

Lovers of Jane Austen who lay down *Persuasion* or *Sanditon* with a sigh, because there is no more for them to re-read until a lapse of time has made it possible to begin once more with *Sense and Sensibility*, may find a welcome balm in two...novels by Emily Ede.... [They] are to be recommended to...lovers of Jane Austen to bridge at least one of the recurring...gaps between re-readings of her novels.

(Masefield 1934:107)<sup>4</sup>

The resemblances between Austen and Eden are obvious. As Anthony Eden, Eden's famous kinsman, asserted, of all literary influences on Emily Eden 'that of Miss Austen's novels was the most important' (1928:106). The intertextuality between Eden's and Austen's work is extreme. The Eden letters are shot through with direct allusion to Austen: rooms in India are compared unfavourably to the little parlour at Rosings; fatuous Anglo-Indian acquaintances are 'du Collins tout pur'.

*The Semi-Attached Couple*, Eden's earliest novel, written around 1830, is a virtual homage to Austen and establishes Eden's claim as a woman writer in the Austen tradition. (*The Semi-Detached House*, Eden's literally 'post-colonial' novel published seventeen years after her return from India, is much more problematically related to that tradition as the final section of this essay demonstrates.) As the secondary heroine, Eliza Douglas—a high-spirited daughter of ill-matched parents, like Lizzy Bennet, and a new reader of novels and visitor to country houses, like Gatherine Morland—moves into the country-house world of the Whig aristocracy, she also moves into the world of Austen, writing home to ask her mother: 'do you object to my reading novels, if Lady Eskdale says there is no harm in them? They look very tempting, particularly one called *Pride and Prejudice*?' (Eden 1979:82). Eliza reads all Austen's novels and is soon able to describe her sister's courtship by a Mr Wentworth as 'so interesting, and quite as amusing as one of Miss Austen's novels.' (114), although Wentworth himself turns out to be 'a very commonplace Mr. Wentworth indeed—fond of his dinner, inclining to fat and sleep, and drab-coloured in look, coat, and ideas' (197), recalling *Persuasion*'s Richard Musgrove, 'nothing better than a thick-head, unfeeling, unprofitable Dick Musgrove', who served under Captain Wentworth. (*Persuasion* also surfaces in *The Semi-Detached House* in which a character is likened to Sir Walter Elliot as one who won't be 'setting the Thames on Fire' (172)).

Eliza's reading of *Pride and Prejudice* directs Eden's readers to read *The Semi-Attached Couple* as itself an extended allusion to *Pride and Prejudice* both thematically and structurally. Making matches—four different marriages are arranged in *The Semi-Attached Couple*, five in *The Semi-Detached House*—is

the great shaping principle of the novelist, with appropriately ironic awareness of the need to balance love and money:

Mrs. Douglas had been an heiress, which perhaps accounted for Mr. Douglas having married her; but though no one could suppose that he married for love, he had been to her what is called a good husband. He let her have a reasonable share of her own way, and spend a reasonable portion of her own money.

(21)

Lord Teviot, the great *parti* of the year, with five country houses—being four more than he could live in; with 120,000l. a year—being 30,000l. less than he could spend; with diamonds that had been collected by the last ten generations of Teviots, and a yacht that had been built by himself, with the rank of a marquess, and the good looks of the poorest of younger brothers—what could he want but a wife?

(25)

Transferred to an entirely aristocratic Whig environment, the pride of a Darcy and the prejudice of a Lizzy Bennet are transmogrified into an endangered marriage between a proud thin-skinned Darcy figure, Lord Teviot, desperately jealous of his young wife's 'prejudiced' affectionate attachment to her parents and siblings. A sub-plot features a Lizzy Bennet figure in the person of Eliza Douglas, who visits a Pemberley-like great house that tempts her to a rich marriage, and who comes to a recognition of the limitations of her ill-matched parents' manners. Mr and Mrs Douglas recapitulate the Bennets as the foolish wife and the clever ironic husband sparring over everything. Over a party at an upper-class neighbour's:

'Pray, may I ask, Mr. Douglas, if you thought that a pleasant dinner?' said his wife in an insidious tone.

'Yes, my dear, I did indeed; good cookery, pleasant company, and very pretty women—I ask nothing more. Ought not I have liked it?'

(44)

Over the proper treatment of servants:

'I am always glad of an opportunity to tell servants what a thoroughly bad race I think they are.'

'That must be encouraging to them,' said Mr. Douglas, 'and produce a great increase of attachment to yourself.'

'Oh! my dear, that is one of the subjects you do not understand, and so you may as well not talk about it'

(63)

More than any specific echoes (of which there are myriads) and redactions of plot, Eden follows Austen as novelist of *discrimination* within a knowable community (to use Raymond Williams's familiar phrase), a novelist of narrowly drawn, closely dissected, exclusively English spheres, castes, classes, and circles, in which every detail—even something as spontaneous as a laugh—is delved for social meaning: "The Beauforts all laugh as if they thought they had good teeth," said Mrs. Douglas' (*The Semi-Attached Couple*, 205). Constant surveillance enforces a class-based dress code:

'Don't you think those silver epergnes full of flowers would look better on a dining-table than walked about a drawing room? I know nothing of dress, but is not that a little in the May-day line—rather chimney-sweeperish?'

(49)

Such details can be confidently interpreted because all the participants belong to what Raymond Williams has described as Jane Austen's both 'outstandingly face-to-face' and thus intimately knowable community (1984:24), but also a 'very precisely selective' class-based community whose solidarity rests on the principle that masses of persons are simply not-to-be-seen-or-known at all. The 'social *recognition*' Williams describes also involves social exclusion:

What she sees across the land is a network of propertied houses and families, and through this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen. To be face-to-face in this world is already to belong to a class. No other community, in physical presence or in social reality, is by any means knowable.

(Williams 1984:24)

In *The Semi-Attached Couple*, Eden confines herself to a face-to-face knowable community even more restricted than Austen's mixture of the middle classes and the country gentry. It is a narrow world of Whig aristocrats and their servants, known so confidently and concretely that Eden can depict the machinations of a political hostess, 'the daily toil of the mistress of a large country house', in the pellucidly concrete terms of domestic labour:

No laundress, ironing away at an obstinate row of plaits; no carpenter planing the roughest plank of wood; no gardener raking the stoniest soil, has half the trouble she has, to maintain a smooth surface in the aspect of her mixed society. Nothing more is asked. They may all hate, all envy, all rival each other; they may say everything that is ill-natured, and do everything that is mischievous but the 'general effect', as painters would call it, must be harmony; and this must be maintained by the tact of the hostess.

(149)

Outside of this tightly controlled, and vigilantly patrolled aristocratic world, there is very little worth knowing or even noticing. The limits of comprehensibility are marked by broadly-drawn comic servants and by LaGrange, a comic foreigner, claiming to be thoroughly British in culture and feeling but actually maladroit, confused, a butt. The world beyond England—Lisbon, for example, where Lord Teviot contracts a deadly fever—is beyond imagination except as a source of trouble. The middle classes impinge inconveniently and vulgarly as an electoral necessity in a single electoral scene, while ‘the mob’—‘more eager and considerably more drunk’ (225)—functions as background only.<sup>5</sup>

What does it mean for Eden (like Angela Thirkell and Barbara Pym and perhaps half-a-dozen other women novelists of the past century) to be assigned the role of bridging the gaps ‘between re-readings of [Jane Austen’s] novels’ (Masefield 1985 [1934]: 107)? What is this gap, this ‘Jane Function’, that such an Austen-surrogate must fill?

No one is clearer on the uses of ‘England’s Jane’ than Thomas Babington Macaulay (Eden’s contemporary in Calcutta) and Rudyard Kipling, both artificers of the Empire and idolaters of Austen. Macaulay’s dependence on Austen is evident in frequent observations. Forty-eight hours before his departure for India in February 1834 and already proleptically homesick for England and its booksellers, Macaulay proposed writing a long article on Austen’s novels, ‘a subject on which I shall require no assistance from books’ since he had them almost by heart (1982: 13 February 1834, 120). Macaulay’s knowledge of and dependence upon Austen as common ground, the place where he and his intimates, his sisters, would meet to enjoy themselves and exchange ideas and affections, are apparent from a letter to his sisters from Bath in June 1832:

But I have been at Bath. I have seen all the spots made classical by Miss Austen, —the pump-room and the identical bench where on Miss Thorpe and Miss Morland discussed the merits of novels,—the nasty buildings wherein Mrs. Smith lodged,—the street where Captain Wentworth made his proposals to Anne. The assembly room, I own, I did not see. But I climbed the hill whereon Revd Henry Tilney MA, Miss Tilney, and Catherine held their conversation;—and I did not agree, I must say, with their opinion that the city of Bath might with advantage be struck out of the landscape.

(74–5)

As he had met his sisters on the common ground of Austen’s novels, so twenty years later, he labours to persuade a beloved niece, 16-year-old ‘Baba’ Trevelyan, Hannah’s daughter, to meet him there as well. Rebuking her taste for ‘trash’ as

represented by de la Motte Fouque's orientalist romance *Sintram*, he offers Austen as antidote:

There is an age at which we are disposed to think that whatever is odd and extravagant is great. At that age we are liable to be taken in by such essayists as Carlyle, such orators as Irving, such painters as Fuseli, such plays as the Robbers, such romances as *Sintram*. A better time comes when we would give...all of *Sintram*'s dialogues with Death and the Devil for one speech of Mrs. Norris or Miss Bates.

(Macaulay 1982:19 September 1851, 250)

And for a second niece, 12-year-old Alice Trevelyan, he also prescribes a steady course, wholesome as fresh air and plain food, of Jane Austen: 'I hope that you let the dear child have plenty of Miss Austen. All her lessons will not do her half so much good' (1982:22 August 1855, 269).

The health-giving Jane Function is even more emphatically adumbrated as a life-saving one in Kipling's post-First World War 'The Janeites' (1926), a story written under the sign of St Jane. Its epigraph:

Jane lies in Winchester—blessed be her shade!  
Praise the Lord for making her, and her for all she made!  
And while the stones of Winchester, or Milsom Street, remain,  
Glory, love, and honour unto England's Jane!

(Kipling 1926:99)

'The Janeites' tells a story within a story. Framed by a narrative of a post-war London masonic lodge, the inner narrative recounts a wartime frontline club of 'Janeites'. Source of an in-group discourse, 'this Secret Society woman...this Jane' (102) is the idol of a group of gunnery officers and soldiers on the Western Front in 1917–18. Some of the Janeites—the officers—have read Austen's novels repeatedly, others—enlisted men such as the shell-shocked sole survivor Humberstall—merely memorize her words talismanically. All use Austen's phrases for passwords (for example, 'the Password of the First degree...was *Tilniz and trap-doors*' (105)) or as nicknames for their guns—'The Reverend Collins' (noisy and ineffective), 'General Tilney' (worn out), and 'The Lady Gatherine de Bugg' (large, tending to blow up). At the last ditch, the wounded Humberstall's chance reference to 'Miss Bates' inspires an astonished aristocratic nursing supervisor to save his life ('You're coming on this train if I have to kill a Brigadier for you' (117)): 'You take it from me, Bretheren, there's no one to touch Jane when you're in a tight place. Gawd bless 'er, whoever she was' (118). In 'The Janeites' it is England's Jane who sustains the sanity in a mad war. Even unto death in the midst of insane carnage the Janeites hold on to cool equanimity, their bizarre serenity, and their fidelity to humane civilian values.

The Jane Function is a saving club function for readers 'in a tight place', a home away from home. Macaulay and Kipling make clear the appeal of Austen as the authorizer of a recognizable, intelligible, controllable, and *usable* world, full, in Macaulay's telling phrase, of 'all the spots made classical by Miss Austen'.<sup>6</sup> The hyperintelligible Janeite world is also a knowable community of affection and common knowledge, a clubhouse in which the likeminded can meet: thus Macaulay's use of Austen to maintain solidarity with the people he loved most in the world; thus the Janeites' secret society with its codes, passwords, nicknames and other marks of voluntary society in the midst of mass chaos. Above all, the Jane Function is an *englishing* role. 'England's Jane' makes 'classical' mere geographic and architectural places, endows them with the fixity of thought. So too her works constitute a stabilizing touchstone of pure English character and language, a centring, norming instrument, a register of Englishness and pure English. Just as Macaulay's notorious 'Minute' on English in India found 'a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia' (1972:241), so too 'one speech of Mrs. Norris or Miss Bates' with all its untranslatable in-group irony must predominate over the promiscuous imaginings of an internationalizing age. Reading Jane Austen—which can also mean a *membership* in the Janeite community—is notably precious to the exiled and alienated who seek home thoughts from abroad. Macaulay and Kipling have the colonial's distance and the colonial's urgency in demanding a 'classical' home place.<sup>7</sup>

Jane Function novelists also work national home ground and its localities where they not only construct exquisitely knowable, rankable, definable, categorizable, judgeable communities but interpellate readers as socially communally knowing and judgemental as well. Readers of Jane Function novels, like Kipling's Janeites and Macaulay's sisters, recognize each other by their common codes/allusions and use the fictive Jane world as meeting ground. For judgement to be possible, there must be a common code in a common language, so the idiom of the Jane Function writer must be 'pure' normative English. Jane Function novelists then construct a consciously simplified clubhouse nation by depicting and fixing nationality as locality and idiom, and readership as comfortable collaboration. It is for this reason that *comfort* is a key feature of Janeite novelists—not the comfort of sentimentality or simple-mindedness or cliché—but the comfort of intelligibility as opposed to what Ranajit Guha has recently described as the 'anxiety' state of those expected to decode a realm 'beyond the limit...empty...inaccessible, outside' (Guha 1997: 484).

Emily Eden had exuberantly performed the Jane Function in the novel she wrote in 1830, *The Semi-Attached Couple*. But what happened to this self-consciously Jane-inflected writer of knowable community when she went—very reluctantly— to a place that seemed neither knowable nor worth knowing,<sup>8</sup> into what Guha has acutely labelled 'India...the unhomely opposite of the world of known limits?' (Guha 1997:484)

### Eden and the alien paddy: resisting India

The alien corn was bad, but still she had always been used to that; but the alien *paddy*... is more disheartening, to say nothing of the alien people.

(Eden 1872:3 July 1840, 2.182)

In October 1835, full of regrets, Emily Eden left with her younger sister Fanny and her brother George, Lord Auckland, on their long voyage to India, a voyage that lasted five full months from 3 October 1835 until their arrival in Calcutta in March 1836. Appointed Governor General of India by Melbourne, the Whig Prime Minister and family friend, George Eden, Lord Auckland, was a bachelor whose two unmarried sisters chose to accompany him as his official hostesses and unofficial confidantes. Their six years in India were an immensely privileged sojourn—when the Governor General's party processed to Simla in 1840, some fifteen hundred bearers accompanied the party—but not a joyous one. The six years sapped their health ('We are decidedly very yellow' (1872:2.97); 'We are like so many yellow demons' (1872:1.237)) and did not do much for the diplomatic lustre of British India either. Lord Auckland was a cultivated and intelligent Whig aristocrat with little knowledge and less curiosity about India; he was sent out to replace Charles Metcalf who had been in India since his youth and was 'probably the greatest' (Woodruff 1964:266) of all British Governors General. In sorry contrast, Auckland's administration 'has been more generally condemned than that of any other Governor General' (Thompson 1930:xi). In Edward Thompson's view, Auckland fomented and then botched the disastrous First Afghan War and, through his incompetent and possibly even duplicitous dealings with the King of Oudh, sowed the seeds for the Rebellion of 1857.<sup>9</sup>

During the six years of keenly regretted exile, Emily Eden wrote voluminous letters and an epistolary journal which she sent regularly to her family in England. It is clear from these Indian writings, and from the novel that follows them, that Eden's six years in India *denaturalized* her and changed her relation to England. 'Transported' (1872:1.132) like some violent criminal from all she loved, Eden lost her relation to a *normal* England and transformed that normality to a Home and England hypertrophied by yearning, beautified to a tiny preternaturally-still paradise (typified by 'Eden Farm', an actual family 'place') set in her memory like the scene on a Wedgwood plate. India denaturalized Eden, stressing and distorting her Englishness. This denaturalization is represented in her Indian works by the note of excess: her constant and obtrusive homesickness, her glorification of every thing about the narrow circle which defines Home and England (including 'dear Mrs Hemans! I dote on that book' (1872:2.56) whom she lauds and quotes). England becomes strange by the very intensity of the desire to bring it closer.

What strikes every reader of Eden's Indian journals is her desperate homesickness:

I do so long to see you all. Sometimes it feels like a bad illness, and I hate all the people here in consequence.

(1872:2.68)

...if I had known what it would be, to be away from all of you—so far and hopelessly away—and without anybody at hand with whom I can talk over old times and old feelings, I do not think I should have come.

(1872:2.68)

I find it not at all unwholesome to think of home. I never think of anything else.

(1872:1.121)

I want to go home, please.

(1872:1.284)

I wish you many happy Christmases, my dear; and that we may pass them together, and have some snow and icicles, and be on the top of a hill with people that we like about us, and no India to go to, and no sun and no black people; and then we will talk it all over so comfortably.

(1872:1.274)

I cannot stay away from you all any longer. I really can't; I must go home. I want to talk to you and never to see these brown arid plains and browner, arider people any more.

(1872:2.126)

Trapped 'in the wrong place' (1930:212) in the wrong time continuum where 'it has taken us forty English years to do these two Indian ones' (1930:107), Eden feels 'so *unnatural* and so far off' (1930:181) that she focuses obsessively on home as a realm with 'quite another moon, and another earth altogether' (1930:74). Home is represented as an abnormally, hypernormally ordinary place, an almost parodically green and pleasant England 'of that small Greenwich house and garden with all its little Cockney pleasures and pursuits' (1930:1), a delicious Austenish world of 'archery and country balls and the neighbours...all so *natural* and easy' (1930:181).

That natural and easy Home is laboriously invoked again and again in scraps of English literature—Shakespeare, Scott, Dickens, Crabbe—but above all in Mrs Hemans with her vision of Home and England made luminously uncanny by desire:

dear Mrs. Hemans! I dote on that book. She just said things I was thinking. I hardly knew whether I was thinking the book or reading my thoughts; it is all amalgamated so dreamily, and you and Eden Farm, and 'youth and

home, and that sweet time' when we were all together and all happy, or unhappy, but still together...and then I thought how pleasant it would be if you would just come and sit down and talk over Mrs. Hemans with me.

(1872:2.56–7)

She measures the depth of her alienation in units drawn from beloved and familiar poetry:

if I were sure I never should see [the flowery lanes around Calcutta] again, I should like them very much; but as it is, I think of Ruth when sick for home:—

She stood all tears, amidst the alien corn.

The alien *corn* was bad, but still she had always been used to that; but the alien *paddy*, the alien maize, is more disheartening, to say nothing of the alien people when I want so very much to be with you, with whom I could find nothing alien.

(1872:2.182)

Eden testifies to the validity of Home and England by resisting India for every reason and for no reason. Throughout her six years, with a distaste that does not ebb with time, she periodically pronounces India 'detestable to me' (1930:1.121), 'an abominable place' (1930:2.104), where English women go crazy ('Mrs \_\_\_ has gone out of her mind. I think it must have been at the notion of coming here [to Agra]' (1930:360)) and where young men live in a 'horrible solitude' (1930:77), and where Eden herself is 'quite "*sick at my stomach*" sometimes when morning comes and I wake up...and think I have another day to do' (1872:1.121).

She hates the climate—'much more detestable than I have expected' (1872:1.108)—and cites with weary satisfaction 'a common Mussulman proverb, "Why, if God created Dadur, did he take the trouble to make hell too?" a rational proverb applied to India generally' (1872:2.247). Much of the time she feels ill and looks ill, and blames the climate: 'I suppose it will be very dreadful when we all meet. "Oh! my coevals, remnants of yourselves", I often think of that. What sort of remnant are you? I am a remnant of faded yellow gingham.' Even English people who are relatively healthy 'look about as fresh as an English *corpse*' (1872:1.210). With gallows humour, she and George nickname one dragged-out looking Englishwoman 'the little corpse':

She came and sat down by me, upon which Mr. K. with great presence of mind, offered me his arm, and asked if I would not like to walk, and said to G. that he was taking me away from that corpse. 'You are quite right,' G.

said. 'It would be very dangerous sitting on the same sofa; we don't know what she died of.'

(1930:340)

A 'yellow and elegant female' (1872:2.97), 'very yellow...the prevailing human-creature colour of the country' (1872:2.97), she is alienated from her own body, hardly recognizing herself or feeling herself in India:

I have a right to feel vapid and tired and willing to lie down and rest; for during the last four years my life has been essentially an artificial life.... I have had enough of it, and as people say in ships, there is a difficulty in 'carrying on'.

(1930:337)

Late in her stay, she feels so debilitated that she fantasizes that her new Indian manservant 'shall write my journal to you. It is that only real action of my life that I contrive to perform for myself, and in another year I should hardly be up to it in the hot season' (1872:2.34).

Though a good linguist, Eden averred a 'detestation' of 'their patois' (1930: 53) and refused to study it: 'as for attempting to learn their gibberish I can't' (1872: 1.148). She recoils from Indian religion, indeed hardly recognizing it as religion at all (thus the curious description of India as a deeply 'unreligious country' (1930: 230), that is, a country without serious Church attendance by European expatriates). She learns almost nothing of Indian religious practices, never learning names of festivals, nor ever properly distinguishing between mosques and temples. She is struck principally by the 'horrible absurdities' (1872:2.165) of Hinduism—its 'horrid clay, misshaped gaudy-looking' images (1872:1.254–5), its 'inexplicable' devotions (1930:349), its 'grotesque' religious architecture (1930:350), and the vulgar indelicacy of Krishna worship ('A larking sort of Apollo' (1930:350)). Islam is somewhat better: 'There is nothing absurd or revolting in their religion; it is only incomplete' (1872:2.165).

She hates India with an aesthetic hatred. Except for the mountains, the scenery is uniformly repulsive: 'The country around here is hideous' (1930:421). Bengal is 'hideous' (1872:1.320). (The moon is the only good thing I know in India' (1872: 1.320).) Although the occasional fair-skinned Kashmiri Purdah woman is perceived as beautiful, Eden generally finds the population as repulsive as the landscape: 'all the native women I have met with' are 'hideous' (1872:1.337). The 'little green Ghoorkas' are 'the most hideous little soldiers in the world'.

The repulsion is moral as well as aesthetic because India offers a human landscape of savage native masses, a barbarous native aristocracy, and an Anglo-Indian population notable principally for its brutality or its vulgarity. The low-caste natives are perceived by Eden as savage, the high-caste as barbarous:

I get such horrible fits at times...of thinking that we are gone back to an entirely savage state, and are gone at least 3,000 years behind the rest of the world. I take all the naked black creatures squatting at the doors of their huts in such aversion, and what with the...jackals, and the vultures, which settle in crowds on the dead bodies... I feel all Robinson Crusoeish. I cannot abide India.

(1872:1.148)

Eden's social contacts with Indians ('natives') were confined to her own servants and to Indian aristocrats. Eden found the former class childlike (her maid Rosina 'very much (as all uneducated natives are) like a child of three years in feelings and in intellect' (1872:1.165)) and the latter barbarous, given to tasteless extravagance. Aristocratic women, however beautiful, with 'their immense almond-shaped black eyes' are 'always rather stupid' in conversation (1930:233). Dancing girls —'screaming-girls' she calls them (1930:207–8)—are usually quite an 'ugly set'. The men and boys are mostly physically disagreeable and socially trying. Thus Eden coolly describes a Lucknowi noble, 'our fat friend the prince', as dressed to match his throne 'with its canopy and umbrella and pillars covered with cloth of gold, embroidered in pearls and small rubies' (1930:233). She remarks on a courtier's son as 'more hideously fat than any boy of fourteen I ever saw, a regular well-fed Hindu' (1930:380), and on a nervous rajah with 'his wide black face...full of twitches...[smelling] very strongly of green fat' (1930:355). No matter how friendly and high-born, 'natives at table are always a great gêne' (1930:221). In Eden's eyes the chief barbarian among her acquaintance was the great Sikh king Ranjit Singh, Maharajah of Lahore and an essential British ally, 'an old mouse, with grey whiskers and one eye' (1930:198); he too was a great *gêne* both as a guest and a lavish host with a fondness for drink:

[Ranjit Singh] began drinking that horrible spirit, which he pours down like water. He insisted on my just touching it, as I had not been at his party on Saturday, and one drop actually burnt the outside of my lips. I could not possibly swallow it.... The two little brats, in new dresses, were crawling about the floor, and he poured some of this fire down their throats.... I could not help thinking how eastern we had become, everybody declaring it was one of the best-managed and pleasantest parties they had seen. All these satraps in a row, and those screaming girls and crowds of long-bearded attendants, and the old tyrant drinking in the middle—but still we all said: 'What a charming party!' just as we should have said formerly at Lady C's or Lady J's.

(1930:207–8)

If the society of India was a 'great gêne' to Eden, the society of her compatriots, the Anglo-Indians, was hardly more to her taste. The resident Britishers and Europeans have *no* conversation: 'I have yet to discover the person I like to sit

next to at dinner three days running' (1872:1.199). Their manners are crude. Even fat old women betray an unseemly avidity for youthful pleasures and persist in dancing and sweating, sweating and dancing, one 'with a gown two inches shorter than her petticoat, *bounding* through every quadrille, with her three grown-up sons dancing around her' (1930:21). Still worse are the 'low Europeans', crude brutes, like the indigo planter who kept two dogs 'for the sake of hunting the niggers' and another who 'murdered his wife, a girl of sixteen... beat her to death—and, because she was half-caste, the other planters in the neighbourhood helped him to get away, and the magistrate took no notice of the murder' (1872:2.252–3). Eden scorns the pervasive racism of the European community, less because of her own freedom from racial feeling, than because she is an aristocrat who finds pretensions of superiority droll among such a bunch of lower middle-class second-raters as the Anglo-Indians of Calcutta. She mocks, for example, the reluctance of the ladies of Simla to admit contributions to their charity bazaar from the half-caste (really 'very black') wives of clerks of the 'uncovenanted service': 'This, I met by the arguments that the black would not come off on their work' (1930:159).

But she herself enforces the colour bar for she is highly aware of what is due to her as a white aristocrat. Much of her discontent with India, often expressed with savage amusement, is at being forced to endure the indignity of meeting self-styled Englishmen and women who are actually 'uncommonly black' (1930:372). The famous Colonel Skinner, 'a half-caste, but very black...broken English...and heaps of black sons' (1930:96), is never mentioned without a slighting reference to his 'appearance and complexion', which are 'as black as this ink'. In noting that a Colonel J. lives 'quite in the native style, with a few black Mrs. J's gracing his domestic circle when we are not here', Eden intends a crude and ugly irony by her juxtaposition of 'black' with 'gracing'.

Eden's chief complaint against India is *boredom*.<sup>10</sup> She reports 'such fits of bore...that I have a mad wish to tell the bearers to turn back and go home, right home, all the way to England' (1930:121). Brother George, the Governor General, is often reported 'frantic with bore' (1930:224), or, very occasionally, 'less bored than usual' (1930:37). Small wonder when 'The days are all alike in India' (1872:1.270), as are the places ('just as if we were ever in *a place*', commented Frances Eden (1930:384)): 'all these places are so exactly like each other—a mere sandy plain with a tank and little mosque near at hand—that I can never make out why they have any names; there is nothing to give a name to' (1930:34), 'nothing to see or draw' (1930:89). Inasmuch as India is not a real place with real people in real villages, there is a void, and young Englishwomen especially, Eden reports, are bored out of their minds with nothing to do: 'no gardens, no villages, no poor people, no schools, no poultry to look after—none of the occupations of young people' (1872:1.270–1). Even Eden 's own journal—her ultimate resource in desperation—is boring:

I was thinking how much journals at home are filled with clever remarks, or curious facts, or even good jokes, but here it is utterly impossible to write down anything beyond comments on the weather. I declare I never hear in society anything that can be called a thing—not even an Indian thing.

(1872:1.144)

India is boring in its very picturesque visibility. Much has been written of the imperial gaze and its controlling power, but Eden's journals suggest the self-defeating despair of the colonial voyeur's relation to the subject people who are only visually knowable, known as picturesque objects but not novelistic subjects. Although highly decorated *purdah* women and 'very Jewish'-looking Afghans (1872:24) seem 'different and look new', they rapidly become boring to Eden because they are not *answerable* objects. They do not return her gaze no matter how dazzling their costumes or how bright their eyes, which are only 'those enormous black beads the natives habitually see with' rather than windows into a loving soul or at least a readable consciousness (1930:245). Where constant cultural and linguistic translation is required for every act, spontaneous human interaction becomes impossible and the pleasures of human intercourse disappear. As she explains to her sister in England:

if ever we are living in St. John's Wood, and you ask me to dinner in Grosvenor Place, I shall first send Giles down to your house to say I am ready; and you must send R., as your *istackball*, to fetch me, and I shall expect to meet you yourself, somewhere near Connaught Place, and then we will embrace and drive on, and go hand-in-hand to dinner, and sit next to each other. If I have anything to say (which is doubtful...), I will mention it to Giles, who will repeat it to Gooby, who will tell you, and you will wink your eye and stroke your hair, and in about ten minutes you will give me an answer through the same channels.

(1930:213)

It is only within the narrow English discourse community that real communication is possible. Outside of that community there is nothing except an India that is a waste of time and of life. With no real people, real places, real things, no real social circle, India was BOREDOM interspersed with a rare few interesting moments linked to a banal hypertrophied inauthentic Englishness.

The few events Eden labels interesting are English rather than Indian in subject matter—picnicking (on ham and wine, among other things) in a decayed mosque, entertained by a game of hopscotch—the Old School Hopscotch—played by some ageing Old Boys of Westminster School. On one occasion, she claims that 'I am interested in Indian politics just now, but could not make it interesting on paper' (1930:145), presumably because she knows how unimportant the Raj is to her knowable community at home. What Eden

explicitly marks as interesting material for a letter, a knowledge worth knowing, can seldom be Indian material but rather the stuff of English domesticity.

I have at least found a good subject for a letter, something worth writing about. I have heard a great deal about *you* and Eastcombe, and you have no idea of the fun and pleasure of it; much the most amusing day I have had in India, and quite unexpected.

(1872:1.264–5)

The ‘something worth writing about’ is an encounter with a young woman, whom Eden would never have bothered with at home, niece of the clergyman of the church attended by Eden’s sister, who could recall seeing the sister herself. Other sparks of interest include a routine shipboard romance during the Governor General’s slow inland progress ‘Up the Country’, and some London gossip relayed by a newly arrived Sir Willoughby \_\_\_\_, and what ‘interests me beyond everything’ is news from England ‘about your *out* girls.... They are doing just the bit of life which interests me beyond everything, the only violently happy bit in fact’ (1872:2.119).

Despite transiently comforting evocations of a Janeite England of country villages, clergymen’s nieces, Sir Willoughby’s gossip, and ‘*out* girls’, Eden’s experience of Empire was an estranging one, dominated by boredom, cultural distaste, and a homesickness that was as much a physical as an intellectual malaise. Whether she *believed* in the goals of Empire or not,<sup>11</sup> she spent six years within the Empire fully conscious of *not* belonging, ‘not being at home in empire’ (in Guha’s phrase), fully aware of the uncanny anxiety generated by her encounter with a place (‘as if we were ever in a *place*’) that didn’t signify or ‘appeared to signify a nowhere and a nothing—an emptiness beyond limit’ (Guha 1997:487).

In her most meditative moments, Eden is able to use this uncanniness, this self-alienation as an analytical tool. It is in her consciousness of reciprocal strangeness and mutual incomprehension between herself and the Indians around her that Eden moves beyond querulous satire.

Ali Behdad has suggested that the pressure of ‘mis-recognition of the native or Other’ makes a colonizer ‘alien to his own subjectivity’ (1994:234). Such impasses lead Eden to see herself as strange, unnatural, even insane, in India: ‘It sometimes strikes me that we Europeans are mad people sent out because we are dangerous at home’ (1872:1.52–3). The Janeite home girl self is denaturalized both on the level of the physical eye as when, not entirely ironically, she is ‘convinced that brown is the natural colour for man—black and white are unnatural deviation and look shocking. I am quite ashamed of our white skins’ (1872:1.128); ‘what an odd thing to be so white!’ (1930:229). This denaturalization threatens the imperial equilibrium as the British presence is noticed as uncanny. A ball at Simla, partly set in a brightly illuminated Hindu

temple, set in the midst of the Himalayas, strikes Eden as vainglorious and bizarre in equal measure:

Twenty years ago no European had ever been here, and there we were, with the band playing the ‘Puritani’ and ‘Masaniello’, or eating salmon from Scotland, and sardines from the Mediterranean, and observing that St. Cloup’s potage a la Julienne was perhaps better than his other soups, and that some of the ladies’ sleeves were too tight according to the overland fashions for March &c.; and all this in the face of those high hills, some of which have remained untrodden since the creation, and we, 105 Europeans, being surrounded by at least 3,000 mountaineers, who, wrapped up in their hill blankets, looked on what we call our polite amusements, and bowed to the ground if a European came near them. I sometimes wonder they do not cut our heads off, and say nothing more about it.

(1930:293–4)

Along with the sense of being monumentally out of place in the midst of mutual incomprehension comes a tacit scepticism about imperial mission and an awareness of the possible interchangeability of British and Indian identities. Contemplating the ruins of an ancient Indian city, Eden notes:

An odd world certainly! Perhaps two thousand years hence, when the art of steam has been forgotten, and nobody can exactly make out the meaning of the old English word ‘mail-coach’, some black Governor-General of England will be marching through its southern provinces, and will go and look at some ruins, and doubt whether London ever was a large town, and will feed some white-looking skeletons, and say what distress the poor creatures must be in; they will really eat rice and curry; and his sister will write to her Mary at New Delhi, and complain of the cold, and explain to her with great care what snow is, and how the natives wear bonnets, and then, of course, mention that she wants to go home.

(1930:66–7)

The community of mutual incomprehension prepares the ground for piercing moments, quite brief, of sympathy or even empathy with, usually, high-caste Indians. Sometimes there is an aristocratic fellow-feeling with other aristocrats: ‘it is very painful to hear the way in which even some of the best Europeans speak to those Rajpoot princes, who, though we have conquered them, are still considered kings by their subjects and who look like high-caste people’ (1930: 123). One visit to a Nawab’s Begum takes Eden into ‘her furnace; she was so curtained and canopied up and every jalousie shut. I thought I should have died of the heat’ (1872: 2.221–2). Suddenly she is touched into sisterhood with the ageing beauty, ‘such a little thing she is hardly visible to the naked eye’, who

said self-consciously “I am not the lovely girl I was”... I am glad I was not born a “purdah ne sheen”, a lady who lives and dies behind a curtain or purdah; I know I should have plotted so immorally to trick my attendants.’ The identification goes deep enough for Eden to acknowledge the *sati* of the Ranjit Singh’s *ranees* not in the language of moral outrage nor in that of ethnographic curiosity but in the familiar Western discourse of romantic gallantry:

Those poor dear ranees whom we visited and thought so beautiful and so merry, have actually burnt themselves.... The death of those poor women is so melancholy, they were such gay young creatures, and they died with the most obstinate courage.

(1930:310)

The episode of Chance, her pure-bred English dog (‘the servants...call him “Chance Sahib”’ (1872:1.241)), and the Nazir operates as Eden’s unwitting allegory of colonialism, an allegorical mix of class, gender, species, and race. Eden brought her lapdog Chance with her to India as a portable piece of Englishness; she counted him dearer than ‘all the rest of India, with Ceylon and the Straits thrown in too’ (1872:1.299–300). An upper-class pure-bred aristocratic dog, Chance is equipped with all the markers of colonial rank and privilege: he has a servant of his own, a ‘Boy’ (who allegedly worships him to the point of his own abjection—and his wife’s);<sup>12</sup> he has his own baby elephant, his *haathi* in which to ride in his own dog-sized *howdah*; he is bedizened with the jewels—pearl and diamond rings on his tail—given as gifts to Eden herself. Eden dryly characterizes her aristocratic European male dog as a patriarchal racist, who scorns his darker offspring:

Mrs. Chance with her twins, came to visit Chance pere today. He was very polite to his wife, but he could not endure the young puppies. I am not surprised, for they are nearly quite black, with a little white, but no tan, and with vulgar, greasy, smooth hair.

(1930:161–2)

‘Self-exoticized’ (in Behdad’s phrase (1994:234)) by his Indian privileges, Chance is ‘done for as an English dog’; ‘his constitution is dreadfully indianised... he is just the sort of dog you see at Cheltenham’ (1930:119). This canine embodiment of imperial privilege came, late in Eden’s stay, smack against a high-born Indian man. In the confrontation, class and species trumped nationality and thoroughly fuddled Eden:

George’s servants have asked leave to wait on me while he is away, and I am so afraid of his nazir, whom he always calls ‘the genteelst of men’ (see Hood), and who is a most distinguished-looking individual, that I have

taken to waiting on myself. The first morning I asked the nazir to send one of the tribe that followed him—the lowest of course I mean—to fetch a glass of water for Chance, and he brought it himself. I thought I should have fainted away when I saw Chance, who is too idle to sit up, lying lapping out of this glass held by the ‘genteelest of men’ and a well-born Mussulman: I snatched the glass, and scolded the dog, and salaamed the nazir, and ever since have gone poking about the tent looking for the Kedgerree pot of water the bearers bring me and if it is not there Chance must just die of thirst.

(1872:2.130)

Instantly, thoughtlessly, shocked by the outrage of asking ‘a well-born Mussulman’ to serve an animal that he deems unclean, even a dog that she herself prefers to all India, Eden has evidently internalized the values of the country she still finds so ‘unnatural’, so alien, but without thereby remitting her own very English devotion to dogs. In such a moment of stress it becomes obvious that neither Chance nor England is entitled to its pride of place, that Chance and England—denatured and ‘ruined as an English dog’—must rethink their thoughtless privilege.

The Chance episode is an allegorical exposition of the alienating effect of India on Eden, longing to go home yet never again able to approach home unproblematically. It is this involuntary detachment from home and England—a detachment that turned the homeland into a distorted hypernormality and the exiled colony into a companionable strangeness—that Eden brought back home with her. This involuntary semi-detachment made possible her second novel, *The Semi-Detached House*, a narrative of British identity in an age of imperialism, a narrative in which natural instinctive Englishness, laboriously reconstructed as class division, is very explicitly papered over, but where racial divisions are exaggerated.

### ***The Semi-Detached House* as postcolonial novel**

Emily Eden’s sole ‘postcolonial’ work is *The Semi-Detached House*, published thirteen years after her return from India but bearing the mark of her colonial experience. Although *The Semi-Detached House* shares with *The Semi-Attached Couple* (written in 1830) a focus on a small group of Whig aristocratic protagonists, the post-India novel problematizes rather than takes for granted Home and England. The destabilizing of the former centre, the redefining of Home, the thematizing of boundaries all mark *The Semi-Detached House* as both literally and thematically *postcolonial*.

As the title suggests, *The Semi-Detached House* is very much a novel of a knowable community, a community contained within the title dwelling. The semi-detached house of the title is a suburban villa on the Thames, ‘Pleasance’, inhabited by the middle-class Hopkinsons and, as the story begins, by the 18-

year-old aristocratic Blanche Chester whose equally aristocratic husband, Arthur, is off on an essential European diplomatic mission. Unlike *The Semi-Attached Couple* in which only the lives of gentlefolk matter, the action of the novel works to bring high and middle folk together in an expanded grand Britannic comity that excludes, however, both 'the Mob' (as mid-century Whigs named the masses) and the Jews, racially-marked unassimilables.

The novel is a self-conscious variation on the country-house novel in which Britishness, both 'pedagogic' and 'performative' (to use Bhabha's terms)—both settled, landed, authentic traditional Englishness and unsettling, hybridized, aestheticized Britishness—looks for accommodation. (By the 'pedagogic' Bhabha represents the 'authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event'—authority that is handed down, such as the landed aristocracy's hereditary acres and political power. By the 'performative' he suggests the continual process of interpellating, indeed inventing, new national subjects through a 'recursive' reinvention, re-performance of national tradition (1990:297).) In this postcolonial variant, a secure home identity can no longer be figured by a massive great country house, a Mansfield Park safe behind its palings, but only by another kind of dwelling more open to incursions from without, a semi-detached suburban Pleasance with a garden sloping down to the Thames, that roadway of international traffic and trafficking. If the image of the house has served as the novel's 'accommodation of life' (Bhabha 1995:246), the temporarily-rented and shared semi-detached Pleasance functions as a new model for a possible accommodation of a new British identity. This shifting peripheral impermanent Pleasance serves as a place of initiation, healing, recruitment, rest, and birth. The heir to the Chesterton title and fortune, the royally-named Albert Victor Chester, is brought safely into the world at Pleasance through the skilful midwifery of the redoubtable Mrs Hopkinson. This semi-detached residence proves essential in emergencies, for the aristocrats' questionable middle-class neighbours turn out to be saviours: 'a semi-detached house has its merits; if one half catches fire, you can take refuge in the other' (1979: 58). Although the performance of new British identity takes place at temporary Pleasance, even the pedagogic fixity embodied in Chester's great house will be adjusted: 'It is a pity that Chesterton is not semi-detached.... A semi-detached castle would be a novelty' (223).

The work is postcolonial in the most literal way possible. *The Semi-Detached House* literally comes after Eden's sojourn in the East. (She returned during the First Opium War with China (1839–44) and the novel refers obliquely to the Second (1856–60).) It is also thematically postcolonial in its play of centre and periphery, metropole and colony.

Unlike the great-country-house location of *The Semi-Attached Couple*, the setting of the later novel is indeterminate. The novel is set in a peripheral location, the suburb Dulham, equidistant from both the authentic heartland of Britain (that is, great country houses like the Chesters' castle at Chesterton) and the authentic seat of power (that is, London, the great metropolis). The

inhabitants feel unauthentic by virtue of their habitation there and pretend not really to be there at all but in London: ‘The men went daily to their offices or counting-houses, and the women depended for society on long morning visits from London friends and relations; and they did not, as they observed with much pride, “visit at Dulham”’ (25–6). Further, *The Semi-Detached House* is inhabited by characters who depend upon colonial interests elsewhere. For the male leads—Arthur, Captain Hopkinson—the colonies are an occupation and the appropriate and *normal* sphere of manly activity. It is worth noting, however, that women habitually treat the colonies with ostentatious ignorance, hostility, and dread—ridiculing their silly names (Tattyminibo, Tammyhominy) and dreading the prospect of visiting them (244). Arthur Chester, as a scion of the ruling classes, has begun his adult life with travel to the colonies. Older aristocrats supervise colonial affairs. Lord Chesterton, Arthur’s father, a Whig minister, devotes himself to Indian affairs, ‘filling his carriage with red boxes containing minutes about Hospodars and statements of the wrongs of Dedarkhan Bux in the well known cause of the Jaghire of Munnydumdum’ (198). Speculators such as Baron Sampson see colonial investment (‘a projected Hongkong railroad’ (168)) as a gold mine, while the middle ranks, backbones of Empire, the Captain Hopkinsons, sustain the colonial trade and protect Britain’s security. In his prime, Captain Hopkinson was an ‘East India Captain’ (130) regularly plying a route from London to South Africa to Calcutta; in retirement he becomes guardian of the shore as ‘the Duke’s Agent for the Pier and Harbour of Seaview, with good house and a handsome salary’ (253).

As this good and handsome Austenesque cadence indicates, *The Semi-Detached House* fills the familiar Jane Function and indeed enacts a set of *Pride and Prejudice*-style reversals of Pride, the aristocratic Blanche Chester’s assumption of middle-class Hopkinson vulgarity (‘She will be immensely fat, wear mittens—thick, heavy mittens—and contrive to know what I have for dinner every day’), and also of Prejudice, the bourgeois Hopkinsons’ self-righteous expectation of aristocratic vice (‘Lord Chester’s going to establish his mistress next door...in Dulham too!’ (29)). With *Pride and Prejudice* overturned, there follows a candid friendship between the Aristocracy and the People.

A performative, new space, which juxtaposes a rurally-rooted equestrian Whig aristocracy with the solid pedestrian middle class, the semi-detached house easily accommodates and strengthens a pedagogic Britishness—that is, a new Britishness which feels immemorial. The aristocratic tenants are unproblematic aristocrats, ostentatiously the real thing. Their names suggests antiquity and pure blood—they are Norman (Blanche), Saxon (Edwin), or Celtic (Arthur, St Maur); their names are consubstantial with the landscape of England—the Chesters of Chester. The high-born ladies are true ladies: unaffected, indefatigably gracious, charitable, and beautifully (under)dressed in hues of lilac or dove-grey decked with the family lace. They are physically graceful, sometimes—like Blanche—delicate. Although they assert class lines as real—thus Edwin Chester notes that only a man without family, ‘a good sort of fellow, [who]...never had any

particular father or mother...could marry to please himself" (141–2)—they respect the middle classes as essential fellow-tenants of a greater Britain. They praise the solid, substantial attributes of the commonplace Hopkinsons—solid, wind-blown and a bit common: Mrs Hopkinson is definitely fat, definitely red. But there is no discomfort in sharing space with such people. The middle-class Hopkinsons have plain homely names—Rose, Janet, John, Charles—and speak and sing in plain English. They are the salt of the earth—Mrs Hopkinson with her good English ‘sterling sense’ (113); Captain Hopkinson of the ‘Alert’ and the ‘Alacrity’ with his bluff manly active honesty, ‘tall, erect, fresh coloured...keen blue eyes’ (168); and Rose and Janet ‘unaffected, quiet’ (99), ‘natural, good-humoured’ (151). Properly married to suitable men of a slightly higher class—Rose to Harcourt, Janet to the poor but well-bred young clergyman patronized by the Chesters—the daughters join their parents (Captain Hopkinson now patronized with a superb land-based seashore job by the Duke of St Maur, a relation by marriage of the Chesters) in devoted friendship towards and admiration of the new Chester heir, little Albert Victor, heir to vast estates and a doubly regal name. The radiant domesticities of the semi-detached house suggest that Albert Victor will grow up in a more inclusive Britain than his parents have done. The new inclusion, however, corresponds with an emphatic pattern of exclusion. If class lines are gentled, racial lines are grotesquely spun out and exaggerated.

At the same time that her work enforced a new and insistently solid upper- and middle-class coalition, Eden draws attention to a new category of persons whose performance of Britishness is much more questionable, as if, in Bhabha’s formulation, ‘a holistic representative version of society could only be represented in a discourse that [is] *at the same time* obsessively fixed upon and uncertain of the boundaries of society’ (1990:296). These performers—all Jews, all actors—mark out the boundaries of permissible Britishness in an imperial age. Jews are Eden’s regular boundary markers. While in India, Eden had found the ‘Jewish-looking’ Afghans, and the servant she and George nicknamed ‘Shylock’ for his ‘Jewish look’, pleasing to contemplate because evocative of the West. But back in the West, Jewish looks betoken the Orient.

The Jewish Sampsons are Christian by hypocritical profession but unassimilably Jewish by biological destiny (by their ‘high noses’, and ‘jet black hair’ (40)). As Michael Ragussis has pointed out, most representations of Jews in Victorian fiction draw on either the financially-inflected Shylock or the erotically-inflected Rebecca stereotype; Jews are either money-lending, acquisitive hook-nosed gabardined Shylocks, or fair Jewesses winning the love of a Christian. The three Sampsons—all emphatically semitic by name (Moses or Rebecca)—belong to the world of finance. Unlike the landowning, military, administrative aristocrats and unlike the professional and productive middle classes, they are parvenu speculators.<sup>13</sup> Speculation is their vocation and money is their element: the ‘brazen’ Baroness (218), heavily rouged and excessive in dangling ‘ringlets and also... ear-rings, and chains, and bracelets’ (41), habitually wears ‘flashy’ (162) clothes, sometimes ‘bright pink’ (40), more often

golden, ‘a gown of such very bright yellow that the sun was affronted and went in’ (234). She entertains lavishly with meals featuring golden pineapples. The sallow Baron has a yellow complexion ‘as if he had never breathed any air that was not tainted with the scent of gold’ (168). They spend profusely on their vast ‘Marble Hall’, entertaining ‘second-rate British society’ and guests of whom ‘an enemy might have said that the assemblage at Marble Hall looked like the recovery of one of the lost tribes of Israel’ (142), including ‘a gentleman who looked like the Stock Exchange taking a little recreation’ (148).

The Sampsons play up their Englishness by aping the vices of English philistines: snobbery and hypocrisy. Baroness Sampson and her son Moses affect French—condescendingly translated for the benefit of interlocutors assumed ignorant—to establish their superiority to their company: ‘my mother, who is *entichee du beau Willis*, quite taken with him, means to humanize him, and make him give constant dinners’ (70). In a hypocritical aping of hypocrisy, significantly located in jingo imperialism, Baron Sampson manipulates the cant of high-minded evangelical Christianity and the cant of high-minded and incidentally profitable imperialism. Sampson’s Christian/imperial discourse inevitably signals deception: as the Baron manoeuvres to cheat his niece of her fortunes, he first remarks on his Christian-colonial benefactions:

I was looking out for a most interesting report on the Church Missions to Central Africa, to which you may like to subscribe. Ah, here it is; my name and subscription are made a little too prominent; I wished to have been put down merely as a ‘friend’ but the Committee attached more weight to my name than it deserves.

(138)

In an unctuous justification of gun-boat colonialism, appropriate for a book published during the last year of the Second Opium War (1856–60), Sampson links progress, Christianity, and the opium trade. The new Hong Kong railroad, a concession wrung from a reluctant China, will make possible penetration into China, from which all good things will follow: ‘facilities for trade are our best means for the conversion of our Eastern brethren.... Though these railroads may carry opium, Christianity will have its ticket too’ (169).

Eden’s remarkable attribution to the Jew Sampson of missionizing Christianity as well as ruthless profiteering and imperializing opportunism lays everything that is offensive in mid-Victorian Britain—its vulgarity, its money culture, its religious hypocrisy, its dishonesty—not upon the aristocratic administrators of Empire like the Chesters, nor its good soldiers like Captain Hopkinson, but upon the flagrantly performing Sampsons. Such pretensions as the Sampsons’ to Britishness are transparent; the merest child—three-year-old innocent Charlie—can recognize the Sampsons for what they are (‘me no like that black man’ (71)), diabolical outsiders bent on pulling down the pillars of the state.

The novel banishes the ostentatious Jewish Sampsons abroad, but allows the marginal assimilation of the niece of the Baroness, Rachel Monteneros, the beautiful heiress. Even more marginal to the main plot and pedagogic centre of the book than the Sampsons, Rachel is the test character who defines the limits of possible new Britishness. As a fair Jewess who evades Sampson-Shylock to marry Lorenzo-Willis, so Rachel wills to be one of us and marries Willis, the least eligible English male in the cast. Willis, widowed husband of Mrs Hopkinson's eldest daughter, is an emotional charlatan who bullied his wife into her grave and now lugubriously moons over her loss. A typical Willis gesture is to bring his 3-year-old a tiny model tomb with pop-up skeleton (67).

Rachel, a fair Jewess of the line of Scott's Rebecca (and also of Edgeworth's Berenice Montenero in *Harrington*), is a homeless orphan, brought up in boarding schools and with an aunt and uncle she despises. Rachel is a positive anthology of postcolonial traits. She is rootless. Her family ties are fraudulent, based on avuncular avarice rather than family affection: 'I have nobody to love, I have never loved any one. My vocation is "to roam among the world's riot denizens with none to bless me, none whom I can bless"' (165). Her few cordial relationships are with boarding-school classmates—whose names are never mentioned.

As an heiress from who-knows-where with a fortune from who-knows-what, she and her legacy are equally portable property. With the help of Mr Ballooned, a British attorney (that is, not a Jew, not her uncle), she secures her fortune and moves it and herself from her uncle's house into an English space (first the Hopkinson's house and, after marriage, into Mr Willis's). She is the embodiment of travelling wealth that comes from outside, from Jewry, to enrich Christian England.

Rachel is a self-declared mimic. A deracinated observer rather than a participant, she looks at the world with scientific dispassion through her 'glass'. Conscious of her unauthentic relationship with her surroundings and of 'the falseness of the atmosphere in which she lived' (109), she is by her own account 'very artificial...a regular actress' (204). Through her 'glass' she studies texts that will help her perform her life: they are canonical English texts—sometimes the texts of English literature and sometimes the texts of the semi-detached family. And the texts through which she performs her life are all drawn from the English classics. Her mainstay is Shakespeare—hardly any speech lacks a Shakespearean cadence—but also Byron and Landor. She soliloquizes regularly in the self-mocking style of contemporary melodrama: 'Oh! these horrible suspicions! why were they ever put into my head? and why have they become almost certainties? Is money worth all the miseries, the struggles it brings?' (135). She enacts melodramatic mood-swings in snatches of song—"And so you call me gay, she said,/Grief's earnest, is life's play, she said" (145)—and in lines of impromptu poetry:

Ye household cares, vex not my mind  
 With your inglorious strife,  
 Nor seek in sordid chains to bind  
 My free aesthetic life.

(107)

‘What would become of us’, she says ‘without that meaning word aesthetic?’ (107). Rachel has moved from the realm of London Jewry, to which she belongs by birth, via boarding school, wealth, and education into the border realm of aesthetic Englishness, which is better, so the novel suggests, than no Englishness at all. The Sampsons have mimicked—hopelessly—Englishness and succeeded only in becoming diabolic parodies of what is worst in the national character. Rachel, hanging on to the margins, aesthetically, contemplates ‘through her glass’ as if they were texts—Austen’s novels perhaps—the good Rose and good Janet so as ‘purposely to see a happy family’ (164). As a hybrid figure with a merely aesthetic British identity, Rachel is minimally marriageable, good enough for a morose widower whom she doesn’t love but whose child she can serve. By virtue of her portable fortune, the usual good Jewess’s endowment, and also by virtue of her hybrid performing literary self, Rachel the outsider can at least marry into the suburbs of the British world. Willis, the poseur and hypocrite, comically lugubrious and unacceptable to any normal woman, will be good enough for the not-quite-acceptable Rachel, the performer of aesthetic but not yet social Britishness. Willis, the dud Englishman, and Rachel, brilliant, interesting, and disaffected Jewess, are the limit couple who mark the boundaries of the new postcolonial British world.

As Linda Colley has emphasized, British identity was created during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the production of objects of difference. With the expansion of Empire throughout the nineteenth century, a more capacious way was needed to figure an expanded imperial Britain where new social juxtapositions were necessary. In *The Semi-Detached House*, class marks are diminished through a plot that demands the intersection of aristocratic and middle-class circles, while racial marks increase in importance as if to signify the new British ascendancy over the colonized world.

### Notes

- 1 Eden’s works are: *Portraits of the People and Princes of India* (1844), principally consisting of Eden’s Indian drawings; *The Semi-Detached House* (1859); *The Semi-Attached Couple* (1860, written c. 1830); ‘Up the Country’: *Letters Written to Her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India* (1866); *Letters from India* (1872); and *Miss Eden’s Letters* (1919).
- 2 Although nineteenth-century British ‘caste’ was a far cry from Indian caste, T.W. Robertson’s remarkably popular play ‘Caste’ (1867) indicates a British

consciousness of affinities. Indeed, Americans of the nineteenth century were fond of noting that ‘there are no classes in the British sense of that word,—no impassable barriers of caste’ (1888; Hinsdale in OED definition (3.b) of *caste*). Although differences between the aristocratic subculture and Indian caste are more profound than resemblances (the essential Indian category of *purity* is absent from the British system), it is true that the Whig aristocracy of Eden’s era did conform roughly to Dumont’s definition of caste in *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966): a hereditary group that is definably separate from other groups, has a defined task in the division of social labour (that is, to govern), and has a defined place in a hierarchical system (that is, at the top).

- 3 Even Deirdre David whose *Rule Britannia: Women, Empire, and Victorian Writing* is exceptional among analyses of Eden in avoiding explicit comparisons with Austen, does admit the comparison as a subtext. David praises Eden’s multiple voices in Austenesque terms ‘as a social gossip, as novelistic recorder of domestic manners, and...as detached and politically alert observer of the institution she inhabits: the British Raj’ (1995:39).
- 4 Extracts from the following articles appear in the unsigned ‘Emily Eden’ in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, volume 10. Of the fourteen articles cited, nine (marked below with asterisks) make the Austen comparison, as does the brief introduction (1985:102):

Walter Bagehot, *Saturday Review*, Aug. 27, 1859

Anonymous review of ‘*Up the Country*’, *Saturday Review*, 18 August 1866.

Anonymous essay, *The Spectator*, 7 February 1920.

\*John Gore, ‘A Rival to Jane Austen’, *London Mercury*, March 1924.

\*Anonymous, ‘Miss Eden’s Novels’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 December 1927

\*Anthony Eden, Introduction to *The Semi-Detached House*, 1928.

\*Anonymous, ‘In Jane Austen’s England’, *The New York Times Book Review*, 29 April 1928.

\*Muriel Masefield, ‘Emily Eden and Her Novels’, *Women Novelists from Fanny Burney to George Eliot* (1934).

Anthony Eden, Introduction to *The Semi-Attached Couple*, 1947.

\*Ernestine Evans, ‘Marvelous Married Pair’, *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, 15 June 1947.

Carlos Baker, ‘Idyllic, Mid-Victorian’, *New York Times Book Review*, 17 October 1948.

\*Valerie Grosvenor Myer, Introduction to the Virago edition of both novels, 1979.

\*Marghanita Laski, ‘Keep the Home Fires Burning’, *Country Life*, 17 January 1980.

\*Phyllis Rose, ‘Taking Up Where Jane Austen Left Off’, *The New York Times Book Review*, 25 April 1982.

- 5 According to Robert Stewart’s study of the Whigs, *Party and Politics, 1830–1852*, the Whig construct of British society divided it into three orders: on top were

‘gentlemen’ (aristocrats and gentry). Then came ‘the people’ who were ‘men of property below the gentry, including yeomen, free holders, merchants, manufacturers and the learned professions’. The ‘mob’ was everybody else. ‘Gentlemen’ were responsible for governing; the people were on the periphery of the rulers but had a claim to a voice in the political process; the mob had no claim at all for participation in the political process. In the election depicted in *The Semi-Attached Couple*, an election of the 1820s, gentlemen run for office and mastermind the manipulated electoral process; the people assist the gentlemen and cast their ballots under guidance; the mob gets drunk, rowdy, and occasionally threatening.

- 6 That Kipling shares the sense of Austen as marmoreally classical is indicated by ‘The Survivors (Horace Book V, Ode 22)’, prefixed in the Burwash edition to ‘The Janeites’. This spurious and convincing translation from a non-existent Horatian original (Horace wrote only four books of Odes) declares in Horatian cadences the transience of worldly political power and the permanence of writers of private life, the ‘survivors’:

The Caesars perished soon,  
 And Rome Herself: But these  
 Endure while Empires fall  
 And Gods for Gods make room...  
 Which greater God than all  
 Imposed the amazing doom?

(1970:101)

- 7 Indeed, on his voyage out to India, Macaulay read Virgil’s *Aeneid*, from which he gleaned principally Virgil’s ‘home thoughts’, the *Italian pastoral* rather than the political conquests: ‘I like him best on Italian ground. I like his localities, his national enthusiasm, his frequent allusions to his country, its history, its antiquities, and its greatness. In this respect he often reminded me of Sir Walter Scott.... The Georgics pleased me better—the Eclogues best’ (1982:1 July 1834, 124).
- 8 Throughout her stay, Eden was generally incurious about India and condescending towards her more inquisitive compatriots, for example, ‘P., who, by dint of studying Indian antiquities, believes, I almost think, in all the superstitions of the country’ (1930: 79).
- 9 See Woodruff (1964:183–379) and, especially, Edward Thompson’s Introduction to ‘*Up the Country*’ (ix–xvi). Thompson condemns Auckland for ‘infatuate pride’ (xii) and reckless vengefulness by which he persisted in a pointless scheme ‘to force on Afghanistan a man driven out by his own people as far back as 1809 and twice unsuccessful since in attempts to recover his throne’. Thompson also accuses Auckland of concealing key documents from both the British client ruler, the Nawab of Oude, and from the British government.
- 10 However odd such a response may seem to a twentieth-century reader, Eden’s contemporaries took it for granted. The anonymous reviewer of ‘*Up the Country*’, writing in the 1866 *Saturday Review*, praised Eden for ‘writing two volumes about life in India which are thoroughly amusing and readable from the first page to the last. It is a feat which only those can really appreciate who know from doleful experience how monotonous Indian life is.... Her journal from a dull country is

infinitely more amusing than nineteen out of twenty journals about interesting countries.’

- 11 Only rarely does Eden ever suggest that British presence does India much good. Even the prospect of abandoning all national claims is not unthinkable to her: ‘I am in that mood that I should almost be glad if the Sikhs, or the Russians, or anybody would come and take us all. It would be one way out of the country’ (1872:2.103–4).
- 12 After Chance’s death, Eden asked the dog’s keeper to look after a new spaniel:

I have just made it over to poor Jimmund, who looks very disconsolate. I asked him if he thought it pretty, and his answer in Hindustani was, ‘Whatever the Lady Sahib likes her servant will take care of, but Chance was the child of his heart’ and great tears kept falling on this little dog’s head. Wright says Jimmund brought his wife last night after it was quite dark, and they sat crying over Chance’s grave for an hour, and, as they do not know I know it, it was really for their own comfort. Chance always slept at their house, and they fancy he was lucky to them, which natives think much of.

(1872:2.231)

- 13 Indeed, according to David Feldman, ‘Jews were disproportionately well represented’ among wealthy Victorians, and ‘with few exceptions these great fortunes were accumulated in finance’—mostly from merchant banking and stock exchange dealing (1994:79). Feldman quotes an 1878 newspaper disquisition called ‘What is a Jew’, which represents Jews as by definition acquisitive, ‘essentially speculative; their fondness for making money is only equalled by their love of spending it, and their mania to gamble with it’ (81).

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## 9

### Farewell to Jane Austen

#### Uses of realism in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*

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##### I

Postmodern Indian English fiction, as Viney Kirpal elects to name the rich haul of novels produced in India in the 1980s and the 1990s, does not seem to be uniformly predisposed towards the contemporaneous in terms of its chosen reference point and influence (Kirpal 1996). While the most sensational of these new authors, Arundhati Roy, the winner of the 1997 Booker Prize for her *The God of Small Things*, may take her cue from James Joyce and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie, the unquestioned guru of postmodernism in the India context and the winner of the Booker of Booker for his *Midnight's Children* (1981), would like to revert a couple of centuries back to Laurence Sterne. Likewise, Upamanyu Chatterjee might draw his inspiration from Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) and J.D.Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), but Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh and Vikram Chandra would seem to hearken back towards the English nineteenth century. This essay is an attempt to investigate the anachronism of Indian postmodernism. It seeks to do so by scrutinizing the representative case of Seth's very conscious and deliberate resumption of the realist project of the nineteenth century, especially that of Jane Austen, in his critically acclaimed opus *A Suitable Boy*.

##### II

It may be recalled that *A Suitable Boy* not only created publishing history in 1993 by being paid the biggest advance ever for a work of fiction by an Indian author; it also, with its magnitude and epic ambition, helped establish the Indian novel in English on the international literary scene, despite the fact that it could not make it to the Booker shortlist, let alone win the prize, as had been widely expected. Now this very 'European novel', as Seth's literary agent, Giles Gordon, chose to term it, is anachronistic in the sense that it recalls a phase in the European novel's life which is historically *passé*, namely realism. This was also the case with Seth's much-acclaimed earlier verse novel *The Golden Gate* (1986). It, too, was anachronistic in imitating *Eugene Onegin* (1823–31), the rhymed verse

narrative of the nineteenth-century Russian poet, Alexander Pushkin. It was a reader-friendly, realistic narrative, although with a quaint ring to it imparted by Seth's use of the sonnet form, couched in tetrameter lines.

The distinguishing feature of *A Suitable Boy* is its recasting of nineteenth-century English novelistic conventions as popularized by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Eliot. Of these, Austen, in particular, has been Seth's favoured model. As he has clarified in several discussions and interviews, his 'clear-window' narrative aspirations and his preference for an easygoing, transparent style derive, in the main, from Austen. To quote him, 'I prefer a clear and easy style. It should be a window that helps you to see the scenery clearly instead of drawing attention from the scenery to the window' (cited in *The Times of India*, 28 February 1993). Language, Seth feels, should work to supplement the story, as is the case in an Austen novel, rather than to distract attention from it, as in a postmodern narrative. No wonder approving mention has been made of the novel's Jane Austenian 'what-you-see-is-what-you-get style' (cited in *The Times of India*, 20 June 1993) and its answering Austenian theme of marriage. Nor merely that: the text of *A Suitable Boy* is laced with subtle, strategically placed Austenian moments and allusions. To give a foretaste of this analysis, reserved for the fourth section of this essay, we shall only point here to the use of Austenian vocabulary in the text at a key moment of sexual surrender. Just as the portrait of Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) inspires in Elizabeth a 'gentle sensation towards the original' (Austen 1983:365), the framed photograph of Lata evokes in Hareesh 'tender feelings of the original' (Seth 1993:1290). This is the moment in both Austen and Seth when love is signed, sealed and delivered.

This attempt to compare Austen and Seth may seem strange and rather incongruous at first sight, given the striking differences between the two authors, separated by great gulfs of history and culture, not to mention gender. Austen wrote about the English landed gentry of the early nineteenth century at the point of its evident interlocking with an acquisitive high bourgeois society. And, of course, she chose to write about this volatile social formation, dominated by the newly emergent middle classes, from a minimalist and ironic perspective. It is not just that Austen's narratives unfold within a restricted geographical and social compass in keeping with her well-known fictional credo that '3 or 4 families in a country village is the very thing to work on'; what is more important is that she delimits herself almost with a ferocious consciousness of her art, keeping historical reference to a bare minimum and pruning everything that does not fit into her austere narrative economy. The outcome, as we know, is the famous 'two inches of Ivory', the highly nuanced study of morals through manners.

Admittedly, it is difficult to see how an Austen novel can serve as a model for the 'loose and baggy monster' that *A Suitable Boy* unmistakably is. Seth, too, is writing about the middle class, but his Indian middle class, unlike its English or European counterpart, is a late developer. It is this class which occupies centre-stage in the post-independence India of the 1950s that Seth is writing about. Besides, Seth's narrator is garrulous where Austen's was restrained. The novel

has for its setting almost the whole of India. The vastness of space is matched by the large gallery of characters. Manifestly the novel is the story of only four families (the Mehras, the Kapoors, the Chatterjees and the Khans), but the Voltairian ambition 'to tell everything' about these vast and sprawling kinship networks makes it into a panoramic saga of the coming of age of a nascent nation.

Why then such avowals on the part of Seth, and, more important, why are they echoed and endorsed by critics? Introducing a book of critical essays on Austen, Harish Trivedi goes on to observe that Seth is a 'latter-day Jane Austen' (Trivedi 1996:11). What could possibly be at stake in this comparison? One may, in fact, argue deeper affinities of spirit between the two novelists. For one thing, Seth has set out to write a realist novel in the face of the pervasive postmodernist scepticism about realism. Novels, postmodernists would say, are basically language games and do not authorize any epistemic access to reality. In other words, postmodernism rejects the mapping function that is central to realism. According to the postmodernists, for instance, the notations and markers of realism such as names, places, dates and deictic produce the illusion of reality or a 'reality effect'. Suddenly with postmodernism that whole solid fabric seems to have dissolved. All that the postmodernist novelist is supposed to do is slide the signifier. The reigning paradigm of Indian English fiction is postmodernism. The magical realism that Salman Rushdie has made immensely popular is also a variant of it.

To write a realist novel about people and places, as Seth seems to have done, is, in this context, nothing short of revolutionary. It attaches itself to the 'tradition of compassionate realism' fashioned by the first generation of Indian English novelists such as R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, recoiling consciously from the now fashionable tradition of 'pinwheeling experiment' favoured by Rushdie. It is in trying to achieve this ambitious task that Seth is abundantly served by his chosen Austenian model. As he himself claims, he prefers the orderly nineteenth-century realists to the anarchic moderns and the psychedelic postmoderns. The basis of this preference for realism lies not only in its cognitivist function (*A Suitable Boy* follows the nineteenth-century novelistic convention of prefacing the narrative with the cast of characters given in the form of family trees); the realist mode recommends itself to Seth also for the way in which it fuses 'internal impulse' and 'external compulsion' into a seamless unity, thereby making the world available for appropriation by the emergent bourgeois subject of Seth's epic narrative. His particular attachment to Austenian realism makes him focus on the drawing room and the parlour as the sites of complex social negotiations and exchange. Marriage is a crucial metonymic concern in Seth, as in Austen: the question of who will turn out to be the 'suitable boy' from amongst a host of suitors and contenders for the hand of the 'girl' seems to translate in the last analysis into the question of who will best embody the values and aspirations of the emergent class, and will, by so doing,

guide the nation towards its rightful destiny. We shall elaborate on this point in the fourth section of the essay.

It can easily be seen that marriage has large social and ideological implications in both Seth and Austen. The focus on marriage can be seen, for instance, as part of the process inaugurated by 'domestic fiction', which, as Nancy Armstrong has argued in her classic study *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), contributed to the feminization of bourgeois culture. Armstrong points out how domestic fiction, centred around the domestic woman who values marriage and family, 'actively sought to disentangle the language of sexual relations from the language of politics and, in so doing, to introduce a new form of political power' (Armstrong 1987:3). This power is inscribed in the image of a dehistoricized, bourgeois subjectivity. What is not so obvious is that this new form of subjectivity helped to reinforce patriarchal power relations.

The difficult and delicate nature of the marriage choice, as explored in Austen's novels, makes this clear. The typical Austen heroine breaks out of the stranglehold of feudal-aristocratic relations only to plunge headlong into the vortex of bourgeois-patriarchal relations. This is as it should be, concerned as Austen is with marrying the 'landed' interest with the 'monied' interest. The process is best exemplified in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth's discourse to justify her choice of Darcy precisely reflects the sexual division of labour and the corresponding gender roles enforced by patriarchy:

It was a union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgement, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance.

(Austen 1983:400)

In *A Suitable Boy* Lata's discourse, justifying her choice of Haresh as the 'suitable boy', moves along the very same lines. Only she phrases it differently: 'Haresh is practical, he's forceful, he is not cynical. He gets things done and he helps people without making a fuss about it' (Seth 1993:1297). Lata goes on to speak in Cloughian terms of a 'calmer, less frantic love, which helps you to grow where you're already growing' (1299). The ironic conclusion of this Austenian rational love is the death of romance, the very flower of feeling: Lata is going to be known as Haresh's wife, the 'Bride of Goodyear Welted' (1333), as the novel's ending plainly shows. Seth's engagement with the realist mode is then not without its pitfalls. Realism has this tendency to slide into a form of male objectivism, just as reality in this bourgeois patriarchal order tends to translate into reality.

The point, of course, is that if *A Suitable Boy* is Austenian in one respect, it is fundamentally unAustenian in another respect, which is to do with its being an Indian story. This duality is, of course, a feature of the Indian English novel right from its inception. The form which developed in the mid-nineteenth century

began by imitating the English realist novel, an established and influential form with its authority vastly augmented by the reigning colonial ethos. The Indian English writer started off with reportage and description and moved hesitantly towards narration, though of a 'plain and unvarnished' kind (Day 1874:4), as shown notably in the case of Rev. Lal Behari Day's *Bengal Peasant Life* (1874). The passage from 'purana' to 'nutan', which is what the term, novel, signifies, was for the early practitioners of the form a fraught and troubled one. Meenakshi Mukherjee prefers to look at the Indian novelistic scenario in terms of a head-heart split:

Their conscious models were Scott's and Thackeray's novels rather than *Brihatkatha* or *Kadambari*, *Daskumaracharita* or *Kathasaritasagara*. Yet the unconscious influence of these works, of the puranic tradition of oral narratives and the memory of episodes from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* on which the imagination of most Indian writers was sustained, cannot be ignored altogether.

(Mukherjee 1985:9)

Thus, even when the formal and thematic aspirations of the early Indian novel were the same as those of the English novel on which it was consciously modelled, 'behind the obvious European influences can be found the bedrock of a different narrative structure and value system' (Mukherjee 1985:15). What Mukherjee calls 'the pre-novel conventions of narrative' proved to be doggedly persistent. And this, we can now say with the advantage of hindsight, was liberating rather than constricting.

The realist tradition still continues to hold sway in Indian fiction. As Mukherjee says, 'It subsequently came to form the mainstream along which the Indian novel developed in the 20th century' (Mukherjee 1985:16). A contemporary Austenian novel in India is, therefore, not as unusual or preposterous as it may at first sight seem. The point, of course, is that the 'pre-novel' conventions of orality, fantasy and circularity continue to animate and inform the modern Indian novel in English. Nothing illustrates this better than the absorption and transmutation of the Austenian legacy in the narrative unfolding of *A Suitable Boy*. Before we go on to focus attention on this, we feel the need for an intervening section which will explain more fully the ideological imperatives governing Seth's decision to revive the realist project of the nineteenth century.

### III

'You too will marry a boy I choose,' said Mrs. Rupa Mehra firmly to her younger daughter.

Lata avoided the maternal imperative by looking around the great lamp-lit garden of Prem Nivas. The wedding-guests were gathered on the lawn. ‘Hmm,’ said she. This annoyed her mother further.

(Seth 1993:3)

The story of Mrs Rupa Mehra’s search for a ‘suitable boy’ for her younger daughter, Lata, constitutes the thematic centre of the novel. Lata does, however, go through her own experiential trajectory as she falls in love with someone (Kabir Durrani), flirts with someone else (Amit Chatterjee) and finally chooses to marry yet another person, Haresh Khanna, the ‘suitable boy’ of the novel’s title, who also happened to be her mother’s choice in the first place. This coming round on Lata’s part to the mother’s viewpoint, is, of course, not a simple matter of accepting the ‘maternal imperative’; it involves for Lata a complex process of maturation and growth. *A Suitable Boy* is not only conceived like an Austenian tale of marriage; it has, likewise, an Austenian focus on love, or rather rational love, as the only allowable basis of marriage. The novel also abounds in married couples and follows the careers of other lovers. However, it is not marriage alone that the novel is about. It is, in fact, a portrait of India, three years after its independence, and, alas, partition. Jawahar Lal Nehru is at the helm as the Prime Minister. The first general election is around the corner. The Congress Party is seeking re-election for a second term at the centre on the strength of its campaign for the abolition of Zamindari and other remnants of feudalism.

It is against this political backdrop that the multi-layered and multi-levelled action of the narrative develops. The action is set in a small provincial town in eastern India, called Brahmpur, which is a fictional version of Patna. It is here that the Mehras, the Kapoors and the Khans live. The families are influential and high-profile. The Mehras and the Kapoors become related through matrimony at the beginning, with Savita, the eldest daughter of Mrs Rupa Mehra, marrying Pran, the eldest son of Mahesh Kapoor. The political interests and circumstances of the Kapoors and the Khans are opposed. Mahesh Kapoor, as the Minister of Revenue of the state of Purva Pradesh, is the prime mover of the Zamindari Abolition Bill which, if made into a law, will reduce the land holding of the Nawab Khan, who happens to be the largest landowner of the state. They are, however, close family friends, the friendship reaching down the line to their sons. Mann, the youngest son of the Kapoors, happens to be the closest friend of Firoz, the youngest Nawabzada. The Chatterjees, once again related to the Mehras through matrimony, are another high-profile family, living in Calcutta.

While this huge canvas accounts for the immense horizontal spread of the narrative, the multiple stories of individual lives in it create a bewildering sense of complexity and diversity. At the same time that Lata is meeting and falling in love with Kabir in Brahmpur University where they are both studying, Mann is falling torridly in love with a famous courtesan of Brahmpur, Saeeda Bai, and Rasheed is secretly courting Saeeda Bai’s daughter, Tasneem. Each of the stories takes its own course and generates more stories which are designed by the

narrator to reinforce the two main plots of Lata and Mann. As the characters—and there are a whole lot of them here—move and grow and change, the India they inhabit slowly changes too as it enters the modern era. In the words of Pico Iyer, ‘it is the story of the passing of an era, of the last strains of a rarefied world of ghazals and nawabs, and the first approaches of a new, industrial era, of how the elegant Rajput miniature, you might say, is being replaced by the news photo’ (Iyer 1993:20). The story of this transition derives added significance from the fact that it is at the same time the story of the emancipation and empowerment of a colonial people. The novel provides a panoramic vista of a huge country undergoing unprecedented birth-pangs.

There are other Austenian qualities in the novel as well. For one thing, the book is set not during the tumult of independence and partition of India, but in the uncertain interregnum that followed it. This has an interesting parallel in the Austenian emphasis on personal relationships at a time framed by the tumultuous Napoleonic Wars. The purpose in both cases seems to be to displace attention from the macro-history to micro-history, to shift the locus of meaning from structure to texture. It is this preoccupation, in the vein of ‘domestic fiction’, with the deportment and gestures of characters and with their socially nuanced expressions and utterances, which gives to Seth’s novel its distinctly Austenian character, its ‘surpassing dailiness’ (Iyer 1993:20). This indeed is the reason why it seems like a novel about ‘things not happening’ (Iyer 1993:20).

There is, we must note, the simultaneous Indian focus on the ‘great god family’ to ensure its monumentality, its Indianness. Family is central to the Indian novel, in both its regional language and English language avatars. Not merely that: it cuts across the tradition and modernity divide in Indian English fiction, as Kirpal forcefully argues:

The family which has been central to Indian English novels...is aggressively foregrounded in the Indian English postmodern novel. Work after work, it appears almost like a character... *Midnight’s Children*, *The Great Indian Novel*, *The Shadow Lines*, *Rich Like Us*, *A Suitable Boy*, *Such a Long Journey*, *The Binding Vine*, and a host of other novels. By contrast, the characters in Euro-American postmodern novels such as *Catch-22*, *Possession*, *Under the Net*, appear to be so alone. No mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives, husbands, sons, daughters, cousins, aunts or uncles; only lovers who keep coming in and going out of their lives. They inhabit a lonely society and the malaise of alienation spills into the novels.

(Kirpal 1996:19)

With only a few exceptions, the families depicted in the Indian English novel are the usual Indian middle-class families.

The significance of the family, its ramifications, the resonance of familial relationships, is immense. In *A Suitable Boy*, the family tree, so graphically sketched as a preface to the novel, becomes the very metaphor for the novel

genre itself, which, as Amit, Seth's *alter ego* in the novel, puts it, 'sprouts and grows, and spreads, and drops down branches that become trunks or intertwine with other branches' (Seth 1993:483). What we have, therefore, is a novel with an Austenian form and an Indian substance. The choice of this particular formal possibility does, however, have a deeper import. As a matter of fact, it follows, almost organically, from the historical situation in which Seth finds himself, much in the same way as it did for Austen. This situational parallel needs further exploration. It has already been pointed out that Seth's expressed reason for invoking Austen is to do with the latter's clear-window approach to novel-writing. We are led back then to the question of realism.

Now the first thing to be said about the realist project of Austen is that it is much more than the purely technical matter of the lucidity and transparency of language or style. For it entails a protest against a dominant epistemology and ideology from the site of an emergent one. In this connection we may invoke Michael McKeon's highly suggestive account of the rise of the novel. According to McKeon, the novel arose in England in the early modern period in order to deal with two kinds of crisis, epistemological and social. That is to say, the novel addressed itself to the twofold question of how to signify 'truth' and 'virtue' at a time of major social and cultural transition in people's attitude towards these things (McKeon 1987). We thus have a situation where 'romance' gives way to 'novel' through a historical process in which, as McKeon puts it, 'aristocratic honour' is replaced by 'capitalist credit' (McKeon 1988:171).

Austen's fiction, it can be seen, is supremely illustrative of McKeon's model. The novel, or, to be precise, the realist novel is an ideological weapon for Austen, a means of settling an epistemological doubt, a crisis in the nature of apprehension of truth or reality itself. The case of Henry Tilney, the protagonist of *Northanger Abbey* (1818), is exemplary. For him to write fiction is to make a truth-claim, the truth in question being construed by Austen's narrator in an empiricist or even positivist sense and considered nailed down by the authenticating devices of a supposedly referentialist discourse. These devices, consisting of names, places, dates, events and eye or ear-witness testimony, constitute the staple of a diary or a journal. Not surprisingly, therefore, the language of a diary or a journal is his model:

How are the civilities and compliments of everyday to be related as they ought to be unless noted down every evening in a journal! Perhaps you are not sitting in this room, and I am not sitting by you. These are points in which doubt is possible! Not keep a journal!

(Austen 1983:1013)

The novel for Austen is an extended discourse of the same type. No wonder she has been traditionally regarded by critics as an accurate observer and recorder of empirical phenomena.

The interesting thing, of course, is that this realist discourse is implicated for Austen in the ideological project of constructing a sense of the inviolability and moral superiority of the English nation. The juxtaposition of realism and romance, of empiricism and idealism, in Austen's fiction can be seen to enact a complex ideological differentiation between England and its Others. As Mukherjee points out in an illuminating essay, while realism evokes England—a rational, orderly and normal or even normative England—romance evokes France, which was England's main imperial rival at this point in history, and, hence, needed to be tarred with a darker brush. Again *Northanger Abbey* is symptomatic here. To quote from Mukherjee:

Henry Tilney, who is the ironic intelligence of the novel and ought to be less insular than the inexperienced Catherine, also in a way corroborates Catherine's view by claiming reason, order and normalcy for England alone ...in order to prove to Catherine that English society lacks the darkness and mystery that might exist abroad!

(Mukherjee 1996:57)

Austen's fictional world, it can be said on the evidence of this and other novels, is firmly located in the South of England. But then, as is the case with ideologies, the part is not only seen as the whole, but also as central, as representing the very essence of human nature. Chapter 25 of *Northanger Abbey* opens with a crucial sentence, 'The visions of romance were over', and goes on to chronicle Catherine's realizations thus: 'Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for' (Austen 1983:1112). What is at stake in the conflict between Austen's brand of realist fiction, set in England, and the Gothic fiction of Mrs Ann Radcliffe, oriented towards France, is precisely this ideology of 'Englishness'. It may not be wrong to assume that this emphasis on Englishness on the part of Austen was the outcome of the two-decade-long war against France.

It is possible then to say that in taking on Austenian realism Seth is taking much more on board than the simple technical aspects of language and style. Realism is for him a means of countering what he considers to be the diversionary and evasive mode of much postmodernist writing, and especially of what has been defined as 'marvellous realism'. Seth is ultimately interested in writing what has been called a 'counter-Rushdie epic' (Iyer 1993:20). That is to say, he is concerned to pose the solidity and the density of the realist novel against the vaporousness of the world posited in the fiction of Rushdie, whatever may be the other virtues of the latter.

The situational parallel between Seth and Austen amounts to this: what Gothicism was for Austen, 'marvellous realism' is for Seth. That is to say, it is an adversary genre. Just as Austen found herself pitted against Mrs Radcliffe and

her imitators, in an analogous way Seth finds himself pitted against Rushdie and his acolytes. In saying this one ought, of course, to be aware of the fact that there is no historical continuity between Austen's realism and Seth's. In fact, we could distinguish two types of realism, one which was emergent and contestatory and was conceived as such by Austen, and the other which is ideologically more nebulous. This latter variety of realism is found to be complicit with bourgeois power, as has been forcefully demonstrated by Stephen Greenblatt:

Power that relies upon a massive police apparatus, a strong, middle-class nuclear family, an elaborate school system, power that dreams of a panopticon in which the most intimate secrets are open to the view of an invisible authority, such power will have as its appropriate aesthetic form the realist novel.

(Greenblatt 1992:108)

The irony, however, is that realism is perceived as hegemonic today for the very same reason for which it was once regarded as subversive, thus balancing the historic shift or slide of the bourgeoisie, its progenitor, from a progressive to a retrograde role. This reason has to do with the perceived ubiquity of realism's roving gaze, its ability 'to lay everything open', to adopt Henry Tilney's expression in *Northanger Abbey*. Tilney's highly rhetorical defence of the age of English realism needs to be cited in full here:

Remember the country and the age in which we live.... Dose our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open?

(Austen 1983:1111)

The power of realism, or, to be precise, the power of the realist novel, is matter for an unambiguous celebration here, although realism is equally clearly complicit, in this instance, in bourgeois power.

Naturally the very same power is now dreaded and resented precisely for its ability to reify, rationalize and commodify all human products and processes. The mapping function which was considered in a positive light by Tilney and was attributed to 'roads and newspapers' is now seen as highly insidious and negative in Stephen Greenblatt's famous accounting of the realist discourse which 'dreams of a panopticon in which the most intimate secrets are open to the view of an invisible authority'. But to put the matter another way, the realist novel is a necessity in the Indian context, not simply because of the latter's panoramic quality and heterogeneity, but also—and this is more important—because, by its very nature, it directs the writer and the reader to the history that both heals and

hurts, in other words, to history as a shaping force. It now becomes clear why Seth should want to revive realism in its nineteenth-century version. Realism of this sort is the essential precondition for deploying the novel in its nation-forming role or function, as we saw in our coverage of the novel in section III. We can say that Austenian realism provides the ground for narrating the nation in *A Suitable Boy*, a ground which does not, however, remain unaltered in the process of that narration. It is now time to argue out this case with the aid of further textual elaboration and analysis.

#### IV

The intimate and familiar portrait of an oversized India that we find in *A Suitable Boy* is, then, a product of a realistic aesthetic, which, like Austen's, is given to anthropomorphizing. In other words, the novel is about the world of men and women, and about the world of history. But it is history as inscribed not in the larger events of war and revolutions, but in the ordinary quotidian events of eating and drinking and growing up and marrying and dying. (And, for that very reason, Austen's novels are political too, for they are necessarily involved in 'questions of power, of justice, questions of wealth and poverty and so on' (Said 1996:II).) This sort of quiet, or rather quietly subversive, chronicling of the slow, jog-trot rhythm of a nation's post-independence evolution is, of course, profoundly and patently Austenian. No wonder Iyer has been led to comment on Seth's Austenian goal to 'usher India into the drawing room, to make it seem as everyday and close to us as St Petersburg, or, say, Regency Bath' (Iyer 1993:20).

What we would like to urge here is a crucial distinction between Austenian moments, authorizing this narrative mimesis, and the allusions to Austen. The latter constitute a mere handful, whereas the former permeate the whole narrative of *A Suitable Boy*. We are told in one place (pp. 586–7) that Lata reads *Emma* on the train during her journey from Calcutta to Kanpur. At another point (p. 407) Amit jestingly likens himself, when peeved, to Jane Austen. And then there is the final reference to *Mansfield Park* towards the close (p. 1287), which will be discussed later. Surely a whole theory about Seth being 'a latter-day Jane Austen' cannot be sustained on the basis of these few allusions. Besides, there are other allusions in the novel as well: for instance, to Thomas Mann, Tennyson, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot and Marcel Proust, not to mention the ubiquitous William Shakespeare. The Eliot allusion can even be said to be of more moment, as it is a self-reflexive allusion to the novel's own epic canvas. The point, therefore, is to read the novel in terms of the Austenian moments that are also the narrative's defining moments.

As has been suggested, *A Suitable Boy* resembles an Austen novel in its preference for the domestic as a space traversed by the political and the economic. The nexus between desire, power and money is nowhere more sharply evinced than in the domestic, seemingly apolitical institution of marriage. Moreover, in both Seth and Austen this means a shifting of emphasis from a

'government of families' to 'a government through the family', to use Jacques Donzelot's terms (cited in Armstrong 1987:18). The opening moment of *A Suitable Boy* is clearly and unambiguously Austenian. Mrs Rupa Mehra, in initiating the search for a suitable groom for Lata, and in thus setting the ball of the narrative rolling, is working out the logic of the Austenian 'It is a truth universally acknowledged...'. She wants for Lata a good, covenanted Khatri boy, like her son Arun, but is ready to make certain compromises as well. Having been introduced to Haresh Khanna through a family friend, she concludes: 'Of all the boys we have met, Kalpana, I like that young man the most' (Seth 1993: 556). What she likes about Haresh is, of course, that he has it in him to make his way in the world. (In *Pride and Prejudice* Mrs Bennet likes Mr Bingley, the owner of Netherfield Park, for much the same reason.) Lata's angle of vision is at this point drastically different. She is young and impulsive and has just entered into a totally unacceptable tryst with a Muslim boy from the university, named Kabir. (The comparable situation in Austen is the sudden attraction of Marianne towards Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and the havoc it wreaks in the quiet life of the Dashwood family.) Eventually, however, the angles of vision of mother and daughter will meet at a common point, something that is itself contingent upon a change of attitude on Lata's part. The novel basically dramatizes this passage of Lata from an impulsive and impetuous kind of attraction to a 'calmer, less frantic love' (Seth 1993:1299). The tension between romance and realism characterizes the narrative throughout, as it does the writing of Austen.

We can see this happening in the next important Austenian moment in the text, a moment which also involves a direct reference to an Austen novel. Lata, we are told, reads *Emma* on the train on her way to Kanpur from Calcutta at her mother's bidding to appear before Haresh. Her thoughts are of Kabir as she takes her eyes off the book and lets her fancy roam: 'Lata felt that her heart would have leapt with happiness at the sound of his voice and the sight of his face' (Seth 1993: 587). The flight of fancy is rudely interrupted as she looks down at a passage from *Emma*, transcribing the mindless and monotonous chatter of an ineffectual Mr Woodhouse. The structural and thematic relevance of this passage is that it parallels Mrs Mehra's own sentimental drivel about matches and prize catches a little later. The passage from Chapter 12 of *Emma* alludes to a journey, which, like Lata's, is not the most exciting, terminating as it does in a basin of gruel. But then *Emma* is about moderating one's impulses and emotions, and is, therefore, eminently instructive for Lata. We are told that Lata read *Emma* and was 'grateful to be able to do so' (587). The parallel with Austen, we can say, lies in the way in which the 'external compulsion', typified in this instance by the 'maternal imperative', mutates imperceptibly into an 'internal impulse' in the form of Lata's consent to marry Haresh.

In a sense the manufacture of consent is the goal of this Austenian narrative. If the novel is about the emergent middle classes of a newly independent nation, and if it undertakes to celebrate the middle-class ethos, the stress on consent is,

in a way, inevitable. It thus happens that in *A Suitable Boy*, unlike in *Middlemarch* (1870–1), for instance, the co-optation of characters by the family and society they were in rebellion against initially, does not seem to enact an unremitting indictment of a conservative attitude towards life. Lata's Austenian outburst against passion seems wholly credible, just as her decision to marry Haresh seems perfectly legitimate. It is not primarily a matter of Haresh's puritanical entrepreneurism winning the day as against Kabir's romanticism or Amit's tender lyricism. Kabir and Amit will not do because their attitude is too laid-back and casual to be of much help to the historical role the middle class, to which they belong, aims to play. This is not to say that the alternative is the phoney jingoism of the poet Makhijani, the dispenser of mediocre verses at Nowrojee's literary society at Brahmipur. The need of the hour is moderation, the avoidance of extremes. Haresh, in fact, represents the right blend of emotion and reason. In a manner a Thoreau might have approved, he combines the skills of the artisan with those of the poet, as the following sentence amply demonstrates: 'No poet worked harder or more inspiredly to craft a poem than Haresh worked for the next three days on his pair of shoes' (Seth 1993:920). The parallel between the poet and the artisan here is revealing. Seth's presentation of Haresh is meant to be a reminder of the pre-industrial unity of work and art. It is thus central to the realist aesthetic as conceptualized by Seth. By erasing the distinction between art and work, Seth is clearly going against the ideological consensus of the contemporary moment, bent upon the separation of the utile and the beautiful, and the resulting segregation of the discourses of good, the useful and the beautiful. The narrative of nation-building, especially in a context of decolonization, requires this sort of realism. Thus it is not only that the middle-class exuberance and optimism that the novel sets out to celebrate are voiced through Haresh; it is also that Haresh is Seth's chosen mouthpiece or vehicle for those sporadic outbursts of anti-colonial nationalism. It is notable that it is Haresh who decides 'to beard the lion' (Seth 1993:931) in that famous face-off scene in the novel involving 'the impossibly home-grown, or *desi*, shoemaker hero, Haresh, and the heroine's obnoxious Anglophile brother Arun Mehra' (Gandhi 1998:12).

Austen's *Persuasion* (1818) provides an interesting parallel here. Both *A Suitable Boy* and *Persuasion* open with an ironic portrayal of what, after Austen, can be best described as 'the vanity of person and of situation' (Austen 1983: 1145). Mrs Rupa Mehra's glorification of her late husband's status in the government service is a flickering reminder of Sir Walter Elliot's obsession with his precariously held baronetcy. Just as he fusses constantly over the 'baronetage', she fusses over the 'saloon-centred glory' of her halcyon days in the Indian Railways. The crucial analogy is that both Lata and Anne Elliot move against this patriarchal order through their marriage choices. Anne's case is, of course, more exemplary in that she marries decidedly beneath her class. Captain Wentworth, being a sailor, is a social upstart in Austen's genteel world. Yet Anne is perhaps the first Austen heroine to opt out of the existing property

arrangements and yet escape Austen's disapproving narratorial irony: 'she gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which, if possible, was more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance' (Austen 1983: 1290). We have moved a long way away from Robert Martin of *Emma*, that Austen novel most concerned with class purity, and the diminished sense of the domestic. Captain Wentworth is allowed to come into his own as a member of the dignified new middle class, destined to redefine the space of the domestic by seizing the initiative from the hands of an effete aristocracy, typified by Sir Walter Elliot.

It is class, or rather it is class snobbery, which presumes to get in the way of the proposed relationship between Lata and Haresh. What goes against Haresh is the fact that he is a middle-class, self-made person who lacks the refinement and the social graces that characterize the covenanted, anglophilic elites of new India. Lata's brother, Arun, writes to tell her that he cannot approve of Haresh as a 'suitable addition to our family' (Seth 1993:1293) for three reasons: one, his English is not good enough; two, he moves in inferior social circles; and, three, he does not have a white-collar job. Arun's complaint, in fact, goes back a long way; it connects with that historic criticism of the middle class that was sounded in the days of the ascendancy of the self-same class. The sentiment is found echoed in Arun's smug, elitist railing against Haresh:

his family are small people from old Delhi, and, are, to put it bluntly, entirely undistinguished. Certainly, it does him credit that he has brought himself to where he is; but, being a self-made man, he has a tendency to be rather pleased with himself—indeed, a little bumptious.

(Seth 1993:1293)

However different the two contexts in *Persuasion* and *A Suitable Boy* may be, they are at least united by this common hostility towards the 'hebraic middle class' on the part of an upper-class elite. In Austen's case it is a decadent aristocracy. In Seth's case it is a snobbish English-educated, covenanted class. The responses of Anne and Lata are similar: both move against their persuaders, Lady Russell in the case of Anne, and Arun Mehra in the case of Lata. Since it is Lata we are discussing here, it is important to note that her decision to marry Haresh was made in the very instant in which she received Arun's bullying letter: 'she wrote to Haresh the same evening, accepting with gratitude—and indeed, warmth—his often repeated offer of marriage' (Seth 1993:1295).

Thus the novel is Austenian in its privileging of rationalistic 'sense' over romantic 'sensitivity', even though it lacks, as Anita Desai has pointed out in her review, 'the flashing and satiric swordplay of Jane Austen's pen' (Desai 1993: 23). Not just the main love plot, but two sub-plots dealing with Mann and Rasheed chronicle the defeat of youthful dream and passion. This is not, of course, to suggest that heartbreaks are alien to the Austenian vision. The tragic fallout of the careers of Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*, of Marianne in

*Sense and Sensibility*, and of Harriet in *Emma*, is too well known to bear repetition. In the case of Harriet, in particular, we become painfully aware of the Austenian narrative's ruthless dismissal of heart if it gets in the way of the existing arrangements of property and rank. It is only Emma, the richly endowed heiress, who can marry Mr Knightley, the owner of Donwell Abbey, and not Harriet, that mere 'chit' of a moonstruck girl. Neighbours in Austen are not those people who inhabit the same geographical space; they are primarily people who share the same economic space (Williams 1974). Philosophically, property may be insubstantial, but in the real world, which is grounded in a property-owning individualism, people themselves become the shadows of property. As Eric Cheyfitz has shrewdly observed in his book *The Poetics of Imperialism*, those who own no property are not entitled to even this limited visibility (Cheyfitz 1991).

A similar narrative dynamics operates, for the most part, in Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. The utile is accorded more value than the lyrical, for the master narrative of nation-building requires this sort of utilitarianism. It will not do to harp too much on the novel's postcolonial heart of darkness in communal conflict and class tension. But heartbreaks cannot entirely be wished away either. Each of the three love stories dramatized in *A Suitable Boy* ends tragically: Lata loses Kabir and marries someone who had perceived her as 'wife material' (Seth 1993:597), thus measuring the distance between the beatific Barasaat Mahal of the novel's lyrical early part and the humdrum Prahapore of the novel's prosaic later part. Seth obliquely hints at the trauma of partition through the failure of this most tender and romantic of relationships between characters belonging to two opposed faiths. Mann's break with Saeeda Bai is equally heart-rending. This is another inter-faith relationship which, like that of Lata and Kabir, is doomed from the start. And Rasheed kills himself after being frustrated in his twin passions for socialism and Tasneem.

There may be an Austenian reconciliation in the face of all these losses, but they do indeed press against the limits of this rationalist ideology, undercutting it from within. There is no way in which an Austenian realistic framework will be able to confront these dark, unAustenian pressures. As we think back on them, Lata and Mann appear before us as twin studies in defeated idealism. And this connects with Eliot's *Middlemarch*, centred as it is around the two defeated idealists, Dorothea and Lydgate. Similarly, Lata and Haresh as husband and wife at the end of the novel conjure up the image of exhaustion and listlessness after all passion is spent. As they travel to Prahapore by train they are the very picture of what Russian formalists have aptly termed 'habituation'. Haresh has dropped off to sleep, leaving Lata, as Desai perceptively writes, 'to entertain herself by feeding the monkeys at the railway station with a somewhat pensive air' (Desai 1993:26). This scene which closes the novel thus underlines the final irony of marriage in this book about marriages.

Austen is here outstripped by the logic of the narrative, the act itself symbolically enacted in the text by Lata's buying and misplacing a copy of

*Mansfield Park* at the Blue Danube coffee house, as she walks out of Kabir's life for good. The scene from the text is dramatized thus:

Kabir entered the shop, looking quite cheerful. He noticed Lata and stopped....

'Hello', replied Kabir, 'I see you're on your way out.' Here was another meeting brought about by coincidence, and to be governed, no doubt, by awkwardness.

'Yes', said Lata. 'I came in to buy a Wodehouse, but I've bought myself a Jane Austen instead!'

'I'd like you to have a coffee with me at the Blue Danube.'

...

...

He continued to stir his coffee with a troubled look.

'I know of two mixed marriages...' He began.

'Ours wouldn't work. No one else will let it work. And now I can't even trust myself.'

'Then why are you sitting here with me?' he said.

'I don't know.'

'And why are you crying?'

Lata said nothing.

'Come on, eat your cake, it'll do you good. I'm the one who's been rejected and I'm not sobbing my poor little heart out!'

She shook her head. 'Now I must go', she said. 'Thank you.'

Kabir did not try to dissuade her.

'Don't leave your book behind', he said. '*Mansfield Park*? I haven't read that one. Tell me if it's any good!'

Neither of them turned around to look at the other as Lata walked towards the door.

(Seth 1993:1286-7)

It is interesting that both the buying and the misplacing of Austen in this scene happen to be unconscious acts which betray her acute psychic stress. Lata has chosen to go the way of an Austen heroine in moderating her passion, a road that has brought her to Hareesh by the clear light of the day. Kabir, however, is the dark unAustenian force in her life that momentarily disrupts logic and reason, giving her a glimpse of the heart of darkness, the abyss. The scene thus brilliantly dramatizes the play of light and shadow in Lata's unconscious. And this moment also coincides with the disappearance of both the Austenian moment and allusion from the narrative of *A Suitable Boy*. This could be construed as Seth's symbolic farewell to Austen, before he moves into the expansive, stratified and gendered spaces of Victorian narrative realism. The story of this particular negotiation calls, however, for a separate recounting, and hence falls outside the scope of this essay.

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## 10

### Father's daughters

Critical realism examines patriarchy in Jane Austen's  
*Pride and Prejudice* and Pak Wansŏ's *A Faltering  
Afternoon* [Hwichŏngkŏrinŭn Ohu]

*You-me Park*

#### I

My mother has always been an avid reader. As a child, I loved listening to her adventures in reading. She used to hide under a blanket with a small lantern in order to read after bedtime because, as the oldest daughter with seven younger siblings, she was not encouraged to read. Her time was not really hers but supposedly belonged to her family. She was to take care of her little brothers and sisters or perform domestic chores rather than read. Of course, she was not allowed to go to college. The narrative of my mother's history as a young female reader in colonial and postcolonial Korea was, to me, as exciting as the other war stories we used to hear from adults. To fight your parents who wanted you to look after younger siblings and to not read, seemed to be as indomitable a task as to survive during the Korean War.

Naturally, I got first acquainted with many canonical texts through my mother's stories. One of her favourite texts happens to be Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. It was one of the 'world classics' translated from Japanese, a legacy of the 'modernization' projects of Japanese colonialism. She, a girl in occupied Korea, was taught feminine values in modern form from a British text that had been chosen and sanctioned by the Japanese regime in Korea. The 'world classics' that were offered to the Korean public in Japanese translation under the Japanese colonial regime carried out several functions. Given that the primary claim for the Japanese occupation of Korea was to modernize Korea and rescue it from its own backwardness and inertia, it was important for the Japanese regime to present the appearance of introducing modern culture, be it a Western brand or its own Asian variety. In addition, the publication of the series was part of the Japanese colonial power's effort to posit Japanese culture as one of the superior cultures of the world. The selection and publication of classical or canonical texts are never innocent ventures, but become especially charged with various political implications when they are carried out in the name of 'civilizing the natives'. The introduction of 'modernity' by colonial powers in colonized spaces is invariably accompanied by the construction of 'classics', which in turn serve as the validating 'origin' of that particular brand of modernity.

My mother admired Elizabeth Bennet's spunkiness but chose Jane Bennet as her heroine. In a situation where you had to fight for your chance to read these stories, it must have been too much for her to dream about, much less desire, a world where you have to fight for an ideal marriage. After all, Jane's sweet temper, with some help from her sister's frankness with her would-be lover, allowed her to attain what she deserved without putting up too much of a fight. In a way, my mother was too shrewd a reader of her own world to accept and share Elizabeth's moral triumph. *Pride and Prejudice*, to her, was a fantasy text where women get the men they want and deserve, and, if she was to dream, she would dream the easiest one. The patriarchal, not to mention colonial, world she lived in was not about meritocracy, whether the merits be moral or otherwise, and she was not to be fooled by the fantasy world of *Pride and Prejudice* even though she loved the text for its crispness and vigour.

My mother's suspicion of Austen's moral authority is representative of Korean female readers' reception of Austen's novels following the Japanese occupation of Korea and the Korean War. Aptly, Pak Wansŏ, the most significant woman writer of postcolonial Korea—and one who shares my mother's experience of the devastation of Japanese colonialism and the Korean War down to the last detail (such as the year of their birth and the elementary school they attended, as well as their thwarted dreams of education and careers)—named one of her novels *Pride and Fantasy* [Omgangwa Mongsang] (1980).<sup>1</sup> The solidity of the moral system that Austen's title suggests only becomes apparent when we compare it with Pak's, in which 'pride', instead of being pitted against a fairly equivalent and complementary moral shortcoming, 'prejudice', is paired instead with 'fantasy', and becomes unbound and uncontrollable, as it were. Contrary to Austen's 'prejudice' that can and ought to be remedied by a stable moral critique, Pak's 'fantasy' doesn't inherently imply the stern yet reliable comfort of knowing that things can be set to rights.

Pak Wansŏ has long been regarded as the 'Jane Austen of Korean national literature'. As the lone female writer in the otherwise masculine as well as male literary circles of Korea, Pak shares the widely acknowledged objective of oppositional cultural movements in Korea, that of examining the structure of class oppression within the framework of critical realist fiction. What sets Pak apart from other writers of Korean national literature, however, is her commitment to the critique of patriarchy as evidenced in everyday life. Pak Wansŏ's trajectory as a person and a writer can be read as the most telling *realist*—that is, 'typical' in the Lukácsian sense—narrative of the cultural history of colonial and postcolonial Korea. Born in 1931, Pak experienced the most brutal phase of Japanese colonialism until she was 14 years of age. This was a time when Koreans were not allowed to use the Korean language, and were forced to make other 'sacrifices' to satisfy the imperial ambitions of Japan. After five years of the utmost confusion, delirious celebration and violence, following independence (1945), the Korean War broke out in 1950. At the time, Pak was in the first year of college, majoring in literature and dreaming of becoming a

writer one day. During the war, however, her brother was killed and she was forced to give up her education and to make a living working at an American military base. After the war, she wasn't allowed to pick up her life where it was disrupted. She got married right after the end of the war and stayed home without continuing her education or writing novels for close to twenty years. In 1970, at the age of 40, Pak started writing and publishing her novels—and these have changed the configuration not only of feminist literature in Korea but also of the tradition of Korean realist novels and oppositional culture in general.<sup>2</sup>

Her novels revolve around two interlocking themes: one, the Korean War and the ideological conflicts that have disrupted and destroyed individual lives; and the other, what it means to live as a woman in a postcolonial Korea that has been intent on constructing an 'economic miracle', following the war. Inevitably her novels investigate and unravel the complex transactions among patriarchy, neo-colonial influence, and raging capitalism that has restructured and reconfigured the whole social structure and cultural fabric of Korea.

*Pride and Fantasy* [Omgangwa Mongsang] is one of her earlier novels. In this novel, she explores the burden of the colonial legacy in intricate detail: the 'burden' of inheriting the capital accumulated by pro-colonial and pro-neocolonial ancestors on the one hand, and the burden of the excruciating and suffocating poverty inherited from ancestral freedom fighters on the other. By portraying two youths trying to cope with opposite kinds of pressure and obstacles, Pak reveals the botched decolonization process in the Korean peninsula and puts to test the reader's belief in the 'post-coloniality' and 'modernity' of Korean society. More than anything else, the novel is the exploration of a moral principle that might free both youths from disabling pride and shame—one deals with his economic and social prestige that has to be also his source of shame, and the other struggles with the glorious past which can only add bitterness to his present abject poverty. The narrative of *Pride and Fantasy* bears a striking resemblance to Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in that, in both novels, two people from disparate social spheres fall in love with each other and have to find ways to overlook if not overcome their pride as well as the circumstances dividing them. I argue that the fact of two *male* protagonists in Pak's novel, instead of a heterosexual couple, does not in any way dilute the intensity of their emotion or the stakes they have in their relationship. This is not to suggest that *Pride and Fantasy* is a text about homoeroticism. Rather, it is to argue that Pak emphasizes many kinds of emotional relationships and does not privilege only sexual, 'romantic' ones. I will discuss later how Pak disrupts the most sacrosanct patriarchal script of romantic ideology in her 'realist' critique of marriage practices and the gendered rituals of domestic life, by refusing to centralize and privilege sexual desires and 'love' at the expense of different modes of love and desire. The medium of realist narrative allows Pak to investigate the process of cultural meaning-making that regulates both the 'private' daily transactions of ordinary members of society, and the 'public'—political, economic, social—discourse of the nation, alike.

Significantly, Pak's two protagonists in *Pride and Fantasy*, Namsang and Hyön, also interpret and dream about their world through the constructs of realist novels.

Namsang was well aware of the plots of *Doctor Zhivago*, *Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary*, *Captain Ahab*, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, having heard about them all from Hyön... Namsang believed that Hyön would become a novelist. He even knew the title of his first novel: *Doctor Namsang*.... He was not ashamed of his poverty any more because it was his poverty that would provide the dramatic plot for the unwritten masterpiece. Nor was he afraid of the hardships in store. He dreamed about a future filled with fun, love, and romance, and believed in his own greatness for the sake of the greatness of the masterpiece. There were no reasons why they couldn't get what they wanted. They were young, healthy, deeply fond of each other, and engrossed by their own potential for success.

(Pak 1980:75; my translation)

The list of the novels Hyön and Namsang share is what you would find in any collection of 'masterpieces' of world literature following the Korean War, the kind that my mother and Pak Wansö pored over in their youth. More than twenty years after the end of the Korean War, it still remains in the basic territory of the world classics: the Russian and European realist narratives that Japanese cultural authority promoted in the modernization project of Korea, a phenomenon which has to be explained by the Fanonian critique of failed decolonization. Quite unrelated to the effects those authorities expected from introducing those novels, the realist narratives of the West appeal to Pak's youths because of their advocacy of individualism as a response to social conflicts. The novels of Tolstoy or Thomas Hardy, despite their critique of social contradictions, valorized the stable individual subjectivity that struggles with adversity. Namsang and Hyön plan on writing their own realist narratives that not only interpret but shape their world and their future. Namsang would gloriously struggle and ultimately overcome his environment by beating the odds and becoming a doctor, and Hyön would write the book that would finalize and monumentalize the inscription of their will onto the world. Thus textualized, their daily lives of abject poverty and hardship become more than tolerable due to the orderly shape and the linear narrative imposed on them. The novel traces the trajectory of the demise of their fantasies and the violence of that process, but without giving up on the hope of enduring love between the two friends. Inevitably, this particular kind of love does not have too much to do with the institution of marriage, or even with the kind of sexual or romantic relationships that Jane Austen explored as possible answers.<sup>3</sup> Almost two hundred years after Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Pak pursues 'the moral discrimination' that can be detached

from class allegiance and economic and political interests outside of the institution of marriage and the sexualized romantic relationship altogether.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Pak does not arrive at this answer easily. She understands both the power of the romantic ideology and the cultural hegemony of the institution of marriage. In *A Faltering Afternoon* (1977), Pak portrays and critiques the institution and customs of the marriage market in postcolonial Korea within a framework that very much resembles that of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Three daughters in the novel pursue the ideals, myths, and fantasies around romantic relationship, sexuality, marriage, and family, the way Jane, Elizabeth, and Lydia—the three daughters in *Pride and Prejudice* who successfully marry—do in their quite distinct ways. Following the trajectories of the three sisters' mishaps, Pak patiently tells us that, with the best of intentions, the institution of marriage and gender relations in general in post-War, post-economic-miracle Korea are farcical at best and devastating in most cases.

It is noteworthy that Pak examines the complicity of patriarchy and capitalism by following a father's pained gaze on his three daughters' 'quest' for ideal marriage. By interweaving the father's downfall as a small factory owner with his daughters' (especially his first daughter's) disastrous marriages, Pak interrogates the notion of love—romantic, sexual, and fatherly—within the structures of class and patriarchal exploitation. Pak's fiction, very much in the Austenian manner, traces the ideological imprint of the social constraints on a 'love' that can never be innocent. In this essay, I compare Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Pak's *A Faltering Afternoon* with a view not merely to pointing out the similar kind of intensity in their critiques of the ruthless proceedings of patriarchy, but also to extending and expanding our understanding of each novel by focusing on the slippages between the conceptual frameworks of the two novels. I argue that Pak's novel, by representing the brutal exchange of women's sexuality and bodies from the viewpoint of the failed and unwilling patriarch, suggests a more nuanced and complex reading of Austen's novel. It is not only romantic love that is commodified and distorted out of recognizable shape. Caught in the midst of the 'need' to provide for children and to help them make it in the capitalist world of ruthless competition, parental devotion too cannot remain unproblematic. Thus *A Faltering Afternoon* engages in a critique not only of family as a problematic structure of power dynamics but of the notions of love, caring, and humanity itself, that have become impossible concepts.

Here it would help to remind ourselves of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. For the purpose of the essay, I will focus on the figure of Mr Bennet and his relationship to patriarchal authority, the construction of female sexuality and desire, and the critique of the institution of marriage in the context of the logic of capitalist, 'acquisitive' culture.<sup>5</sup> My argument is that Pak puts all three theses to test by applying Austen's moral discrimination and her narrative tools, those of the observation of the ritualistic details, to postcolonial Korea where Western modes of capitalism and patriarchy have been transplanted in a concentrated manner. The Japanese colonization of Korea in the first half of the twentieth

century did not allow Koreans to negotiate with Western cultures and modernity on their own terms. Added to that was the neo-colonial domination of Korea by the United States after the Korean War, which brought about the widespread admiration and yearning among Koreans for all things Western or American, old and new. As a consequence, both capitalism and Western patriarchy (with all of its baggage of commodification and objectification of sexuality and the female body included) were introduced to Korea in shorthand, as it were. One of the side effects is that the causes, processes and consequences of 'modernization' and 'Westernization' became quite legible. In a way, then, Jane Austen's novels—*Pride and Prejudice* in particular—not only assume urgent significance for the present moment, but the text itself becomes more distinct in its contradictions.

It is in the figure of the father and the exploration of what it means to be a patriarch that *A Faltering Afternoon* helps us read *Pride and Prejudice* with greater insight. Mr Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* is a reluctant patriarch who does not explicitly vaunt or even want his patriarchal authority. He 'has taken refuge in mockery just as he takes refuge in his library—both are gestures of disengagement from the necessary rituals of family and society' (Tanner 1986: 45). Yet he, knowingly or unknowingly, asserts his authority exactly based on his 'disengagement from the necessary rituals of family and society'. His first appearance in the book is heralded by his 'wisdom' concerning the true nature of the marriage market. He addresses his over-zealous wife: 'You are overscrupulous surely. I dare say Mr Bingley will be very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying which ever he chuses of the girls' (Austen 1972:45). By pointing out not only the true nature of social visits among neighbours but also the exchangeability of his girls as goods transacted upon, Mr Bennet detaches himself from the scene that, despite its fancy trappings and the meticulous social conventions surrounding it, will not brook close scrutiny. He doesn't recognize the fact that, for his daughters, such a detachment is not an option and indeed they cannot help but plunge into the market and try to make it whichever way they know.

Austen does not miss out on an opportunity to let him pay for his witty yet irresponsible understanding of the situation. In an almost cruel manner, Austen makes Mr Bennet predict what will happen to Lydia, when Elizabeth urges Mr Bennet to assume the role of patriarchal authority and prevent Lydia from going to Brighton. Mr Bennet refuses to consider the possible serious consequences, making deprecating comments instead about his family in general and about Lydia in particular: 'Lydia will never be easy till she has exposed herself in some public place or other, and we can never expect her to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to her family as under the present circumstances' (257). Lydia of course exposes herself in various ways in Brighton and forces Mr Bennet to confront the fundamental issue he was too wise and sophisticated to be mired in up to that point: female sexuality. A daughter's elopement, in the eighteenth-century cultural imagination, is the most flagrant offence to patriarchy in general and the most humiliating insult to a patriarch himself—due mainly to an

economic reason, that of endangering the value of the female body and sexuality, but also to the cultural myths concerning female chastity and the male ownership of their bodies.

By presenting Mr Bennet as a morally bankrupt and hapless father rather than a brutal and oppressive one (as Mr Harlowe in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* is), Austen ironically emphasizes the power of patriarchal authority. You cannot easily abdicate the authority because it is a position you have to negotiate with carefully whether or not you desire it. Once you are born into a society ruled by patriarchal culture, with all its rituals and trappings, you might be able to detach yourself from the rituals but not from its power structure that has very real power over disenfranchised individuals—in this instance, daughters. As we hear from Mr Bennet himself, *Pride and Prejudice* may well be read as a conduct book for him rather than for his daughters: 'No, Lizzy, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame' (314).

The novel prepares the reader for the disaster at the end by frequently reminding the reader of the seeming autonomy of patriarchal culture. It is indeed at the level of culture that Jane Austen is addressing the dangers and cruelty of patriarchy. Throughout the text, she lays bare the prevalence and power of a patriarchal 'logic' that bestows 'natural' meanings on people's clothes, words, deeds, and lives. The process begins from the very first sentence of the text: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife' (51). The power of the sentence comes not from mere irony but from the aptness of the thesis. This particular 'truth' concerning male needs and desires, embedded in the logic of male sexuality, primogeniture, and social prestige, is indeed universally acknowledged. A culturally and historically limited truth, yes, but a 'universal' truth none the less. This particular version of logic and truth, of course, takes an almost bizarre tone of mimicry when Mr Collins appears on the scene and pushes the logic to its extreme, but inevitable, endpoint:

'You must give me leave to flatter myself, my cousin, that your refusal of my addresses is merely words of course. My reasons for believing it are briefly these: —It does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy your acceptance, or that the establishment I can offer would be any other than highly desirable...and you should take it into farther consideration that in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you.... As I must therefore conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me...'

(150)

Confident of his ability to read the deep structure of the courtship language, Mr Collins does not have problems discarding Elizabeth's utterance. His logic is painfully clear and even convincing in the social universe of Mrs Bennet's 'four and twenty families' (89) where you need to be wary of your limited

opportunities. Upon hearing the outcome of Mr Collins's meeting with Elizabeth, Mrs Bennet confidently declares that 'Lizzy shall be brought to *reason*' (151; emphasis added).

The propitious manner in which he transfers his attachment from Elizabeth to Charlotte Lucas also resonates with and reaffirms Mr Bennet's remark at the beginning of the book concerning the exchangeability of female goods on the marriage market. The most powerful endorsement of the logic of the marriage market, though, comes from Charlotte Lucas when she makes the 'logical' and 'reasonable' choice of accepting Mr Collins's address. Possibly the only other intelligent young female in the text after Elizabeth Bennet, Charlotte 'accepted [Mr Collins] from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment' (163). By putting the words 'pure' and 'disinterested' in this uncomfortable context, Austen asks the reader to take a long and hard look at the genuine content of the romantic ideology. What if the female desire for an 'establishment' is justifiably as powerful and significant as the desire for a pure and disinterested love? What if desire and love are always already so deeply embedded in a social, political, and economic nexus that the concepts of purity of motives or disinterestedness are impossible concepts to begin with?

Thus the world of *Pride and Prejudice* is a closed circuit where money not only influences and regulates economic and political practices but defines and determines formerly sacred concepts such as reason and moral virtue. Elizabeth asks Mrs Gardiner in their discussion of Wickham's pursuit of Miss King with her ten thousand pounds, 'what is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and the prudent motive? Where does discretion end, and avarice begin?' (188). Mr Collins's flawless logic of supply and demand, and Charlotte Lucas's and now Wickham's prudence and discretion, which cannot be distinguished from mercenary motives and avarice, offer a good view of a seemingly invincible cultural 'truth': not only the institutions of marriage and family but romantic relationship itself is inscribed by the discourse and logic of profit. The fact that money is not always based on land in Austen's England with its prosperous colonial endeavours does not fundamentally disrupt the operation but only complicates the processes of negotiations among new money and old money, landed interest and trade interest.

Against this backdrop of an 'openly acquisitive' society and culture, Jane's and Elizabeth's success stories do read like a fantasy text. Yet when we leave Jane and Elizabeth at the threshold of matrimony and come to Pak's *A Faltering Afternoon*, we are forced to enquire into the nature of this particular fantasy itself. In the postcolonial Korean society of the 1970s, the complicated process of negotiations around matrimony, with the growing population, has created a demand for professional matchmakers specializing in controlling and fulfilling those fantasies. One of those celebrated professionals, Madame Ttu, offers her analysis of the marriage market where fantasies, desires, and mercenary motives not only intersect with each other but become each other.

People quickly assume that money wants to marry power, but such a formulaic definition is very different from the reality. The protected society where these young men and women belong in desires a world with dreams much more variegated than that. Money dreams power...this is so formulaic it doesn't even deserve the name of dream. Money sometimes dreams beauty. Some other times it dreams superior intellect.... I happen to be born with the ability to penetrate people's dreams and make those dreams come true.

(195)

Mr Collins, then, actually does not know as much as Mrs Bennet when she exclaims upon hearing about Jane's engagement with Bingley: 'I was sure you could not be so beautiful for nothing!' (358). What is implied here, of course, is not as much meritocracy as the many facets of the commodity system where female beauty can very well be valued wares that can be translated into symbolic capital. Similarly, Elizabeth's 'remarkably fine' eyes and 'lively mind' that win over Darcy might tell us more about the various ways female virtues and attributes are assessed in the marriage market than about romantic, disinterested love. Being able to marry a good-natured, intelligent, and beautiful woman certainly adds to the comfort and well-being of the privileged male, and if she is without money it adds, as well, to his credit. We should not forget that Darcy can surely afford Elizabeth. After all, the only obstacle Darcy has to overcome is the offences Elizabeth's embarrassing relatives present to his meticulous senses. His status and prestige, not to mention his economic prosperity, are never in danger from his attachment to Elizabeth. Moreover, Darcy's choice of Elizabeth over Miss Bingley or Miss De Bourgh confers upon him a moral superiority that cannot be easily bought by money alone. In that sense, Darcy is being amply rewarded for his fine taste in the form of the unconditional approbation of the author and the readers, the approbation that ultimately reverts to his prestige and prosperity. Hence the achievement of hegemony is based on moral as well as economic and political superiority.

## II

Pak Wansŏ's *A Faltering Afternoon*, at first glimpse, offers us the same framework as Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: three daughters pursuing the dream of an ideal marriage in the marriage market. Three daughters named Chohi [the first female], Uhi [the female repeated], and Malhi [the last female], confront plights exactly like Jane's and Elizabeth's in that they also occupy a social and economic position that precariously hovers between rich and poor. In a patriarchal society that does not offer women any other access to political and economic power, they need to marry right in order not to fall on the wrong side of the fence that they are sitting on. In a postcolonial Korea where there is no stable base for the middle class, the contrast and contradiction between the rich and the poor are

much starker than in Austen's England; and these women desire and dream about the world of the rich even more fiercely and desperately than Austen's. Confronting the dilemma of having to make it in the world by presenting themselves as desirable, without cheapening their value by appearing too eager, these three women unsurprisingly choose paths similar to the three sisters who marry in *Pride and Prejudice*. Chohi, very much like Jane, plays by the rules and faithfully goes through the rituals of the marriage market to the very last detail without offering any significant resistance. Uhi, like Lydia, puts sexual fulfilment before anything else, falls into an openly sexual, thus disgraceful, relationship, and has to be rescued by her family who pays for the retrieval of her reputation. Malhi is Pak's Elizabeth, spunky yet sensitive, determined not to follow Chohi's or Uhi's precedents. It is in the construction and investigation of the figures of Hǒ Sǒng, the father, and Chohi, the first daughter, that Pak creates a productive tension with Austen's text, a tension that illuminates the multifaceted relationship of patriarchy and other social powers in both texts. Ultimately the tension enriches our readings of Pak's and Austen's texts by revealing the paradigmatic limits of each.

The father, Hǒ Sǒng, in *A Faltering Afternoon*, is a former teacher, the equivalent of an Austenian 'gentleman'. That means he is not used to dirtying his hands making money to support his family. However, like many former 'gentlemen' in postcolonial Korea where so many drastic and irrevocable turns of events—colonization, decolonization, the Korean War, revolutions, and the *coup d'état*—disrupted the social and economic order, he does not have the financial stability that would have been available to him in pre-colonial Korea. Pushed off the traditional perch of prestige and pulled into the accelerated capitalist economy, which is also ferociously patriarchal, he has made a necessary choice of partaking in the actual scene of production.

It was for the sake of the daughters that he left teaching and entered into industry when he didn't have any experience in the area. The year his youngest brother and oldest daughter had entered college and the second and the third daughters were in high school, Hǒ Sǒng resigned from school. His thoughts were not too original or even clear. He didn't have any idea how tight it would be to pay the tuition for his brother and three daughters. He did not even know whether it was at all possible. He also thought that a patriarch shouldn't be this clueless.

(17)

Unlike Mr Bennet, Hǒ Sǒng is more than willing to bear the burden of being a patriarch and to provide for his family as well as he can. The pressure not to be 'clueless' in an economic and political structure intent on keeping him clueless pushes him into a role that he is not too happy or familiar with: a small business owner making money by exploiting young workers. Throughout the novel, Hǒ Sǒng is torn between the obligation to satisfy his family's needs and the guilt

that comes from deriving his family's comfort from the exploitation of his employees, labouring in poor and unhealthy conditions, underpaid and overworked. Alongside the mishaps and disasters of his daughters' pursuit of ideal marriages, lie the vicissitudes of the career of Hǒ Sǒng, the faithful patriarch, from teacher to modestly successful businessman to bankrupt old man. A faithful patriarch and an unwilling exploiter of workers, Hǒ Sǒng kills himself on the wedding day of his youngest daughter, which concludes the novel.

The story of Hǒ Sǒng assumes special significance in the context of the economic restructuring of Korea in the 1960s and 1970s. The early phase of the economic miracle of Korea largely depended upon light industry and sweatshop labour for the fast accumulation of capital without significant investment in overhead costs. That is when Hǒ Sǒng entered the scene of industry and had a modest success. In the 1970s, after the initial phase of the small-scale, but fast, accumulation of capital, the Korean economy favoured the consolidation of capital and swiftly entered the phase of monopoly capitalism. Numerous small businesses were either absorbed by the bigger industries or simply went bankrupt. That period also coincided with the rise of the culture of spectacular consumption and the consolidation of the boundaries around the rich. Hǒ Sǒng's mode of small business was in the process of becoming extinct exactly at the historical moment when his wife and daughters desperately pursued the dream of becoming part of the prestigious class, a dream which then had looked deceptively and tantalizingly close. Pak's narrative calmly and almost ruthlessly dissects the workings of these historical trends and reveals the ways in which lives were destroyed.

Chohi, determined to make a leap to the other side of the boundary that divides the poor and the rich, is very well aware that women do not have too many options or chances. She teaches her little sister, Malhi: 'You'd better know this yourself.

Women have only one opportunity to jump over the fence around theirsurrroundings and that is when they get married. You should jump over it at the rightmoment even if it is hard. Why should you marry if you are just to move your buttover within the fence?' (186). Armed only with her good looks, determination, andthe encouragement from her mother who shares Mrs Bennet's sentiment ('I was sureyou could not be so beautiful for nothing!'), Chohi charges into the marriage market—only to learn that the negotiation is much more complicated and brutal than sheexpected. After being rejected by desirable mates a few times due to Hǒ Sǒng'ssmall business that does not meet the requirements of wealth and status (read: youshould be able to keep your distance from the actual scene of exploitation), Chohidecides to marry a widower twice her age. Anticipating a life of luxury and comfort,Chohi feels desperate about her future obligation to the daily rituals of marriage: 'Chohi felt suffocated thinking she would have to talk to him about somethingeveryday when she marries him. That thought is even worse than the prospect ofhaving to sleep with him everyday' (237). After marriage, Chohi does succeed inlearning about male sexual exploits

by heart and satisfying every fantasy of her husband, but fails to retain her sanity.

By disrupting the patriarchal script that puts sexuality first and foremost, Pak calmly tells the reader that Chohi's and Uhi's marriages both disastrously fail despite, or rather because of, their antithetical understanding and approach to sexuality. Chohi uses her sexuality as her main ammunition in order to climb up the social ladder, while Uhi disregards everything else for the sake of her sexual desires. However, they both share the centrality of sexuality in their understanding of marriage, romantic relationships, family, and eventually society and the world itself. Thus they do not step outside of the patriarchal script that defines women's roles, subjectivities, and potential exclusively in terms of their sexuality.

Throughout the text, Pak seems to suggest two things: one, there is no magical or even special aspect in romantic relationship that should set it apart from other types of emotional commitment; two, any type of emotional investment in a brutally patriarchal and capitalist world is trapped in the discourse of competition and profit, hence the term 'investment'. Time and again, Pak shows that the most significant and urgent emotions are those that parents harbour in their heart for their children and those that children feel for their parents. Forcefully pushed back by the patriarchal myth of romantic love and sexual desires that renders all other emotions irrelevant, both parents and children feel helplessly entrapped in the collective pursuit of profitable marriages.

Thinking about his daughters and bracing himself in his determination to provide for them as well as he could, Hō Sōng feels the weight of his love for his children:

Hō Sōng thinks his daughter in her happiness is so lovely. So lovely that his heart aches. This child should be happy. I will do anything to make that happen. Anything. Anything.... He wonders why his love for his daughter has to become a knot in his heart, a tragic and scary obsession about doing anything for her. Doesn't this sound more like revenge than love?

(529)

Pak suggests that, in Korea with its frenzy of economic development in the 1970s and 1980s, love has become an impossible concept.

Interrogating the validity and the limits of the Austenian paradigm of realist narrative relating to the ideology and practice of the marriage market, I argue that, when put to the test in 'postcolonial' Korea, the realist narrative radically critiques if not subverts Austen's explicitly conservative and optimistic vision of the compatibility of 'morality' and the marriage market, and the viability of the concept of civilization itself. Here we might have to look for answers outside the literary world and remember the specific conditions of the Korean economy where, due to typically colonial and postcolonial circumstances, the economic transition from pre-modern to postmodern systems became contracted within a span of twenty to thirty years. Austen in a sense was allowed the historical

'limitations' of realist novels. She acutely and faithfully portrays the major contradictions of the moment—thus 'meeting the requirement of the great realist narrative writer'<sup>6</sup>—without having to confront their ultimate result or long-term consequences. On the other hand, the 'reality' for Pak is a palimpsest formation of postcolonial economy where several major contradictions—from those of industrial capitalism, financial capitalism, imperial capitalism (which Lenin termed the ultimate form of capitalism) to post-colonial, postmodern, and post-industrial capitalism—are concentrated in one geographical and historical site, reinforcing and conflicting with each other.

Consequently, Pak has to confront the dire consequences and 'logical' endpoint of the capitalist logic of everyday life, marriage, romantic ideology, and sexuality. The result is either the heroic vision of renewal (which is sustained by the author's moral determination rather than anything else), or the recognition of the possibility of total destruction of civilization and culture where concepts like humanity, family, and love have become impossible. In this context, the project of reading Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* alongside Pak's *A Faltering Afternoon* assumes an urgent historical significance in forcing the reader in the early years of the twenty-first century to confront the two options, and to search for possible others. Thus reading critically requires an intellectual commitment and rigour befitting the seriousness and urgency of the task at hand. Further, we need to reconfirm the thesis of the dialectics of critical realism which, in its pursuit of the representations of historical reality and 'truth', does not disregard the everyday struggle of women and men in their negotiations with the world, their needs, or their readings of reality. Pak's novel makes us reflect that, while Mr Bennet might laugh at the travesty of the marriage market, it is his daughters who have to come up with realistic narratives in order to negotiate their fate in it.

### Notes

- 1 Pak made sure that the sound of her title still retained the balance and control of Austen's. In place of the Austen alliteration (*P*ride, *P*rejudice), Pak uses assonance (*Q*uan, *M*ongsang). The simulation of the containment in form actually accentuates the threatened disruption in content.
- 2 Her novels have yet to be translated into English. All translations of passages cited are my own.
- 3 Claudia Johnson aptly points out that 'even if marriage in Austen's novels is not always described realistically as a woman's purpose in life, nothing else is' (Johnson 1988:91). She also argues that 'to most readers, Austen's allegiance to conservative social values is proven by the inevitability of marriage in her novels, for it is marriage that at all times confirms and reproduces established social arrangements, and marriage that, at this particular time, was seen as the best possible arrangement in an imperfect world and, moreover, the sole arrangement by which we can nurture precious moral affections' (Johnson 1988:88).

- 4 Raymond Williams points out that we witness in Austen's novels 'the development of an everyday, uncompromising morality which is in the end separable from its social basis and which, in other hands, can be turned against it' (Williams 1975: 145).
- 5 Williams defines Austen's society in eighteenth-century England as 'an openly acquisitive society' (Williams 1975:143).
- 6 See Engels's discussion of the 'triumph of realism' in Balzac's novels where realism prevails over the explicit conservatism of the author and reveals the typical and central contradictions of the age.

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***Clueless* in the neo-colonial world order**

Gayle Wald

Seldom has a contemporary US ‘teen flick’ risen to the levels of both critical and commercial popularity attained by Amy Heckerling’s 1995 film *Clueless*, an Americanized and updated version of Jane Austen’s novel *Emma*.<sup>1</sup> One of four Austen film adaptations released in US cinemas in the space of two years (the others were *Sense and Sensibility*, *Persuasion* and a much-hyped version of *Emma* featuring Gwyneth Paltrow), *Clueless* not only attracted generally high critical regard in the mainstream and independent film press, but in its video version the film became a fast best-seller, particularly among the young female teenagers who were its primary target audience. Indeed, in a year that also witnessed the release of Larry Clark’s frankly dystopian *Kids*, a movie with which it was frequently contrasted in reviews, the fate of *Clueless* seemed almost as charmed as that of its protagonist, the ever fortunate Cher Horowitz. Modelled on Austen’s heroine Emma Woodhouse, Cher lives a life that appears as orderly and abundantly provided for as her overstocked clothes closet, as seen in the film’s opening sequence. It is a life untouched by the social and familial conflict, drugged-out confusion or sexual turmoil that characterize other cinematic depictions of adolescence, including Heckerling’s own classic *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982). Or as cultural critic Cindy Fuchs observed in a review in the *Philadelphia City Paper*, ‘As “teen movies” go, *Clueless* is obviously, self-consciously, lightweight: there are no suicides, no violence, no generational battles...no class or money angst...no racial conflicts...no sexual crises.... The world of the film is ideal, shimmering, stable.’<sup>2</sup>

It is this ‘ideal, shimmering, stable’ world of *Clueless* and of its protagonist Cher (played winningly by Alicia Silverstone) that I seek to interrogate in this essay. More precisely, I’m interested in using *Clueless* to explore the role of cinematic representation in the construction of national and cultural citizenship, as well as to examine the gender, race and class dimensions of the national narratives produced by a contemporary Hollywood film explicitly addressed to an audience of adolescent and pre-adolescent US girls. The impetus for my enquiry into *Clueless* emerges, at least in part, from silences and elisions in the critical literature on nation, Empire and US cinema. While scholars have recognized the status of US films as global commodities (that is, commodities whose paths of dissemination mirror the paths of global capital), mediating the

production of national narratives for 'foreign' as well as domestic audiences, they have been reluctant to interrogate how notions of

nationhood and national identity circulate in films that do not explicitly promote jingoistic fantasies of US global supremacy. At the same time, they have often failed adequately to theorize the *gendering* of nationalist discourses in US cinema, overlooking in particular the possibility that these may be voiced, embodied or symbolized by female protagonists whose sphere of influence is more likely to be the home than the boardroom or the battlefield. Yet while *Clueless*, a clever adaptation of an English comedy of manners, would seem quite remote from the innumerable Hollywood action and suspense films that wear their nationalist desire on their sleeves, primarily calling upon women to establish the heterosexuality of male heroes, this essay argues that it is no less likely a site for the production or negotiation of national narratives and fantasies (Boose 1993: 587–91). Rather, what we find in *Clueless* is a representation of national citizenship that is inextricably tied to, and mediated through, the representation of commodity consumption, heterosexual romance, and class and gender 'cluelessness'.

Fuchs's useful oxymoron of a world at once 'shimmering' and 'stable' anticipates my method of reading *Clueless* as a film structured around contradictions, especially concerning Cher's status as a privileged First World 'consumer citizen'. Like *Emma*, *Clueless* centralizes the narrative of its protagonist's development from eager orchestrator of others' social affairs to object of her own heterosexual romance, a process depicted as both inevitable and desirable, particularly in so far as it corresponds to Cher's loss of a cluelessness that inures her to her privileged place in the 'real' world. At the same time, in pursuing this narrative end—one dictated by the precedent of Austen's text as well as by the exigencies of market and genre—*Clueless* subsumes or deflects many of the questions raised by its portrayal of Cher's national and class agency. In so doing, I argue, the film situates the subjectivity of its protagonist at the intersection of competing narratives of gender itself; for while it represents Cher as a 'First World' girl who deploys her cluelessness in order to 'innocently' access power, it also suggests that such cluelessness stands in the way of her 'successful' gendering according to the demands of the marriage plot.

In this essay I engage the following questions. How does *Clueless* envision citizenship, and more particularly how does it use the alibi of a critique of 'clueless' citizenship to justify and enable a certain gender narrative? How does the film construct Cher's identity through her pursuit of commodities, and how is this representation related to US cultural fantasies of consuming the world? How does the film use the character of Cher to construct the nation—or national/imperial desire—as itself innocent or clueless? In rendering Cher's cluelessness a narrative obstacle to heterosexual romance, what light does the film shed on the power relations implicit in its own 'girling' of national discourse?

As these questions imply, in my analysis, *Clueless* is characterized by a degree of ideological and narrative ambiguity that I also find in its heroine, who is

neither entirely clueless about her social location nor entirely capable of constructing an alternative to the imperatives of heterosexualization and romantic coupling that largely determine the direction of the film's ending. This reading of Heckerling's film in turn contributes to my larger argument about the ways that conventional narratives of gender ultimately frustrate the capacity of economically privileged First World women to realize their complicity with neo-colonial relations of domination, on the one hand, and to recognize the mutuality of their experience with the manifestly different experience of economically disadvantaged and/or Third World women, on the other. As *Clueless* helps to illustrate, the 'proper' gendering of economically privileged First World women will depend, to one degree or another, on their cluelessness about (read: ignorance about as well as 'innocence' with regard to) the various interests through which their own privileged identities are established. As the term *clueless* itself suggests, First World women enjoy their privileges from a subject-position that paradoxically denies them status as political and intellectual agents, thereby diminishing their ability to resist conventional scripts of both gender and nation.

In what follows, I develop my argument about *Clueless* by framing it within the context of the issues raised by Heckerling's 'Americanization' of Austen's text. In invoking such a term, I do not mean to argue that Cher is simply Emma Woodhouse temporally and geographically transposed from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, and from the English countryside to Southern California. In order for *Clueless*'s representation to 'work' in the ways that I am suggesting it does, Heckerling's film must account at the levels of both spectacle and narrative for shifts from a colonial to a neo-colonial order and for the different identity-formations that emerge or recede in the wake of such shifts. Here I am interested in the ways that the film effects a 'translation' of Emma, the unwitting heiress of British imperial and colonial enterprises (although she herself has never visited the English seaside), into Cher, a 'citizen' of Beverly Hills named after the eternally youthful and ambiguously 'ethnic' star of contemporary infomercials, and the beneficiary of a late twentieth-century 'global' economic order. My essay thus begins by demonstrating how *Clueless* establishes Cher's identity in and through a tacit discourse of 'First World-Third World' economic and social relations. After showing how *Clueless* represents Cher's citizenship in terms of her privileged relation to commodities, as well as both implicitly and explicitly to the labour (and bodies) of Third World women workers, I go on to show how the film forwards the ends of the romance plot by gendering her within the context of her vulnerability to sexualized violence, significantly staged within a symbolically 'Third World' locale where Cher cannot hold on to her class privilege. In so doing, I argue, Heckerling's film traces the process through which Cher subtly sheds cluelessness in order to embrace a more acceptable form of domestic virtue, though she initially resists it.

As I suggested in my opening reference to the recent handful of Jane Austen film adaptations, I see *Clueless* as implicated within a larger discourse of US

nostalgia for an imagined and romanticized English past. Here *Clueless* might be seen, however, as a potentially liberating departure from the customary translation of ‘British lit.’ classics into cinematic ‘postcards’—realist works that strive authentically to represent the habits, speech, manners and dress of the English landed gentry, the class that served as Austen’s primary source of artistic inspiration. Modelled after a string of commercially successful productions by the UK producer-director team Ismail Merchant and James Ivory (including 1986’s *A Room with a View*), these ‘faithful’ cinematic translations of Austen’s novels circulate within the context of US national fantasies of pre-industrial England as a site of authentic social and cultural tradition.<sup>3</sup> Whereas in films such as *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* the consumerist pleasures of the rich are endorsed under the premise of ‘historical accuracy’, in *Clueless* a space is opened up for the interpretation of consumption as a specific social practice, one shaped by factors of gender, race, nation and class. In eschewing the high-minded seriousness and patent nostalgia of these more ‘faithful’ Austen adaptations, in other words, *Clueless* also insinuates its own self-consciously clueless appropriation of a ‘classic’ or high cultural text for a more commercially marketable representation. Perhaps more importantly, in relocating *Emma* to a Southern California location more readily associated in the US cultural imaginary with a ‘postmodern’ lack of historical depth, Heckerling’s script plays with ideas of temporality and tradition that are intimately linked to the ideology of Empire, in particular to the notion that imperial power may be duplicated and extended through the establishment of ‘domestic’ traditions in various ‘foreign’ outposts, which may or may not be seen as sustaining their own cultures and traditions.

### **First World girls just wanna have fun**

The plot of *Clueless* can be summarized as follows. Cher Horowitz, the most popular girl in her class at Bronson Alcott High School, decides along with her best friend Dionne to devote her considerable energy, imagination and resources to ‘bettering’ the social standing of Tai, the slightly grungy, somewhat *déclassée* new girl at school. Cher herself takes little interest in high school boys, with their gawkiness, social immaturity and goofy ways of dressing, but she has high aspirations for Tai, whom she hopes to set up with Elton, the only boy Cher deems worthy of attention. Not surprisingly, these apparently altruistic intentions backfire when it becomes clear that Elton is merely using Tai to ingratiate himself with Cher. A scene in which Elton tries to force himself sexually on Cher and in which she is subsequently mugged by a stranger establishes her vulnerability and her need for male protection, and yet Cher initially bumbles in this regard by pursuing a romance with the new boy Christian, ignorant of the fact that he is gay.

Eventually, however, Cher comes to realize that she has fallen in love with Josh, the hunky and sensitive older guy who’s been living under her father’s roof

with her all along. On the one hand, this realization is achieved conventionally, as Cher learns to pattern her own desire after the desire displayed by Tai, who has meanwhile recuperated from her disastrous pairing with Elton and redirected her libidinal energies toward Josh. On the other hand, while Cher's attraction to Josh is necessary for the film to achieve closure and to gratify audience expectations, it is not altogether narratively predetermined or determining of the film's meaning. In particular, *Clueless* allows room for some equivocation in its portrayal of the marriage plot by introducing unresolved oedipal ambiguities: to wit, the detail that Josh is Cher's father's ex-stepson (the child of the woman he married after Cher's mother died, and whom he has since divorced). This ambiguity, however minor, carries over into the film's ending, a wedding scene in which Cher predictably catches the bridal bouquet that portends her own imminent marriage to Josh. While the penultimate moments of the film show Cher and Josh passionately kissing, in the final shot Cher turns to address the camera directly, offering a mildly sarcastic 'as if'—a phrase through which she perhaps signifies her own mild disbelief at this conventional turn in her 'fate'. The General Public song 'Tenderness' (exemplary of the film's retro-1980s soundtrack) kicks in as the credits roll.

*Clueless* establishes the contours of its overlapping national, class and gender narratives early on, in a scene that not only ensures Cher's status as a likeable and admirable film heroine, but also organizes its representation of Cher's gender identity through its portrayal of her loyalty to 'American' values of inclusion and social equality. In this scene (also one of the film's most humorous), Cher delivers a speech before her high school debating class on the subject of Haitian immigration to the United States. Assigned to argue in favour of Haitian immigration, Cher reveals in both her logic and her delivery how the principle of US altruism toward economically downtrodden or disadvantaged Third World nations is premised on the very assumptions about 'correct' femininity and domestic virtue that Cher herself must negotiate if she wants to have a romantic relationship with Josh. That is, by emphasizing Cher's cuteness as she delivers the speech, *Clueless* offers the construction and revision of 'feminine' domestic virtue as the rationale for the expansion and revision of American national identity. As she speaks, moreover, we hear the strains of the national anthem, soft at first, as they swell to an increasingly audible crescendo that coincides with her own *rhetorical* crescendo. Given its importance to my argument about *Clueless*'s own construction of national desire, I quote the 'Haiti' speech in full:

'So OK, like, right now for example, the Haitians [pronounced 'Hay-tee-ins'] need to come to America. But some people are all, 'What about the strain on our resources?' Well, it's like when I had this garden party for my father's birthday. I put R.S.V.P. 'cause it was a sit-down dinner. But some people came that, like, did not R.S.V.P. I was totally buggin'! I had to haul ass to the kitchen, redistribute the food, and squish in extra place settings.

But by the end of the day it was, like, the more the merrier. And so, if the government could just get to the kitchen and rearrange some things we could *certainly* party with the Haitians. And in conclusion, may I please remind you that it does not say R.S.V.P. on the Statue of Liberty!<sup>4</sup>

As is rather obvious, Cher's speech—not to mention Silverstone's wonderful performance of it—is calculated to win her the admiration of the film's audience as well as her own audience of classmates (who respond to the speech with cheers and applause as Cher, ever gracious, curtsies and bows). The speech scene not only serves to establish how gender is produced in and through ideologies of nationhood and national identity, but how narratives of national identity may be framed within the context of (or even serve as the rationale for) ideologies of domestic female virtue. Cher's voicing of a solidly liberal position on Haitian immigration additionally prefigures her compatibility with Josh, who lectures Cher about the environment and who, in contrast to Cher's father, wants to become a lawyer to fulfil his dreams of some day being an advocate for social justice. The only one who is apparently unpersuaded by Cher's speech is Mr Hall, the debate teacher, who gives Cher a grade of C+ (a mark she later contests). Mr Hall is never given an opportunity to explain his indifference to a performance whose cuteness and charm are so apparent to everyone else (both within and without the world of the film), but one suspects that his frustration derives from Cher's inability to 'read' Haiti properly—to understand the plight of would-be Haitian immigrants from a viewpoint informed by the history of US-Haitian relations. As it stands, Cher rationalizes Haitian immigration through an analogy that hints at her proficiency not in history but in husbandry—a proficiency that is confirmed in the scene immediately following this one when Cher's father praises her for looking after him so well.

Yet as the speech hints, here, too, Cher's performance of domestic virtue is inextricable from her role as a consumer of domestic labour, and from her obliviousness to the discrepancy between her parable and the problems that Haitians and Haitian immigrants actually face. As viewers might be led to surmise, in other words, the only way that 'real' immigrants attended her father's fiftieth birthday party were as labourers in the kitchen. Moreover, the garden party scenario merely fosters a simulacrum of parity between the poorest and richest nations in the Western hemisphere without really addressing the sources of such yawning economic disparity; as long as US citizens (those who R.S.V.P.'d) do not object to a redistribution of the abundance of food and space that they already enjoy by virtue of their power, the Haitians (the unanticipated guests who lack the civility to respond to the invitation) can be accommodated at the table.

Here the notion of 'sharing' (a pun on Cher's name?) is put forward not only as a form of inclusive, and therefore more ethical, national consumption, but also as the sign of renegotiated social relations between First World and Third World nations. The Haiti speech thus operates on a number of different levels: it

ingratiates Cher to the viewing audience, pairing her cluelessness about US-Haitian relations with the audience's affection for her as a liberal advocate of the sort of democratic values associated with national symbols such as the Statue of Liberty; it legitimates gendered domestic virtue as both a principle of international diplomacy and the means by which she can win the approval of her father and then later of Josh; and it establishes altruism (gift-giving) and communitarianism as the logical paradigms of First World-Third World relations, and by analogy of the gendered relations within the 'domestic' (that is, the national/public and home/private) spheres.

Cher's Haiti speech enacts a dialectical relationship between cluelessness and innocence that provides the basis for her privileged subjectivity within a neo-colonial world order, as well as the footing for much of the film's comedy. In many ways, too, it is a condensation of *Clueless* itself: both are charming, both are performative, and both manage to keep viewers diverted while also tacitly reinscribing conventional narratives of gender, class and nationality. Both are also *ironic*, in the sense that both invite audience dis-identification and distance. After Cher delivers her speech, for example, her debating opponent and social nemesis, Amber, complains that in talking about her father's garden party, Cher hasn't followed the teacher's instructions, which were to talk about Haiti. Amber misses the point, of course; but on another level her grievance models the mistake of reading the scene of Cher's speech too literally, as though she really were an exemplary defender of Haitian liberty and Northern-Southern solidarity. In so far as Amber is Cher's antagonist, that is, we understand her objection to Cher's speech as exemplifying her own (mock?) cluelessness, whereas Amber's refusal/inability to voice the 'con' side of the argument (that Haitians should be prohibited from immigrating to the United States) hints at Cher's success at using *her* cluelessness to silence opposition to her speech's liberal narrative.

### **Cluelessness and consumer citizenship**

In addition to illustrating the ironic rhetoric of *Clueless*, the Haiti speech correlates to the anticipated trajectory of Cher's transformation from romantically disinclined arranger of others' affairs to the eager subject of her own romance narrative. Like her father's fiftieth birthday party, which turned out to be a success after signs of potential disaster, so *Clueless* must work to avoid the potential 'disaster' of an unrealized heterosexual narrative by securing her femininity within a patriarchal and paternalistic system. In order to be made a heroine, that is, Cher must be made to recognize and also surrender to the bounded nature of her own gender identifications.

Given the film's deployment of the Haiti speech as a kind of preamble to its own narrative development, we might ask what kind of gender, class and race 'citizenship' the film subsequently imagines for Cher. In pursuing this line of questioning, we find a conflation of national citizenship with highly specific gendered and classed forms of commodity consumption. Whereas in *Emma* the

protagonist's innocence is coupled with her enjoyment of material comforts supplied by the British colonial endeavour (as Edward Said has argued in discussions of Austen's work), in *Clueless*, Cher's cluelessness about social relations is coupled with her ability to enjoy a certain gendered consumer 'agency' (Said 1994:89). From its opening shots, *Clueless* quite literally frames Cher's image within an ever-shifting panorama of commodities that lend her world an air of prosperity, convenience and abundance, signifying the presence of wealth that is never actually displayed (in part because the characters buy goods on credit).

The spectacular nature of Cher's identity as a possessor of things suggests a breakdown in the conventional binary distinction between the 'private sphere' of the home (where commodities are enjoyed) and the public sites of commodity exchange; Cher's bedroom, the quintessential private sphere of bourgeois girls, is less a private space than an extension (or even a domestic 'colony' of) the Galleria, the quintessential Southern California commodity palace, which is significantly also the place where Cher feels most 'at home'. Just as *Clueless* portrays Cher as seamlessly assimilated into this world of commodities, so commodity consumption is perfectly integrated into Cher's moral universe; when she and Dionne jokingly refer to the affliction they call 'buyer's remorse', for example, they mean regret over the purchase of an unwanted item, not regret over the fact of consumption itself. Consumption is not merely an 'activity' in which Cher and her girlfriends engage; it is also a sign through which their gendered and classed identities are made and re-made through the mediation of a purchasable relationship to commodities. In *Clueless*, consumption is additionally a primary means of sociability among girls, who alternately 'bond' over shared or similar purchases or fan social rivalries through competition over the possession of specific items (for example, a particular party dress).

As a subject who manifests class agency primarily through consumption (in part because her gender and youth preclude any direct access to the means of production), Cher might be said to belong to the 'consumer elite'—that recent 'class' of national subjects which has emerged, according to Gayatri Spivak, within the context of re-ordered power relations of the global economy of late twentieth-century capitalism.<sup>5</sup> As the phrase implies, 'consumer elite' designates an identity-formation that arises in a context in which consumption has become a sign of agency in and of itself. Yet as Arjun Appadurai argues, under such terms consumption is less a manifestation than a chimera of agency: a 'fetish' constructed through the discourse of an integrated system (or global economy), which in turn conceals the increasing concentration of power over production (Appadurai 1993:186). In Appadurai's terms, the consumer elite is thus the 'definitive citizen' of a world order in which consumption is not only increasingly divorced from production, but has actually taken the place of production within the social imaginary.

Neither Spivak nor Appadurai situates the emergence of this 'new' fetishism of the consumer in terms of a specific discourse of gender or nationality, although

Spivak's discussion locates the emergence of a 'consumer elite' within the context of Indian decolonization and the social, economic and political re-orderings that characterize the transition from 'Empire' to 'Nation'. In many ways, however, their respective depictions of consumption as a site of contradiction—a space of agency and non-agency alike—correspond to Cher's subject-position as a gendered and classed under-age 'citizen' of Beverly Hills. For Cher, consumption signifies ambiguously. It is, on the one hand, an extension of nationalized class privilege that hinges on the 'Third World-ization' of production, as well as a form of leisure or 'play' that signifies her privileged relation to both gendered domestic labour (that is, shopping isn't a chore) and the global gendering of commodity production. Yet it is also inevitably bound up with Cher's performance of femininity (that is, a properly classed, heterosexual, virginal femininity), and hence associated with the loss of gendered agency (even as such displays of femininity win Cher a degree of approval both at school and at home). Given the trajectory of the romance plot, which requires that Cher begin to question the terms of consumption in order to endear herself to Josh, who is critical of her attachment to clothes and shopping, it is particularly significant that Cher's profligacy as a consumer is paired with her failure accurately to read the social—for example, to realize that Elton likes her and not Tai. This conflation of consumption with cluelessness in turn portends the film's representation of romance as the rationale for the revision of Cher's gendered identity.

*Clueless's* representation of its protagonist's consumer identity is further complicated—albeit not in ways that are immediately or easily readable—by its coding of Cher as Jewish. Cher's Jewishness is signified both explicitly, through her possession of a recognizably Jewish last name,<sup>6</sup> and more subtly, through references to ubiquitous nose jobs and stereotypical markers of 'Jewish' ethnicity (for example, the neurotic family; the characterization of Mel Horowitz as a fast-talking, high-strung attorney), as well as through occasional puns (for example, the fact that it is a character named Christian who is an inappropriate love-object for Cher). Perhaps not incidentally, Jewishness is also part of the discourse of teenage fandom around Silverstone, a 'known' Jewish actress whose 'all-American' blonde prettiness does not immediately signify as such.<sup>7</sup> Although the film carefully avoids lapsing into anti-Semitic typecasting—for example, coding consumption as a particularly 'Jewish' pastime—nevertheless Heckerling's translation of Emma into a Jewish-American 'princess' complements the film's re-visioning of national identity in terms of specifically 'American' narratives of the upward economic mobility of immigrants. In terms of such nationalized class mythologies, Cher's Jewishness may thus be said to render her quintessentially American, the implication being that her father has risen to a position of authority within WASP society on account of professionally acquired wealth rather than ancestry.<sup>8</sup>

Cher's Jewishness abets the film's narrative of a 'multicultural' American nation (already established in the Haiti speech scene), in which racial/ethnic

subjects are treated as equals by the white majority, and in which immigrants are capable of ascending the ladder of social and economic success. What this adds up to, in fact, is a portrayal of a Benetton-esque American ‘diversity’ that forwards the film’s own nationalist subtext. For example, the film works to dissuade the audience from questioning Cher’s social privilege by representing it within the context of harmonious ‘race relations’, as symbolized by her friendships with a pointedly diverse group that includes Dionne, her African-American best friend, and Tai, whose class and ethnic differences (the latter less clear-cut) are coded through her vaguely ‘New York’ accent. Like *Independence Day* (1996), a film that packaged its blatantly nationalist agenda (that is, Americans saving the world from itself) in the guise of a domestic diversity embodied by its black and Jewish male leads (Will Smith and Jeff Goldblum), thereby contributing to the export of ‘US multiculturalism’ itself as a global and imperial commodity, *Clueless* works to convey the impression that Cher’s cluelessness with regard to *national* identity is justified because it is shared among a racially and even economically ‘mixed’ group of teenagers. *Clueless*’s innovation, in this regard, is to portray the American public high school—rather than the US Armed Forces—as the site that best illustrates the equality-in-diversity that is a hallmark of the liberal ‘multicultural’ nation-state.

This is not to say, however, that such portrayal of the American nation as welcoming and inclusive, not colonizing or racist, renders the film monolithic in its national discourse or negates the possibility of a critical subtext. For example, in making the comic *excessiveness* of Cher’s wealth clear (recall the spectacle of her hyperbolically overstocked and tidy clothes closet), the film encourages young viewers to revel in their *superiority* to her class cluelessness, and thus to establish an ironic distance from her and her friends, who are otherwise shown to have the same menstrual cramps, to suffer the same sexual insecurities, and to blunder incompetently through the same mindless homework assignments. Young audiences of the film are similarly meant to feel pleasure in their recognition of Cher’s cluelessness when she offers to donate ski boots and gourmet food items to a charity drive for a homeless shelter, or in their awareness of Cher’s ignorance when she complains to Josh that she has trouble understanding Lucy, the Horowitz family’s El Salvadoran maid, because Lucy speaks ‘Mexican’.

As this remark about Lucy implies, however, the film’s narrative of a ‘multicultural’ and class-transcendent American nation (a narrative that co-exists with its portrayal of distinctions in wealth and status) is repeatedly undermined by references to ‘Third World’ subjects or locales that are not easily assimilable to it. As I have been suggesting, to read *Clueless*’s national narrative we will need to read into some of the film’s most ‘clueless’ moments, paying attention to its formulation of relations between the ‘First’ and Third’ worlds. Such relations in turn shed light on the film’s construction of Cher as a gendered ‘First World’ subject. For example, Cher’s reference to Lucy, an immigrant domestic worker, not only complicates the film’s narrative of the United States as a welcoming

'domestic' space for all those who seek to establish themselves within its borders, but it is also instrumental in situating Cher as a gendered subject who occupies a position of national, racial and class privilege relative to other gendered subjects within the patriarchal 'private sphere'. Even as her remark displays her ignorance and a national obtuseness that viewers can laugh at, it also points to the fact that, within the confines of the home, she enjoys a comfort and freedom that are contingent on Lucy's labour. Indeed, the only time domestic work is deemed appropriate for Cher is when she is directly engaged in ministering to her father (for example, his garden party), when such work ceases to signify as domestic labour and instead becomes re-coded as filial duty. In contrast to Lucy's labour, which is naturalized within the domestic sphere, Cher's own service for her father is simultaneously assumed on account of her gender and transformed on account of her social and economic privilege.

It is important to keep in mind, moreover, how such distinctions between women who simultaneously (if unequally) perform domestic work within the patriarchal household are themselves mediated through particular imperial or neo-colonial discourses. What initially appears to be an isolated, 'domestic' conflict ('domestic' here maintaining its dual signification as both the feminized, private sphere and the masculinized public sphere of the nation itself) may thus be governed by specific national discourses about 'foreigners'. Here, for example, Cher's comment about Lucy illustrates her general indifference to national distinctions among Spanish-speaking immigrants and to household 'help'; yet it also speaks to her ignorance of the history of US intervention in El Salvador. The point is not merely that we don't expect a character like Cher to know about this history, but that her own raced and classed gender privilege is enabled through this not-knowing. As long as she maintains her cluelessness about the particular histories of El Salvadoran domestic workers in the United States, in other words, Cher can also remain the untroubled beneficiary of Lucy's labour—labour that not coincidentally also affords Cher a privileged mobility within and outside of domestic spaces. In effect, to remain ignorant/innocent of US relations with El Salvador (or for that matter Haiti) means that Cher can remain ignorant/innocent of her own relations with Lucy, and thus of her own position within a gendered economy of national, race and class privilege.

### **First World-Third World encounters and the (re) construction of gender**

While the conventions of the romance narrative require that Cher be 'rewarded' for her compliance with a patriarchal script of gender in her acquisition of a boyfriend, it is significant that the film cannot bring about such narrative closure without the intervention of a scene of gendered violence that is itself inscribed by issues of First World-Third World relations. In particular, the scene in question stages a paradigmatic 'encounter' of the gendered First World subject with the violence and disorder of the 'street', as Cher, abandoned by Elton on the way

home from a party (notably after fending off his unwanted sexual advances), is mugged in a deserted parking lot while making her way home from the distant neighbourhood of Rainbow Heights. The location of the mugging scene is significant because it offers a symbolically 'Third World' locale (as the name 'Rainbow Heights' implies) as the site in which Cher's class privilege does not 'work' to guarantee her safety and agency as a woman, as it does in the 'First World' domestic sphere. Although in her immediate response to the mugging Cher continues to insist on her classed invulnerability to gendered violence—she frets loudly at the loss of her cellular phone and the state of her muddied designer dress, for example—at the same time *Clueless* undercuts her comic interpretation of the mugging scene by using it to lay the groundwork for the refashioning of her gender identity and thus for her gradual acquiescence to the romance plot. The scene begins to serve such a legitimizing function with regard to gender when Cher calls Josh, himself in the middle of a date, to ask him to drive out to Rainbow Heights to pick her up. On the one hand, the phone call situates Cher within a gendered economy of power and mobility, in which women are victims and men rescuers, and in which Cher's plea for help constitutes a form of passive consent—if not an active invitation—to romantic courtship. Yet on other hand, the scene also serves a complementary function in engendering masculine desire, providing the first occasion in which Josh sees Cher not as a spoiled Beverly Hills brat, but as a 'woman'.

The mugging poses the most obvious danger to Cher; yet it is additionally dangerous within the context of *Clueless*'s efforts to 'domesticate', or otherwise rhetorically tame, the questions the assault raises. By immediately recuperating it as comic, and by using it to initiate the anticipated romance narrative between Cher and Josh, the film avoids having to explicitly contemplate the chastening effects of such violence on Cher's gender identity. In narrative terms, the mugging could itself signify as a moment of crisis, in which Cher might be led to question her own social and ideological alliances, and yet instead it becomes the moment when she recognizes that her interests lie in following a patriarchal script of femininity. In a sense, we might therefore conclude, the scene represents two distinct, if related, kinds of violence: a real violence whose effects are disavowed, and a symbolic, or rhetorical violence that is necessary to the film's expected narrative closure.

The film's disciplining of gender through the romance plot becomes particularly clear in its representation of the effects of her newfound interest in Josh on her previous enthusiasm for shopping. Whereas at the beginning of *Clueless* Cher's identity is defined almost entirely through her role as a consumer (of goods, labour and other people's romantic pleasure), gradually she learns to re-conceptualize her desires, realizing that fulfilment lies not merely or only in the possession of material goods but in the possession of a boyfriend. This shift in Cher's relation to consumption is ironic, if only because Cher is accustomed to finding in shopping—an activity which, significantly, she is more likely to associate with leisure and feminized sociability than with domestic

labour—a form of surrogate agency. As she reasons, even when she has a particularly ‘bad’ day at home or at school, spaces where she is expected to submit to paternal/patriarchal authority in a fashion becoming her gender (that is, to be a ‘good girl’), she can always make herself feel better by going shopping. At the mall, Cher submits only to the authority of her own desires; whereas home is a space of generational and gendered conflict, the mall is contrastingly a space of perfect equivalence between want and its fulfilment.<sup>9</sup>

In so far as shopping is a form of gendered and classed agency for Cher, it becomes all the more ironic that her habits of consumption are represented as inconsistent with the expression of erotic desire for Josh, who, brimming with paternalistic college affectation (he reads Nietzsche, eschews popular culture and at one point dons a black beret), deems her interest in items such as clothes, make-up and exercise videos frivolous. At his suggestion, Cher even takes it upon herself to engage in charitable activities, such as helping to organize a food drive; she also makes a point of dressing down in his presence and of wearing make-up less conspicuously. However, these apparently more ethical forms of consumption that Josh stands for are ultimately revealed to be a different form of domestic virtue to which Cher must accede if she wants to have a romantic relationship with him. The film wants viewers to applaud Cher’s transformation by contrasting her behaviour in the mall, where her habits of conspicuous consumption make visible her cluelessness to her class privilege, with her behaviour around Josh, where she is noticeably more self-conscious and self-critical.

Heckerling underscores these changes in Cher’s attitude and appearance with a more sparing use of voiceover in the scenes that feature Josh and Cher, thereby signifying that Cher sheds superficiality and gains in interiority as she becomes closer to Josh. (Here again, however, the film is somewhat ambivalent, since while their romantic attachment is presented as a happy confluence of romance and social convenience—after all, they not only share the same house but the same class status—the incestuous overtones of their attachment enforce a sense that Josh and Cher are potentially mismatched.)

### **‘Girl Power’ and US Film**

As the film’s resolution makes clear, Cher’s cluelessness serves conflicting ideological functions. On the one hand, it is inextricably linked to her agency as a gendered and classed First World subject. Being clueless means that Cher is spared the burden of critical self-consciousness that falls to subjects who cannot peremptorily assume that others will greet their presence with warmth and appreciation, or who take for granted a certain freedom of self-expression and/or movement. It also invests her with an aura of gendered innocence that she can draw upon in negotiations with more powerful and/or authoritative figures, from her father to her debate teacher to the man who mugs her. On the other hand, to the degree that it signifies ironically, her cluelessness opens up a space for

audience critique of Cher's class and race privilege. In this sense cluelessness offers a means for 'clued in' viewers to realize a critique of the national prerogatives that Cher's social and economic entitlement assumes—but only to a degree, since it never actually threatens the terms of stable audience identification with Cher as a likeable protagonist. Finally, and in so far as it is construed as an impediment to the development of a successful heterosexual romance narrative, Cher's cluelessness represents that quality that she must shed in order to become a more conventional cinematic heroine. For Josh to like her, in other words, she must demonstrate through example (rather than mere suggestion) that her cluelessness is merely an aspect of a performance of femininity that she uses to ward off potential romantic suitors.

My attempt to map the ideological function of cluelessness in Heckerling's film finally suggests that cluelessness may be a metaphor for ideology itself—specifically, that 'system of ideas' around issues of gender and class that Cher must shed in order to be rewarded with Josh's (and the audience's) love by the end of the film (Gramsci 1971:377). Yet even if 'cluelessness' constitutes the terrain upon which Cher acquires subjectivity and consciousness, nevertheless, the fact that the film pairs her relinquishing of cluelessness with her embrace of gendered domestic virtue remains deeply problematic, suggesting that the 'price' of her insight is submission to the heterosexual romance narrative. Here, too, cluelessness becomes a rhetorical strategy of the film itself, which requires that the audience similarly assent to the revision of Cher's gendered identity, even if we do not welcome the film's insistence on romantic coupling as a narrative climax, in so far as this revision is conflated with her growth in self-consciousness. Just as, through her attraction to Josh, Cher learns to construct her femininity in conformity with his interests and desires; so, too, the audience is led to order its desire in conformity with the romance plot and with the attendant 'gendering' of the cinematic heroine, who wins our approval and admiration for having gained in 'humanity'.

Here *Clueless*'s own status as a cultural commodity becomes particularly salient. In the United States, where it had its biggest audience, *Clueless* was an unanticipated hit, grossing \$57 million at the box office and spawning a weekly television series featuring members of the movie cast. Subsequently *Clueless*, a film that was originally based on a pilot for a television show, became a moderately successful Fox television series featuring many of the members of the film cast, with the exception of Silverstone, the film's greatest asset. (Here it is notable that the TV show locates Cher in a 'pre-Josh' period, allowing for the formulation of plots centring on Cher, her friends, and their various 'clueless' adventures, rather than the determining 'master-plot' of heterosexual romance.) In turn, the commercial success of the film—and, to a lesser degree, its TV spin-off—has been widely credited with sparking a trend in the marketing of films specifically for teenage girls, who are perceived by industry executives as an 'emerging' and highly profitable audience.

Yet while *Clueless*'s commercial viability and the marketing trends it has encouraged might attest to the 'consumer power' of US teenage girls (and could conceivably be a harbinger of such power), they also raise questions concerning the cinematic construction (or reproduction) of national, race and gender identities, both 'domestically' and abroad. In a recent *New York Times* article, for example, Joe Roth, the chairman of Walt Disney Studios, reasoned that film executives are eager to target teenage girls because they may be counted on to generate increased profits for multinational corporations: 'They're easier to market to, compared to the older audience, because their tastes are very specific', he is quoted as saying. 'They come to a movie over and over again if they like it. They don't work; they don't have families to raise. They're available consumers with money' (Weinraub 1998: B4). Roth's notion of teenage girls as an audience of 'available consumers' who 'don't work' is telling, not only for its emphasis on girls' perceived docility and therefore their commercial exploitability, but for its conflation of 'girlhood' itself with leisure and commodity consumption. Moreover, in so far as his vision of what girls 'want' is predictably market-driven, it is difficult to read his allusions to 'girl power' (a la English pop group the Spice Girls) as anything but cynical. According to Roth, girls are being rewarded for their loyalty and dependability as consumers with their 'own' films; and yet if *Clueless* is what they want, films like *Titanic* are what they are (and dependably will be) given.

I have hastened to add this account of *Clueless*'s ongoing influence within the US film industry in order to outline potential intersections between the discourse of marketing and the discourse of gender, as well as to suggest connections between the apparent 'spending power' of 'First World' girls and the representation of gendered agency in Heckerling's film. In *Clueless*, as I have argued, Cher is made to realize the bounded nature of her own gender identifications, which are themselves structured in and through the film's narrative of First World-Third World relations. Hence notions of classed and gendered domestic virtue may be recuperated as the rationale for the expansion of national identities, as the winningly patriotic conclusion of Cher's Haiti speech demonstrates. They also serve as the ideological machinery driving Cher's transfer of libidinal energy away from consumption and instead toward heterosexual coupling, such that she does not need to be 'convinced' to like Josh, but eventually comes to recognize romance as the object of her 'own' desire. Given that (at least by the *New York Times* account) *Clueless* and Cher are paradigmatic, respectively, of the kind of commercially visible movies and 'empowered female teen characters' that Hollywood sees girl audiences as 'wanting', then the highly touted consumer 'agency' of US girls may be no less problematically tethered to the embrace of conventional gender and class narratives cloaked in the rhetoric of the charming, the cute, or the clueless.

## Notes

For their helpful suggestions and comments, I would like to thank Ann Cvetkovich, Andrea Levine, Brigid Nuta, You-me Park, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, and Patricia White.

- 1 Although the conditions of cultural production and authorship of novels and films are quite different, for the sake of argument I will take Heckerling to be the 'author' of *Clueless* throughout this essay. In the film credits, Heckerling is cited as director, screenwriter and executive producer.
- 2 See Fuchs. Like her literary precursor Emma Woodhouse, Cher Horowitz may be said to live 'in the world with very little to distress or vex her' (Austen 1816/1964: 5).
- 3 In this respect, they build upon the previous successes of films such as Merchant-Ivory's *A Room With a View* (1986).
- 4 My source for this quote is 'Movie quotes for Clueless (1995)', which can be found at: <http://us.imdb.com/cache/title-more/quotes+19091>
- 5 Spivak discusses the effect of such shifts in 'Woman in difference', an essay that focuses on the representation of subaltern women in the fiction of Mahasweta Devi. In particular, she argues that nationalist discourses of development and progress, specifically those that emerge in the context of post-independence India, conceal the ongoing oppression and domination of subaltern women, a gendered identity produced under the sign of 'Empire' and 'Nation' alike. The relatively unchanged status of subaltern women—which can be inferred, in part, from Devi's fiction—belies the postcolonial narrative of national 'progress' measured in terms of democratization, secularization and capitalist development (1993: 80). Indeed, as Spivak concludes, signs of national 'progress' can produce radically differential results for subjects who occupy different social locations within the national imaginary. Hence even if such measurements could assess the impact of decolonization and independence on the lives of poor, socially despised Indian women, the effects of the transition from 'Empire' to 'Nation' could not be properly understood in abstract, universal terms, because 'Empire' and 'Nation' are both constitutive of the identities that also 'inhabit' them.
- 6 In 'High school confidential', an interview with Heckerling, *Rolling Stone* (1995) cites the name of Silverstone's character as 'Cher Hamilton', a divergence which is perhaps attributable to discrepancies in the press material, but which is nevertheless interesting as a potential 'Anglicization' of Cher's Eastern European Jewish surname.
- 7 For example, Silverstone's 'Jewish' identity is frequently noted on websites devoted to her, and Silverstone periodically is identified as/identifies herself as Jewish in interviews with the entertainment press.
- 8 The film does contain one mildly disparaging reference to 'Persians', or to the Persian Jews who constitute a small but visible minority of Jewish immigrants in Beverly Hills. *Clueless*'s ambivalence about Cher's Jewishness mirrors the coding of much 'American' comic narrative as 'Jewish' humour, as in the television show *Seinfeld*.
- 9 This conflation of domesticity and consumption contrasts with the separation of the public, entrepreneurial sphere (the site of commodity production and purchase) and

the private, domestic sphere in *Emma*. For Cher, commodity culture constitutes an alternative form of domesticity, domesticity embodied in the mall. In constructing the mall as an extension of the domestic, *Clueless* references the mall's place within late twentieth-century US culture as a surrogate public sphere—or, more precisely, a fetish of the public (complete with an architecture that conventionally includes fountains, benches, tree-lined pedestrian 'avenues' and quaint storefronts)—that orders everyday social life even as the 'real' public sphere is increasingly controlled by private interests. The mall's link to the street—the old and perhaps obsolete public sphere—is made explicit, for example, in a scene in which Tai is attacked in the Galleria by a group of rowdy boys who threaten to throw her over a railing.

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# **Part IV**

## **Poem**

**To a ‘Jane Austen’ class at Ibadan  
University**

*Molara Ogundipe*

‘Sew the old days for us, our fathers that we may wear them.’

Kofi Awoonor

I greet you in your innocence  
protected quite from time’s insults  
the agonies of flogged races, the  
blood debt tumultuous floods our lands  
our souths and hearts across the seas  
where hatreds stalk like cougars

I salute the hope in your eyes  
the faith between your brows as words  
untried fall out  
your gleaming teeth like touch of  
nails on glass

sons of farmers—descendants of slavers—born of traders  
in oil and liberty—offspring of riverain folk who plied to  
horror ships with eyes quick white in hope—ask why the  
Austen folk carouse all day and do no work—play cards  
at noon and dance the while—the while the land vanished  
behind closures—mothers’ seeds into holds or marts—  
and pliant life into pits—and in the south our souths, the  
sorrow songs rake the skies—while death the autocrat  
stalks both bond and free?

Have you heard of the fastnesses  
—the fastnesses of human refusal?

Celebrate life, not death!  
Do you ask why India grieves?  
From whence the much-loved stones  
in your much-loved crowns in London?  
Do you tie your rote-learned tales of  
the Navigator's men, Clive's antics,  
routes traced and gained to time spent  
and time stolen in Mansfield Park?  
The gracious receivings, promenades  
and tea-soaked evenings to mother's  
hard palms, her meatless dishes,  
grandfather's goitre and our madness  
at history's noon-time?

Sew the old days  
Sew the old days that we may wear them  
to dance through coming storms  
our steps detoning.

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