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Jane Austen's Englishness: Emma *as National Tale*

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> Except in America, she does not travel. She is too soaked in Englishness and English literature to be caught—a most malign histrionic, especially when quiet.
>
> —V. S. Pritchett

Of all novelists, Jane Austen is the Anglocentric, narrowly and specifically concerned not with Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, but only with England, the English, and Englishness. The novels are determinedly English through and through, a particularity Jane Austen arrived at after completing the juvenilia, those childhood pieces designed for family entertainment and full of jokes about Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, with invented Scottish and Irish names to laugh at and ludicrous adventures throughout the land. But this travelling through the British Isles was a literary game of her early years, a satire on the extravagant journeys and distant places of Gothic and sentimental fiction. As we are told in *Northanger Abbey*, the Gothic "imitators" of Ann Radcliffe were transporting their heroines to "the Alps and Pyrenees," to "Italy, Switzerland, and the south of France" (200); and the contemporary novelists Jane Austen admired, including Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Charlotte Smith, were happy to run their stories across Europe and outwards to America. Jane Austen, however, took a different course. By the time she was seventeen or eighteen, when the childhood writing was over, the travelling stops, the novels remain immovably in England.

And Jane Austen's England is narrowly chosen, an England of the Home Counties and the counties further south and southwest of London. Her chosen locations were the country houses, towns, and villages of southern England. The sole excursion beyond these confines is Elizabeth Bennet's visit to the Peak district, a tourist destination in Derbyshire, about 150 miles north of London. But of Elizabeth's journey with the Gardiners we know only the names of the towns *en route*; we are told nothing of the industrial midlands around Birmingham they would have passed through; nor is there any account of the "[l]akes, mountains, and rivers" of Elizabeth's anticipation (154). Our attention is reserved for Pemberley House, the "large, handsome, stone building" (245), reached, to theatrical effect, on the opening page of volume three.

Occasionally, characters go abroad. In *Mansfield Park* Sir Thomas Bertram and his elder son travel to Antigua in the British West Indies. Their voyage out is described in a single word: it was "favourable" (34). As for his business on Antigua, two years in completion, and his voyage home, however, much is promised: Sir Thomas, "communicative and chatty in a very

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unusual degree" "was ready to give every information . . . and to answer every question of his two sons almost before it was put" (178). The high point is "the most interesting moment of his passage to England, . . . the alarm of a French privateer" (180). But the reader's expectations are dashed. Of his "every information," his answers to "every question," and of the questions themselves indeed, Jane Austen tells us nothing. So it is throughout *Mansfield Park*. The attachment of the narrative is strictly to England. The naval duties of the sailors in both *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* take them worldwide— across the Atlantic and into the Mediterranean and the North Sea, to America, Gibraltar, Sicily, St. Domingo, the Cape of Good Hope, and the West and East Indies. Yet the reader remains untransported, the narrative is tied to England, and these faraway places, redolent of endurance, adventure, and heroism as they are to Jane Austen's sailors, are devoid of any further reality. They resonate no more than names in the text, disembodied echoes of the Napoleonic wars, mere traces of Britain's great commercial and military empire.

This same national fixity prevails among the characters. Jane Austen forgoes the entertainment that foreigners can provide, those vengeful Italians, cunning servants and charlatans with their strange habits, odd manners and broken English. Nor does she find a place for refugees from Revolutionary and wartime France, those "emigrants" sentimentally portrayed in the prose, poetry, and drama of the time. And standing apart from her contemporaries, including Maria Edgeworth, and apart too from the tradition of English comedy, both in fiction and on the stage, she has no cockneyism, no clownish country yokels, or comic figures from Scotland, Ireland, or Wales, parading their broad dialects, their rudeness of speech, and clumsy provincial manners. Indeed, Jane Austen exerts a discipline of denial. Crawford and Dalrymple are eminent Scottish families. Yet there is not a hint of Scottishness to the Crawfords of *Mansfield Park* nor to *Persuasion*'s Lady Dalrymple and her daughter, the Hon. Miss Carteret.[1]

What we find throughout the novels is a singular orientation to England and the English. "'Remember that we are English,'" Henry Tilney's reprimand to Catherine Morland (*NA* 197), was an injunction for which Jane Austen herself needed no reminder. Above all, this is evident in *Emma*, the novel in which Englishness stands as a central theme, and this topic I want to explore.

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Jane Austen was born into an age of nationalism. A year later, in 1776, Britain's American colonists declared their independence, and when revolutionary France announced itself *La Grande Nation*, other countries in Europe redoubled their own pursuit of nationhood and national identity. By European standards Britain, with its established parliament and a stable monarchy, was far ahead. "Above all," as Linda Colley tells us, Great Britain was "an invention forged . . . by war" (5): by intermittent conflicts with France down the length of the eighteenth-century and, more immediately, by the "Long War" of 1793 to 1815, a period of high nationalism and patriotic fervor coinciding almost exactly with Jane Austen's years as a novelist.

Within the United Kingdom, the paramount national identity was England's: the imperial power attended by an immediate ring of satellite colonies, the so-called "Celtic fringe" of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. In relation to Europe, England's firm and confident sense of selfhood and of shaping its own destiny rested on the fact that it was an island set apart from the European mainland and largely secured from Europe's internal conflicts. From the

European point of view, however, this was regarded as an isolation highly detrimental to English life and culture.[2] The English, on the other hand, were long experienced in making a virtue of necessity. Upon this literal insularity was constructed the comforting poetic ideology of "the island race," a deep-rooted and highly-valued English ethnicity celebrated in Shakespeare's "scepter'd isle" populated by its "happy breed of men"[3]— and, ironically or otherwise, Jane Austen awards Henry Crawford the privilege of declaring "'Shakespeare . . . part of an Englishman's constitution'" (*MP* 338). Provided with this lofty racial platform, the English were able to announce themselves as lovers of freedom and masters of the sea, their energies harnessed to an imperial mission of exploration, conquest, and world-wide trade. Earlier in the eighteenth-century, these ideas and sentiments inspired England's two belligerent anthems, "God Save the King" and "Rule Britannia." In 1797, these were joined by "The Tight Little Island," a popular and much-reprinted wartime song by Thomas John Dibdin, written to reassure and rally a nation under threat with its trenchant reminder that the British mainland formed a "little island," "tight" and "snug." On the military and religious front, Britain, that is to say its English core— remembering that the Irish peasantry, as distinct from the occupying English landowners, were largely Catholic, and there was still a significant Catholic population in Scotland— offered itself as champion of the Protestant faith, standing firm against France, the largest and most powerful of the Catholic nations. This compound of boasted insularity, dominance at sea, and Anglican self-belief was a heady mixture that enjoyed a long ancestry in England's literature.

This, then, is the large historical context of Jane Austen's writing: a background of turbulence, and, prominent in the foreground, a confident national identity. It is worth remarking that this turbulence left its mark on the Austen family. A French cousin by marriage was guillotined in 1794 during the course of the Revolution;[4] Jane Austen's brother Henry joined the Army in the early years of the war; her father, a country clergyman, was responsible for registering the men of his parish for military service; and her two youngest brothers, Francis and Charles, served in the Navy throughout the conflict.

As to the "Englishness" of my title, this takes us directly to *Emma* (1815), the novel in which Jane Austen explores the nature of the English national identity. My own understanding of the novel's emphatic Englishness is not that a chauvinist author is asking her readers to join her in cheering for their country; rather, that Jane Austen is inviting us to read *Emma* as a version of the national tale, a type of novel extremely popular at this time. It was a sub-genre which flourished over forty years, from the early 1800s into the 1840s, a period in which a large number of national tales appeared. In essence, these were political-polemical novels asserting the claims of Scotland or Ireland to be recognized and valued as nations, each with its own distinctive culture, history and traditions. Regarded in this light, *Emma* can be understood as a novel that embodies Jane Austen's own version of the national tale, a national tale so far unwritten, England's national tale.

The novel which literary historians identify as the first and most influential of this genre— in effect, its progenitor— was *The Wild Irish Girl, A National Tale*, these last three words forming a generic subtitle. It was written by an Irishwoman, Sydney Owenson, after 1812 more widely known by her married name, Lady Morgan. First published in London in 1806 and in New York the following year, *The Wild Irish Girl* was an immediate success on both sides of the Atlantic and probably the most popular novel of its time.[5] This had much to do with its romantic nationalism, the claim that Owenson made for the recognition of a legitimate Irish national identity, a claim made at the very time this Irish "identity seemed lost" (Kirkpatrick vii)—"lost" because, only five years earlier, in January 1801, the Irish Parliament in Dublin was abolished and the regulation of Ireland passed into the hands of the British Parliament in London, a change effected by the Act of Union. The Act created a new, overriding, political identity, “The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.” This somewhat grandiose title concealed a bitter irony. For the formation this new “*United* Kingdom” was not a matter of consent but of force, of military conquest by England, followed by the arrival of English settlers come to occupy and exploit these conquered lands: Wales, subjugated by Edward I in the thirteenth century and politically joined to England by the Act of Union of 1535; Scotland, with England a joint-kingdom since 1603, and joined politically by the Treaty of Union, 1706, creating the Kingdom of Great Britain the year after; and Ireland, most violently and most recently.

It was not inaccurate to represent England as the imperial power, with the Celtic fringe as its satellite colonies, their indigenous cultures and claims to nationhood stifled or eradicated under English rule and exploitation. Although Scotland had to endure the suppression of the Jacobite Risings of 1715 and ’45, it did succeed in keeping at least some vestige of a national identity in retaining its own church and systems of law and education. But this was not the case with Ireland, a point that Byron made graphically in addressing the House of Lords in 1812:

> If it must be called an Union, it is the union of the shark with his prey, the spoiler swallows up his victim, and thus they become one and indivisible. Thus has Great Britain swallowed up the parliament, the constitution, the independence of Ireland, and refuses to disgorge even a single privilege (41)

In speaking of Ireland, English politicians were given to smooth talk; it was Britain’s “sister-island” or “sister-kingdom.” But Owenson gives the stark reality, “a colonised or a conquered country” (174). The French Revolution inspired a decade of violence, culminating in the Irish Rebellion of 1798; and the Act of Union, locking Ireland within the United Kingdom, was designed to put an end to further resistance by closing any prospect of independence. It is in this context that we see the essentially political challenge contained in Owenson’s assertion, stated bluntly in the novel’s title, that her tale of *The Wild Irish Girl* was *A National Tale*.

The Wild Irish Girl was the first novel to try to introduce English readers to their new partner. Owenson’s aim was show that the Irish were not barbarians; that Glorvina O’Melville, the Irish girl of the title, a Gaelic princess, was educated, a woman of culture; that her Irish “wildness” was not the “wildness” of the primitive but a lyrical, passionate spontaneity, rooted in bardic traditions and described by Owenson as “the impassioned energy” of the Irish “national character” (242). She contended that from ancient times Ireland had developed a distinctive Gaelic culture in its language and literature and in its musical arts and antiquities; and, with considerable astuteness, she claimed that Ireland’s Catholicism was not a dark and hostile force driving an alien people but an earlier stage of the British Protestant faith (Tracy 87). It was, Owenson claimed, in this ancient Gaelic culture and in Catholicism that the origin of the Irish national identity—“the true ancient Irish character” (64)— was to be found, a definition which clearly excluded the Protestant English settlers, known as the Anglo-Irish or Protestant Ascendancy, those settlers who had come into possession of Ireland’s property and power.

However, Owenson set the stage for progress. Horatio Mortimer, the English hero, admits to his inheritance of guilt and expresses his sorrow for these past wrongs, his ancestors having slain the wild Irish girl’s family and seized their land. Forgiveness and love prevail. In the marriage of the young Englishman and the Irish girl we are to read the possibility of reconciliation for their two countries and a new and lasting relationship. Nonetheless, it was not a relationship of equals; the reality of Ireland’s colonial dependence remains unchallenged. Yet the marriage signifies a step far beyond the political Act of Union. It was a marriage based upon Horatio's freshly-gained knowledge of Ireland's history and culture, and it was founded on mutual respect. According to Owenson, in this new relationship the "distinctions of English and Irish, of protestant and catholic" could be "forever buried"; and the English landlord is to treat "his Irish peasantry" in the knowledge that they are "the descendants of

a brave, a free, and an enlightened people" (250-51). Expressed in political terms, this solution envisaged a cementing of the Union through Catholic emancipation and through a reform of the Ascendancy landlord class.

For the British authorities this politico-romantic program was an unwelcome challenge to government policy. Catholic emancipation, long promised, was not in prospect and achieved only in 1829, and any tinkering with the interests of the Ascendancy struck at the absentees resident in England, many of them members of the English Parliament. Not surprisingly, Owenson's London publisher took fright and reviewers objected to the expression of such strong political views by a woman.[6] But *The Wild Irish Girl* with its passionate, visionary appeal and its romantic tale, complete with gothic, picturesque, and sentimental furnishings set in the framework of a tour, was exactly to popular taste. Notwithstanding an implausible story, sketchy characters, and clumsy construction, the novel was an immediate and lasting success.

Its success encouraged other writers, predominantly women novelists living in Ireland or Scotland, to produce their own versions of the national tale, often much along the same lines. Many of these later novelists copied Owenson's form and structure, placing the material of the national tale within a romantic plot: the young hero or heroine comes to Ireland or Scotland on a tour— the Tour or travel book constituting a sub-genre in itself— expecting to find a barbaric country. Instead, he or she falls in love both with the new surroundings and with the native guide who has helped the traveller "to understand the region's beauty and cultural interest" (Trumpener 910); and in the marriage of the traveller and the guide we are to read the union of their two countries on terms of a new understanding and respect.

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In *Emma*, Jane Austen's response, or, more precisely, her *riposte* to the national tale was to laugh at it, to offer her own satirical re-envisioning of the genre. This was a style of literary joke familiar to Jane Austen. It was a form of humor in which she was skilled, having mastered the techniques of satire and parody in her precocious childhood writing; and in the later 1790s her adult writing career began with three such novels. Both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* carry the evidence of their origin as thorough-going satires on the 1790s fashion for sentimental fiction in letter form; and in *Northanger Abbey*, the third of these novels, Jane Austen's principal literary target was the gothic novel (Southam, *Literary Manuscripts* 60-62). So it comes as no surprise to find a literary-satirical dimension to the central comedy of *Emma*.

Jane Austen's variant on the national tale, addressed to her homeland (i.e., English) readership, declares that if you want a truly *English* national tale, there is no need to excavate the past to discover your origins and identity, no need to return to histories of your country or accounts of your racial origin, no need to imagine yourself travelling to England as an observer from afar, no need even to leave home, since the English national tale— the account of the indigenous English identity, the English way of life, its setting and its culture— is to be found here and now, in the observation of ordinary everyday life, on your own doorstep, and in your own home. As one reader wrote to John Murray, *Emma*'s publisher, there is "so much of the English fireside that you fancy yourself seated in the circle."[7]

The generic spot is Highbury, the Home Counties English village-cum-small town *par excellence*, "populous" (7) with its densely-textured society, its leading families, its meticulously differentiated "gradations of rank" (136), its "chosen" and "best" (20), its tightly-drawn circles and "sets" (20), its precise notation of the "second and third rate of Highbury" (155), its "degrees" and "order[s]" (29, 32), its "well bred" (32), its "yeomanry" (29), and its "inferior society" (23). This finely calibrated hierarchy, in all its distinctions and divisions, constitutes Highbury's "little social commonwealth" (*P* 43), complete with its round of local events and gossip, its school, its inn, its shops and shopkeepers, its highways and byways, its doctor, its vicar, its lawyer, its magistrate and landed gentry, and, lurking darkly on the outskirts, the thieves who made off with Mrs. Weston's turkeys, and the local band of gipsies. The heroine of this English national tale, wholly unlike her flawless and accomplished Irish and Scottish sisters, is woefully unaccomplished, a self-centered, self-indulgent and wilful "imaginist" (335). And, prosaically, the hero and heroine of this English national tale— the guide and the guided of Owenson's Irish version now entertainingly redrawn in Mr. Knightley and Emma herself— are neighbors, old friends, living only a mile or two apart, whose love is a matter of time, familiarity, and slow discovery: an unromantic story, perhaps, but true to life.

This, then, is Jane Austen's version of the English national tale, a version that runs counter to *The Wild Irish Girl* and the procession of national tales that it inspired. This latter-day English version is altogether unsentimental and ungothic, unpolemical, unexotic, domesticated and brought home quietly and amusingly to the parochial society of village England. These were the very aspects of the novel that Walter Scott drew attention to in his famous review of *Emma* in 1815, identifying the work as a "modern" novel, with its "characters and incidents introduced . . . from the current of ordinary life," "presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place round him" (Southam, *Critical Heritage* 59, 63), a perception echoed in Saintsbury's exact observation that *Emma* manifests "the absolute triumph of that reliance on the strictly ordinary" (198).

Interestingly, *Emma* is a novel of mixed modes, for its everyday realism goes hand-in-hand with a most precisely articulated fantasy. Highbury has a substantial physical presence, a detailed topography and an active population in motion, in daily circulation on its business and leisure pursuits. In pinpointing the position of the village, Jane Austen appears to be giving Highbury a certified, authenticated reality: 16 miles from London, 9 miles from Richmond, and 7 miles from Box Hill, distances— she seems to be saying— of such exactitude that measurements on the map of Surrey will land you on the very spot. But this is a tease. These distances, by her specific intention, are incompatible; no such place could exist. To adapt Herman Melville's paradoxical insight, Highbury "is not down on any map; true places never are."[8]

Modal duality of a different kind attaches to George Knightley. At the level of realistic portrayal, he stands in the novel with a solid and credible presence as the local landed gentleman, lord of the manor, owner of much of Highbury and the countryside around, duly a magistrate and active in parish affairs. But his name carries us into allegory. George Knightley delivers a personification that takes us directly to England's patron saint, St. George, and to the *knightly* tradition of chivalry with which St. George is associated. George is also the name of English royalty, of its Hanoverian dynasty, with George III occupying the throne at this time. Although for many years the King had been suffering from mental illness, he was an unpretentious, homely man, much loved by the people and often seen in the countryside around Windsor poking at pigs and cattle and inspecting the harvest, and his special interest was the cross-breeding of sheep. For this pastime he was affectionately known as "Farmer George," an occupation that Jane Austen gives Knightley, himself an up-to-date gentleman-farmer attentive to agricultural improvements, to crop rotation, "'new drills,'" and other aspects of scientific farming, including "'shows of cattle'" (473), reminding Jane Austen's readers of England's success in cattle breeding, a notably patriotic contribution to agricultural progress

and food production during the years of war. Knightley's role as a modern and professional landowner is a further aspect of Jane Austen's national tale, directed as it is towards the culture and cultivation of the homeland and the arts of peace.

Englishness also pervades the countryside around Knightley's home. The scene is engaging, satisfying and emblematically English, and Jane Austen delivers a eulogy emphatically patriotic: "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" (360), a pastoral scene that embodies an idyllic national landscape. Not the "oppressive" sun of illiberal regimes or warmer climes, not the fierce sun familiar to West Indian plantation-owners such as Sir Thomas Bertram, returning as he does from Antigua with "the burnt, fagged, worn look of fatigue and a hot climate" (*MP* 178);[9] and not (as we are reminded by the garden historian John Dixon Hunt) the artfulness of "garden design" in the elaborate style seen at Versailles or imported for Hampton Court; but a return to "*all nature*" seen as a garden, an "*ensemble*" "sweet" "to the eye" and to "the mind": in all, the "natural," "modern" or "English" garden promoted in the eighteenth-century by Horace Walpole and Thomas Whately (Hunt 44-46). Only a few pages later Frank Churchill, the quasi-villain of the story, condemns himself out of his own mouth, complaining unpatriotically that he is "'sick of England— and would leave it to-morrow, if I could'" (365).

Churchill is Knightley's counterpart: one, the epitome of Englishness, the other, of Frenchness, or, to be exact, of Frenchness in an Englishman. This nationality-of-character is signalled in the allegory of his name: Frank giving us Frankish or French; and, with a further push of word-play, he is signally *un*Frank in his deception of Emma and the world of Highbury. The drama of national types— Knightley's English straightforwardness ("'Mr. Knightley does nothing mysteriously'" [226]), his honesty and "'humanity'" (223) *versus* what Emma calls Churchill's "'system of hypocrisy and deceit,—espionage, and treachery'" (399)— holds a leading place in Jane Austen's version of the national tale. In the antipathy between the two men is acted out the traditional enmity of England and France: the gentlemanly John Bull-St. George versus the Frenchified Englishman. In setting this engagement, Jane Austen was drawing on national stereotypes made familiar to her readers in political cartoons: John Bull, the archetypal Englishman of bull-dog breed, four-square and solid, a ferocious guardian of English virtues and values, and fiercely Francophobic; and ranged against him the Monsieur-Englishman, artful, devious, glib, and deceitful, a foppish, rootless creature of frivolity and fashion. It was an old game, going back to Shakespeare and beyond, and Jane Austen was delighted to stand in a tradition that sharpens the comedy and enriches her play of language. In the last pages of volume one, Knightley points out to Emma that "your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very 'aimable,' have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him." (149)

The contrast here is between "l'aimable," the French social art of pleasing, and the solid worth of "amiable," valued as an English quality of kindliness and consideration for others.[10] So it comes as no surprise to see Knightley advancing towards his proposal of marriage along this linguistic route. Churchill's mind he finds "'full of intrigue. . . . Mystery; finesse—how they pervert the

understanding!'" He pleads "'the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other'" (446). Accordingly, a page or two later, his proposal to Emma is delivered "in plain, unaffected, gentleman-like English" (448). In this scrupulous attention to the national language, Jane Austen's readers would have glimpsed Knightley's shadowy *doppelgänger*, the great lexicologist and prime champion of "plain, unaffected, gentleman-like English," her "dear" Dr. Johnson (8-9 February 1807), the figure so memorably described by Boswell: "He was indeed, if I may be allowed the phrase, at bottom much of a *John Bull*; much of a blunt *true-born Englishman*" (5.20). Realized in language, this is the very character of the Knightley brothers' laconic greeting, their "'How d'ye do, George?' and 'John, how are you?'" a "blunt" exchange that Jane Austen describes as "the true English style" concealing "under a calmness that seemed all but indifference" their "real attachment" for one another (99-100).

The ghost of Johnson is glimpsed once more in the scene— in technique, a *travesty* —in which Churchill sets out to establish his credentials as "'a true citizen of Highbury'" with a "'burst,'" as he puts it, "'of my *amor patriae*,'" purchasing gloves at the village shop. Emma responds half-jokingly, expressing her admiration for his show of "'patriotism'" (200). But the joke is more than double-edged. As Boswell reminds us, Johnson dismissed "Patriotism" as "the last refuge of a scoundrel" (2.348), a sentiment much repeated and fresh in the mind of Regency England. As for *amor patriae*, resisting Churchill's suave plausibility, readers of Jane Austen would feel perfectly at home with Hazlitt's recently-delivered formulation, Johnsonian in tone, "the love of liberty, of independence, of peace, of social happiness."[11]

Two details seem to identify *Emma* as a direct satire on the tradition of the Irish national tale. First, a small and local detail, Miss Bates's reference to Ireland, her momentary hesitation, her uncertainty whether to call it a kingdom or a country (159), Jane Austen's device to remind her readers of the change in Ireland's status effected in 1801 by the Act of Union. Also, there is an Irish offshoot within the dramatic scheme of the novel. The Irish Question Jane Austen poses in *Emma* is not the set of grave problems that inspired Owenson and the many novelists who followed her. Austen's Irish Question is a light-hearted subplot, turning on the possibility of a marital scandal, the conjecture on Emma's part of an adulterous relationship between Jane Fairfax and the rich and recently-married Mr. Dixon, with his "'country-seat'" at Balycraig, beyond Dublin (159) and his English name confirming that he is of the Ascendancy. The suspicion of such a scandal is wholly a figment of Emma's imagination, a fantasy Churchill is quick to encourage and feed, since as well as entertaining him, it places a further screen around his own concealed engagement to Jane Fairfax.

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In its cartoonlike and allegorical aspects, the contrast between English Knightley and Frenchified Churchill is amusingly and broadly drawn, and I hope that I have been able to exonerate Jane Austen sufficiently from the charge of chauvinism or xenophobia by relating this feature of *Emma* to Jane Austen's pursuit of the national tale. It is worth pointing as well that there is an enjoyable tension between the insistent realism of *Emma* and these other, satirically-driven, levels of figuration. Moreover, Jane Austen provides a necessary balance: alongside the two heavily nationalized characters, Knightley and Churchill, we can exhibit Mr. and Mrs. Elton, both English to the backbone and both obnoxious through-and-through. As to England and France— that is, France before the Revolution— the two countries had always been ambivalent foes, a point registered two hundred years earlier by Sir Philip Sidney with his regard for "That sweet enemy, France."[12] And perhaps also registered by Jane Austen herself in 1815 when she transcribed "Napoleon's Farewell," the poem in which Byron set down his feelings of admiration, pity and regret at the spectacle of Bonaparte's humiliation in defeat.[13]

Emma is the richest, most intricate, assured, and brilliant of Jane Austen's comedies, a substantial and optimistic book whose keynote is the heroine's "eager laughing warmth" (348). We may anticipate a rocky time ahead for Jane Fairfax in her marriage to Frank Churchill. But, that aside, *Emma* contains no hint of the pain and moral darkness of *Mansfield Park*, the novel Jane Austen wrote immediately before. This pronounced change in tone and mood may be connected with the progress of the war. When Jane Austen began *Emma*, in January 1814, victory was in prospect. The Allied armies had entered France; by the end of March they reached the gates of Paris; and on the 6th of April, Napoleon abdicated, to go in exile to Elba. With this background, *Emma*, written with such poise and certainty, can be read as a work of celebration, Jane Austen's record of an English way of life, a rich parochialism to be treasured and smiled at, a rural culture for her readers to enjoy in time of peace, a local comedy and romance that could stand as one version at least of England's national tale. It was an American critic, Lionel Trilling, who, fifty years ago, first drew our attention to this aspect of the novel, observing that *Emma* "is touched— lightly but indubitably— by national feeling." And Trilling's explanation rings true: that it was the "circumstance" of the Prince Regent's "admiration" that "allows us to suppose that Jane Austen thought of herself, at this point in her career, as having, by reason of the success of her art, a relation to the national ethic" (xii): a successful art of peace, as it were, to crown the nation's success in the art of war.[14]

Notes

This essay began life as a lecture delivered at the University of Warsaw and at the Jagiellonski University, Krakow in October 2007.

1 In the two unfinished manuscript works, two non-English characters are mentioned but re- main unseen, the Irish Captain O'Brien in The Watsons and in Sanditon, presumably from the West Indies, the "half Mulatto" Miss Lambe (421).

2 To quote from the Bibliothéque Universelle of Geneva in 1816: the English stood in need of French good taste "in order to soften the gloom of their character and manners, typical of an iso- lated country," a comment repeated in the Warsaw Journal ("Coup-d'oeil").

3 Richard II (2.1.40-45); and see Wilson.

4 This was Jean-Francois Capot, Comte de Feuillide, executed in Paris on 22 February 1794. He was married in 1781 to Jane Austen's cousin Eliza Hancock who remained in England from 1786 onwards. In 1797 Eliza married Henry Austen and, until her death in 1813, was one of Jane's closest friends.

5 In England and America, there were nine editions in the first two years, the first American edi- tion appearing in 1807. In various cheap editions on both sides of the Atlantic, the novel was in- termittently in print until the last American edition of 1883. The next edition in either country was in 1986.

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[6] The London publisher Richard Phillips, who had published Owenson's previous books, advised her that in The Wild Irish Girl "[t]he sentiments enunciated are too strongly opposed to the English interest in Ireland, and I must withdraw from my original offer" (qtd. in Campbell 63). The novel was then accepted by the libertarian publisher Joseph Johnson, only for Phillips to reclaim it.

[7] William Blackwood, the bookseller and founder of Blackwood's Magazine, writing to Murray, 1 January 1816 (manuscript letter, Murray Archives, Blackwood Box 2).

[8] Melville's words for the island of Kokovoko, Queequeg's home, at the opening to Chapter 12 of Moby Dick.

[9] The possibility that there could be a political turn to Jane Austen's use of "oppressive" is raised in Tom Paulin's discussion of Keats's ode "To Autumn" as "a coded political poem in the after- math of the Peterloo massacre" (Guardian 8 Dec. 2007: 21, quoting Paulin's The Secret Life of Poems).

[10] The precise social coloration of aimable was familiar to Jane Austen's readers from a well- known discussion in the classic gentleman's conduct-book, Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son (1774): this quality is the possession of "a man of parts, who has been bred at Courts, and used to keep the best company . . . Great usage of the world, great attention, and a great desire of pleasing, can alone give it ..." (200-01).

[11] This quotation comes in Hazlitt's "On Patriotism— A Fragment," one of his regular contri- butions to The Morning Chronicle (5 Jan. 1814). The very newspaper that readers of Emma could be expected to take, and the most "literary" of the London papers, with a daily circulation of 7000 copies, it rivalled The Times and enjoyed a readership in the provinces. Between December 1815 and March 1816, Murray placed advertisements for Emma in fourteen issues, more than in any other paper.

[12] Sonnet 41, Astrophil and Stella (1591).

[13] See Brian Southam's "Was Jane Austen a Bonapartist?"

[14] An allusion to the letter from the Prince Regent's Librarian, James Sanier Clarke, 16 November 1815: "The Regent has read & admired all your publications."

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