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Sanditon: the Seventh Novel

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Sanditon does not feature prominently in the criticism of Jane Austen and many studies happily ignore it altogether or merely mention it in passing as a biographical curiosity of small literary interest. The focus of attention is properly on the six completed novels. There is a limit to what can be said about a fragment only eleven and a half chapters long, a manuscript whose status is anyway questionable. While some critics believe that the text is reasonably close to the form in which it would one day have been sent to the printer (needing only paragraphing, the expansion of abbreviations and other trivial tidying-up), others view it as a rough draft, not a document upon which to base confident critical judgement.[1] The prevailing attitude towards *Sanditon* owes a good deal to E. M. Forster's influential review of the first edition in 1925;[2] up to this time, the fragment had been known only sketchily from the extracts given in the 1871 Memoir. Forster wrote with enthusiasm and some perception. He was a self-confessed Janeite and he came to *Sanditon* with the special understanding of a novelist who in his own style of comedy had learned much from Jane Austen's example. He was quick to recognise the new topographical rootedness of *Sanditon*. No one has identified this more succinctly and persuasively: 'not only does the sea dance in freshness, but another configuration has been given to the earth, making it at once more poetic and more definite'. But overall Forster was disappointed. He read the fragment diagnostically. He detected the author's bodily exhaustion in the exhaustion of the writing, the product of a failing imagination: the manuscript revisions 'are never in the direction of vitality'; the character-drawing is wholly in the grip of the earlier novels; and it 'gives the effect of weakness, if only because it is reminiscent from first to last.' These remarks are deceptively credible. At the end of January 1817, when she began *Sanditon*, Jane Austen was far into her last illness. Two months later, at the end of March, she abandoned the manuscript, unable to continue, and four months later she died.

Sanditon has been plagued by Forster's biographicalism. Much of the subsequent comment and criticism has lingered sentimentally on the circumstances of its composition and has stepped back in wonder at Jane Austen's creative resilience in embarking on a fierce satire of hypochondria and invalidism at such a dire moment in her own life. The biographical approach offers an appreciative tribute to Jane Austen's courage, detachment and vry humour in this enterprise. This does full justice to Jane Austen's human qualities; but it does less than justice to the literary qualities of *Sanditon* itself, which, in these terms, has commonly been treated as an outsider, a latecomer, pathetically stranded on the outskirts of the oeuvre. The curious and touching context of its writing has tended to distract attention from another, more important context, not the author's state of health at this time but *Sanditon*'s working relationship to the other novels. One aspect of this relationship has been explored in Marvin

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Mudrick's analysis of Jane Austen's irony, where *Sanditon* has the crowning place. It marks the 'Liberation of Irony' (as the last chapter is called), and the book ends on a very challenging note: 'To such works as *Emma* and *Persuasion*, *Sanditon* may - if only in its brevity and incompleteness – seem an epilogue; but it makes its own path. It is a new work; in the midst of her last illness, there months before her death at the age of forty-one, Jane Austen was undertaking with fresh impulse another liberation'.[3]

Professor Mudrick's account asks us to regard *Sanditon* as the beginning to a genuine seventh novel and to understand its strange and sometimes un-Austen-like feature not as the deficiencies of a rough draft, nor, *vide* Forster, as ailing throwbacks to her earlier work, but as features of a new imaginative conception. The same case can be made for *Sanditon* when we look at it alongside the other late novels, in particular, alongside *Northanger Abbey* (which Jane Austen was revising in 1816, probably in the interval of five months following the completion of *Persuasion* in August and the beginning of *Sanditon*). Put in this context, *Sanditon* no longer looks like an oddity, an afterthought of a private joke for the family; and the chronological perspective brings out Jane Austen's attention to the concept of 'Improvement', a term prominent in the later novels, which touches upon some of the most important social and cultural debates of Regency England.[4] The 'Improvement' theme carries from *Mansfield Park* onwards to *Sanditon*, a progression that resists the usual assumption that Jane Austen's development ends in the autumnalism of *Persuasion* and that together the six novels compose the most compact and self-contained oeuvre in English literature. This is a fond illusion, a theory of cyclical evolution, in which *Persuasion* features as the older woman's mature and wise return to the theme of romantic love so caustically treated by the younger women in *Sense and Sensibility*. *Sanditon* upsets the evolutionary view; and the 'improvement' theme calls up a slightly unusual Jane Austen – a writer historically conscious, who regarded herself, in part, as an historian of social change in a period of extreme change, and in whose later works there is an increasingly important dimension of contemporary reference, so much so that the novels are distinctly *contemporary* novels which provide a descriptive and analytical commentary on Regency society and its values. This is not to disregard the novels' timeless qualities as works of art portraying the unchanging elements of human nature, but to draw attention to their historical significance, an aspect of their meaning which is often ignored.

The question of contemporary reference faced Jane Austen very sharply when she came to revise *Northanger Abbey* in 1816. The manuscript of this early novel (written about 1798-9) had been out of her hands since 1803, when it was sold to the publisher Crosby and remained with him, unpublished – probably because he thought that the gothic satire market was over-crowded – until Henry Austen bought it back in 1816.

Although nothing has survived to show us the exact nature of the changes made at this time, we can be fairly certain that as far as the style was concerned, the 1816 revision was very thorough indeed. For while *Northanger Abbey* is structurally, and in its characterisation, the simplest and least developed of the novels, it is also the most flawless. Its writing is quite free from the unevenness and stiffness that crop up occasionally in the other two early novels, its comic tone is remarkably assured and the sustained brilliance of the writing can only be the fruits of this late revision. But Jane Austen made no attempt to bring the story and background up to date. This is Bath in the late 1790's, with the manners and types of the period. There is one literary reference as late as 1801. Otherwise, the novel is set a year or so earlier, at the height of the Gothic fashion. While Jane Austen could feel confident of its success as a piece of entertainment, she was anxious to warn the public that unlike her other late novels, this one was not contemporary and she supplied an 'Advertisement' to this effect, summariesing the

book's checkered history: that it had gone for publication in 1803, that 'thirteen years have passed since it was finished, and many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes.' One obvious anxiety would be the Gothic satire. Although in 1816 *Udolpho* was still well known and currently in print, the literary joke had inevitably lost some of its point. In particular, coming fresh from *Persuasions*, which is set in the post-war years of 1814-15, Jane Austen would have been thinking about the considerable changes in the social structure of Bath.

Bath of the 1790's had been a social mixing-pot. Everyone jostled together in the Public Rooms of the Spa. This is how such a nonentity as a Catherine Morland, the daughter of an obscure country clergyman, can bump into a Henry Tilney, the son of a great landowner; and how they in turn can meet the Thorpes, the children of a rising lawyer. But over the next ten or fifteen years Bath changed. It became less fashionable, less popular with the gentry, less of a marriage-market for their children. It was gradually taken over by the lower middle classes, people we hear so much about in *Emma* – the ambitious farmers of the west country, the merchants of Bristol, the manufacturers of Birmingham, the lawyers and medical men. These were the social groups which benefited most from the prosperity of the Napoleonic wars. They were not born into the ranks of the gentry. But they wanted to share the gentry's social standing, as far as that could be achieved, by mixing with them, by imitating their style of life, their manners and their speech. The older gentry continued to come to Bath from season to season out of habit, to meet up with their friends again and because they disliked the brashness and informality of the new watering-places along the coast. They turned their backs on this new generation of visitors and kept to themselves. This is the post-war Bath of *Persuasion*, of the Elliots and their ageing cronies. There, Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney would never have met. The gentry had abandoned the Public Rooms to the *hoi pollo*i. They kept to their own circles, entertaining in private, and were able to maintain their snobbish rituals in observing the fine gradations of rank between the lesser and the greater gentry. In such a closed society a Tilney would pass his time in one set, a Morland in another, and their paths would not have crossed. Anne Elliot is nearly trapped with this same problem. She is worried about her chances of meeting Wentworth at Bath and Jane Austen is at pains to lay out the precise and prosaic social detail of the situation: "The theatre or the rooms, where he was most likely to be, were not fashionable enough for the Elliots, whose evening amusements were solely in the elegant stupidity of private parties…" (p.180).

As a supreme artist in the comedy of manners, Jane Austen prided herself on this degree of precision and accuracy in social observation. So the *Northanger Abbey* 'Advertisement' can be read as a careful step to protect her reputation for period fidelity. It was a quality which the reviewers had already remarked upon in the earlier novels and she felt it important to explain to her public, an audience very close to her, why this latest story was rather dated. But Jane Austen's concern went further than this. The changes in the pattern of Bath society were not simply local and superficial; they were part of a wider and deeper pattern of change running throughout English society. The forty years of Jane Austen's lifetime was a period of transition. The Georgian world of the eighteenth century, 'the old society' as it was known, was being carried, uneasily and reluctantly, into the early nineteenth-century world of the Regency, into a self-consciously 'new' society, boasting of its modern outlook and modern values, and turning its back upon many of the traditions of the past. This process of change came in the wake of the Industrial Revolution; and during the years Jane Austen was writing, it gained fresh impetus from the economic boom that Britain enjoyed as a manufacturing and trading nation during the Napoleonic wars.

Contemporary historians and commentators identified this process, optimistically and flatteringly, as a process of *Improvement*. They described their age as The Age of Improvement, as it was, indisputably, in material wealth, supporting a middle-class gentry rich and leisured enough to turn Improvement into a way of life – with improved manners, improved fashions, improved morality, education, accomplishments and so on. It becomes a key word in cultural and scientific literature, displayed in the titles of books and articles, and it defined for its users what they confidently regarded as the distinctive feature of the Regency Enlightenment. The most conspicuous improvement was across the face of the countryside itself, in the utilitarian and functional change effected by the agricultural revolution, which brought in scientific farming and saw the enclosure and cultivation of waste land and commons, a process of land utilisation which was greatly accelerated by the fear that a Napoleonic sea blockade would force the country to be agriculturally self-sufficient. The other conspicuous countryside improvement was the Reptonian improvement of great houses and their grounds, as General Tilney's 'improving hand' has transformed the pre-reformation convent of *Northanger Abbey* into a modern home of ostentatious and ingenious luxury, and as Henry Crawford spins his inventive mind around the improvement of Sotherton Court and Thornton Lacey. At its best, landscape improvement could achieve subtle and magnificent effects, as Elizabeth Bennet observes from the windows of Pemberley House. But there was a darker side too. For the radicals of the age, improvement was a cant word, a symbol of Regency pride, pretentiousness and showy wealth. They spat it out as a term of abuse and Cobbett never tires of pointing to the estates where the wonders of improvement had cost the destruction of farms and villages and the beggaring of their inhabitants.

Jane Austen is the most important nineteenth-century historian of 'Improvement' and of the process of change that it signified; and 'Improvement' would make an apt thematic title for *Mansfield Park*, where an elaborate sematic drama is formed around the whole concept of improvement, exploiting its landscape associations, playing with its technical vocabulary, and carrying these ideas into the mental and moral landscapes of the characters. One of Mary Crawford's slyest remarks, intended to upset Fanny Price and to intrigue Edmund with her spirit and daring, is the comment with which she crowns Mrs Rushworth's account of Sotherton chapel and her late husband's abandonment of family prayers: 'Every generation has its improvements' (p.86), (a remark which reminds us of her previous 'improvement' joke about 'improvements *in hand* as the greatest of nuisances'. [p.57], another suggestive pun about her uncle's behaviour). Part of Jane Austen's purpose in the novel is to explore how diverse, often contradictory, the interpretation of 'improvement' could be, not just between the old generation and the new but also between the different moral and cultural worlds that are represented by the Crawfords, the Bertrams and Fanny Price.

These ideas were very close to Jane Austen when she was working on *Northanger Abbey* in 1816, both in the 'improvement' comedy around General Tilney, and in *Persuasion*, the manuscript which she had just finished. Improvement in social status qualifies a humble Wentworth to ask for the hand of Ann Elliot. Eight years earlier, he had been unacceptable to Lady Russell and the Baronet. But the years of victory had brought the navy prize money and the heroic standing, Sir Walter now has to accept Wentworth's social and financial fitness. The landowner is bankrupt. A new social order, born of the war, has come into being, and he is forced to receive an Admiral into his family home and a mere Captain into the family itself. At a more humble level the Musgroves, too, are caught up in this process of change. 'The Musgroves, like their houses, were in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement. The father and mother were in the old English style, and the young people in the new. Mr. and Mrs.

Musgrove were a very good sort of people; friendly and hospitable, not much educated, and not at all elegant. Their children had more modern minds and manners' (p. 40). The Musgrove family portrait in 'the old-fashioned square parlour' looks down in amazement as it sees the room gradually being given 'the proper air of confusion by a grand piano forte and a harp, flower-stands and little tables placed in every direction' by the 'daughters of the house' (p. 40). This triumph of tasteful 'confusion' over the old-fashioned 'neatness' and order, is a mild domestic image, playfully delivered. But the lightness of the tone here doesn't take away from the force of Jane Austen's quasi-historical definition of 'the old English style' and the 'new', of the 'old' manners and the 'more modern minds and manners' of the next generation. Jane Austen's own attitude – of quiet amusement, and behind that, a judgement suspended and withheld – is conveyed by the hesitation in her choice of words, 'alteration, perhaps … improvement'.

The *Persuasion-Northanger Abbey* context bears closely upon *Sanditon*. Having just brought *Northanger Abbey* up to date stylistically, it is as if , in *Sanditon*, Jane Austen is bringing *Northanger Abbey* up to date historically, giving its satire an immediate contemporary point and developing the work with one eye upon what she had described in *Persuasion* as the 'new' style in English society, what Mr Elliot calls disdainfully 'the unfeudal tone of the present day' (p.139), with its 'modern' mind and modern manners and its ambivalent hesitation between 'alteration' and 'improvement'. *Sanditon* can be regarded as a recasting of *Northanger Abbey*. Jane Austen marks the connection jokingly by returning again to the archaic Fanny Burney device which she had employed to launch the earlier novel – getting the comedy of manners under way by tracing the experiences of an innocent an marriageable young women on her first entry into society, with all the conventional pitfalls of fashionable behaviour and the embarrassments of dealing with unwelcome suitors. The burlesque parallels are intentional. Catherine Morland comes fresh from her Wiltshire village, the eldest daughter in a family of ten children, Charlotte Haywood from the remoteness of Willingden, the eldest daughter still at home out of fourteen children.

Sanditon repairs a slight clumsiness in the structure of *Northanger Abbey*, which, according to one theory, may have been first put together by joining two of the childhood pieces – a pastiche of the Fanny Burney situation and a Gothic satire – and running the two stories together, with a single heroine, using Bath as the stage for the parade of character types and the round of embarrassments and the Abbey as the setting for the Gothic reversal. In Sanditon, the two locations are combined. Bath's pre-eminence as fashionable middle-class gathering ground had by that time been lost to the coastal resorts which had also gained a reputation for rakishness. Sanditon is too young to have won Brighton's notoriety as a favoured spot for assignation and elopement. But it already has its statutory seducer, one of these wicked baronets that Mrs Morland was supposed to warn her daughter against, who 'delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farm-house' (NA, p. 18). The joke is now modernised and pushed further. The baronet in *Sanditon* is too poor to indulge in the 'masterly style' of seduction in 'some solitary House' in 'the Neighbourhood of Tombuctoo' but is still ready to plot 'the quietest sort of ruin & disgrace' near at hand (pp. 405-6). The joke about Sir Edward is not just that he is remarkably adaptable; he is also slightly old-fashioned and out of touch with the geography of dissipation. He is still thinking of legendary Timbuctooo, fabled for its remoteness, its exotic pleasures and riches. But this romantic image had been shattered in the reports of Mungo Park and Robert Adams, which gave a disenchanted European view of Timbuctoo's alien and unpalatable native culture. These travellers' tales had only recently appeared – Mungo Park had been printed in 1815, Adams was published in 1816, and both

books were extensively reviewed and quoted form in the monthlies and quarterlies. Incompetent as a latter-day Lovelace, Sir Edward is also laughably out of date in his Regency Afro-Gothicism.

Sir Edward Denham is one of a range of complex character types set up for the heroine to encounter, to puzzle out and understand. The cast of eccentrics forms part of the peculiar social ethos of Sanditon, a place of wonder and novelty, which has to be observed and interpreted in much the same way that Catherine Morland has to try to digest the meaning of the Abbey as it really is, in broad daylight, and understand its owner in his real character. Both girls bring their preconceptions: Catherine, her Gothic fantasies; Charlotte, the scepticism inherited from her father and the country remoteness of Willingden. She is a strong-minded girl, in the 'old' style, with an un-modern mind and un-modern manners, finding herself set down in a strange and slightly dubious society. Instead of a Montoni or a General Tilney she is confronted by other varieties of neo-Gothicism in the complex enigma of Lady Denham, in the manifold absurdities of Sir Edward, and in the puzzles and contradictions that surround the other figures and form an atmosphere of mystery and uncertainty as dense as that Catherine Morland enters upon when she comes to stay with the Tilneys.

The revision of *Northanger Abbey* may also have led Jane Austen towards the idea of focusing closely upon a single place, describing it in detail and linking it with the enthusiasm of an improver.

General Tilney and the Abbey are a convincing analogue. It is the most minutely and elaborately detailed of all Jane Austen's country-house locations, and provides a striking contrast to the insubstantiality of Bath in *Northanger Abbey*. Architecturally, Bath was one of the sights of Europe; 'it looks a city of palaces, a town of hills, and a hill of towns', was Fanny Burneys's impression (jotted in her diary) in 1791.[5] But Jane Austen had no eye for the beauty and splendour of the town; for her purposes, it was merely a *social* location. However, as soon as the story reaches the Abbey, the location becomes significant. It enters into the imaginative experience of the novel with the defined structure and dimension of space that we find in Sanditon.

The Abbey's improver is an improver of the 1790s, a landowner extravagant in his wealth and fired with the 'genius' of invention, his kitchen his 'vanity', his garden his 'hobby-horse'. Mr Parker is a landowner of the next generation, a 'projector' on fire with the genius of commercial speculation. Significantly, Jane Austen uses the same word: his 'hobby-horse' is Sanditon. If Jane Austen had lived to complete the fragment, this repetition would have faced her readers as they moved from *Northanger Abbey*, the novel last published, to *Sanditon*, the latest, and this element of historical contrast would have been firmly before them.

In the earlier novels, Jane Austen had already put a question mark against the 'improvement' of places (as distinct from any other kind of improvement): quite simply, the moral places are *un*improved, or if improved at all, unnoticeable so, and with great emphases upon the hand of nature, as Elizabeth Bennet first sees Pemberley:

> A large, handsome, stone building … in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste; … and at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something! (*P&P,* p. 245)

When Emma Woodhouse surveys the familiar scene of Donwell Abbey, looking at it (towards the end of the novel) with a newly-awakened interest, she sees 'the respectable size and style of the building, its suitable, becoming, characteristic situation, … with all the old neglect of prospect, … its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up … It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was' (*E*, p. 358).

These places are naturally and unpretentiously themselves. Jane Austen's approval is carried in the simplicity and firmness of statement; in a style which is itself unelaborated and unimproved: Elizabeth's impression of what it might be 'to be mistress of Pemberley'; Emma's happy confirmation that Donwell Abbey 'was just what it ought to be, and … looked what it was'. Here, as elsewhere in the novels, Jane Austen is playing with an emblematic interpretation of landscape, whereby a gentleman's character and social standing could be read in the appearance of his house and grounds. With the development of landscaping theory in the eighteenth century and its later sophistication into the philosophy of improvement, this basic idea became considerably elaborated, to the point that Repton was discovering 'the spirit of freedom and independence' in 'the heart-enlivening prospect' of 'the country residence of an English gentleman'. He set a social aim as the 'true end of all plans of improvement'. The landowners' objective should be 'to extend the dominion of elegance around their own habitations, and diffuse cheerfulness and comfort' among their dependents, to promote a benevolent relationship with their tenants and peasantry. Jane Austen sounds the chords of this theory, to raise an echo, and then passes beyond the theory to grasp the true substance of these places and their owners. Inside Pemberley and outside, in its grounds, Elizabeth discovers a congruence, a composed and extended image of strength, solidity and tradition, attaching to Darcy as a man of property and power properly used, a man capable of exerting authority, capable too of containing her and providing her with a refuge from the pressures and disorder of Longbourn. Donwell Abbey is the image of George Knightley's straightforward and unpretentious dignity, his transparent honesty; and a few pages later, Jane Austen celebrates the charming and disarming Englishness of this country scene, consorting so perfectly with what she describes as Knightley's true English style' (*E*, p. 99).

The counter-image to these places is drawn in Henry Crawford's proposals for an improved Thornton Lacey. 'From being the mere gentleman's residence, it becomes, by judicious improvement, the residence of a man of education, taste, modern manners, good connections. All this may be stamped on it; and that house receive such an air as to make its owner be set down as the great land-holder of the parish' (*MP*, p. 244). This is the emblematic theory parodied. The fitness of Pemberley and Donwell Abbey and the satisfaction they convey derive partly from the quality of their ownership, the accord between these men and the places they live in, and partly from the historical character of landscape that has been allowed to shape itself over centuries and carries a sense of respectful, uninterfering care. Henry Crawford's improvement is thin and theatrical, a mere façade, a character fabricated and imposed for the sake of effect. It is indeed to be emblematic: this is his notion of the proper public face for a country clergyman to show to the world, the declaration of faith, as it were, of a Rev. Henry Crawford; and it completes his siter's agreeable fantasies of being a vicar's wife in 'the respectable, elegant, modernized, and occasional residence of a man of independent fortune' (*MP*, p. 248).

In *Northanger Abbey* and *Sanditon*, Jane Austen enters more fully into the larger contemporary debate about the effect of improvement upon the English way of life and its impact as a cultural force. Was improvement the distinguishing character of a new and

enlightened age, or a dangerous fad, a passing but destructive fashion, a threat to time-honoured values and traditions? *Northanger Abbey* poses this question in the context of the 1790s. One of the liveliest arguments of the time concerned the fate of old buildings, now that the Gothic taste, formerly a harmless and curious eccentricity, had blown up into a positive 'rage' for restoring and improving religious buildings and ruins, often converting them into spectacular and fashionable homes. Historians and antiquaries protested that this was not the guardian spirit of 'preservation' but damaging theft by appropriation. They complained that the 'Traits of our Ancient Magnificence' were in more danger from restoration than from decay. In the shadow of the French Revolution, these fears were given a patriotic edge: in such dangerous times, with radicalism in the air, it seemed even more important that the country should hold fast to its institutions and preserve the visible heritage embodied in these monuments of the past.

But amongst the Wyatts and the Reptons, the General Tilneys and the Henry Crawfords – the practitioners and their clients – restoration and improvement were regarded as a means of conferring the benefits of modern taste. Improvement as an assertion of the spirit and style of the new, 'unfeudal' society, with its distinctive lightness, elegance, comfort, utility and cheerfulness – the modern litany of landscaping and architecture. Improvement could be a liberation: for Mr Rushworth, Sotherton is 'a prison – quite a dismal old prison' (*MP*, p. 53), an Elizabethan house waiting for Repton's cheerful hand to give it 'a modern dress' (p. 56). sometimes there was even a note of triumph at the occupation of religious buildings, a heavy Anglican-Regency satisfaction at living opulently in places once sacred to Catholicism. To call one's home an Abbey could be to make a claim about the present age rather than to honour history.

The main lines of this debate enter amusingly into the comedy of Catherine Morland's disillusionment. The Abbey is sufficiently Gothic to feed her imagination. The General parades himself as a man of culture. He speaks fervently of having preserved the 'Gothic form' of the Abbey's windows with 'reverential care' (*NA*, p. 162), even though the ancient glass has gone. He has maintained the romantic appeal of its grounds and setting; and the formal rooms have an appropriate spaciousness and grandeur unchanged from previous generations.

The Abbey is also sufficiently anti-Gothic to make a fool of the heroine. What strikes her first, on the night of her arrival, is its modernity, not its antiquity. The drawing-room is furnished 'in all the profusion and elegance of modern taste' and instead of an ancient fire-place she sees the latest invention, a little patent Rumford (p. 162). The modernised Abbey is an *anti*-Udolpho; and the General, in his modish and determined pursuit of the latest fashion, an *anti*-Montoni – a smooth and urbane Regency gentleman, whose Abbey has been transformed into a home of domestic utility and comfort.

The joke takes a further turn. Whilst the Abbey is an anti-Udolpho, it is also a *neo*-Udolpho; and the General a *neo*-Montoni. The domestication and modernising of the Abbey have been pushed to extremes. The improvements and innovations are elaborate to the point of fantasy. The conducted tour of the Abbey and its grounds leaves Catherine dizzied and overwhelmed. Inside and outside the house the sights are astounding: the kitchen-garden so huge, of such a number of acres as Catherine 'could not listen to without dismay, being more than double the extent of all Mr. Allen's, as well as her father's, including church-yard and orchard. The walls countless in number, endless in length; a village of hot-houses seemed to arise among them, and a whole parish to be at work within the enclosure' (p. 178). Of course, Catherine is an innocent abroad, wide-eyed and wondering. In her fanciful imagination these impressions blossom fantastically. Yet the imagery is also allusive : the 'walls … countless in

number, endless in length', the 'village of hot-houses', the 'whole parish … at work' follow the hyperbolism of Timon's villa:

> To compass this, his building is a town,
> His pond an ocean, his parterre adown.
> (*Moral Essays: Epistle IV*, II. 105-6)

In a footnote, Pope explains that his description 'is intended to comprise the principles of a false taste of magnificence'. Jane Austen's purpose is equally specific. The shift is from an Augustan to a Regency Timo. The General's modern 'false taste of magnificence' has transformed the Abbey into a strange and whimsical showpiece. The Abbey has become a playground for the General's inventive genius and his appetite for display: outside, in the luxury of his 'pinery' and the elaboration of his 'succession-houses', his gardens 'unrivalled in the kingdom' (p. 178); inside, in the extra-ordinary and sacrilegious modernization of the convent kitchen, a description which Jane Austen delivers with a fulsome and resonant irony:

> The ancient kitchen of the convent, rich in the massy walls and smoke of former days, and the stoves and hot closets of the present. The General's improving hand had not loitered here: every modern invention to facilitate the labour of the cooks, had been adopted within this, their spacious theatre; and, when the genius of others had failed, his own had often produced the perfection wanted. His endowments of this spot alone might at any time have placed him high among the benefactors of the convent. (p183)

Beyond the kitchen, the fourth side of the Abbey is given over to the extensive and elaborately-equipped domestic offices, housing a multitude of servants. This, the General admits to Catherine, is his 'vanity … in the arrangement of his offices'; and he unctuously pardons himself for showing her round this utilitarian part of the Abby, 'as he was convinced, that, to a mind like Miss Morland's , a view of the accommodations and comforts, by which the labours of her inferiors were softened, must always be gratifying' (p. 184.)

In this portrait of General Tilney Jane Austen's readers would have recognised the features of Rumford, the inventor of the General's smoke-free fireplace. Rumford was a real scientist. But he was also a standing joke of the age, lampooned and caricatured as a crackpot, a figure of inventive lunacy. He produced a great succession of ideas for gadgetry about the house, especially for the kitchen, (which one 'Rumfordised'), and he wrote about these inventions at staggering length. In his *Proposals for Establishing the Royal Institution* (1799), the long list of 'new mechanical inventions and improvements … to the common purposes of life', includes all three of General Tilney's enthusiasm – the kitchen, kitchen equipment and hot-houses. In his gimmickry, his inventive genius run wild, his pursuit of domestic and mechanical improvement, General Tilney is Rumfordian man – a modern Timon caught up in the rage for novelty and the pride of conspicuous wealth. And in his pious concern for the welfare of his servants, Jane Austen may be sounding another Rumfordian note, since the inventor's schemes were usually produced with a great flourish of benevolent social philosophy, as transparently rhetorical as the General's sanctimonious little comment to Catherine, about 'the labours of her inferiors'. Some of Rumford's proposals were notorious – his recommendation of stale bread as a suitable diet for the poor, since 'it prolongs the duration of the enjoyment of eating',[6] his recommendation of soup-kitchens for the moral benefit to be gained from communal eating; his recipe for a poor-man's broth so rich in water that it was immediately christened Count Rumford's 'metaphysical soup'. Some of these suggestions smack of Swift's *Modest Proposal*; they were put forward the late 1790s when the working population of England was living on the verge of starvation. Rumford prided himself as a philanthropist-thinker and there may be an echo of this activity in the rather mysterious remarks

the General Tilney makes to Catherine on her second evening at the Abbey about having 'many pamphlets to finish' before he can go to bed 'and perhaps may be poring over the affairs of the nation for hours after you are asleep. Can either of us be more meetly employed? My eyes will be blinding for the good of others; and yours preparing by rest for future mischief ' (p187). The General seems to be passing himself off as a man with a social conscience, another piece of fashionable humbug that could connect him with Rumford.

The Rumford joke was still current when Jane Austen returned to *Northanger Abbey* ion 1816. He died only two years earlier and his memory lived on in the discussion of his scientific ideas, which were being reviewed more and more critically and which were of sufficient public interest to e extensively discussed in the quarterlies. During his lifetime, his books circulated very widely and were extremely popular for their combination of practical advice and high-minded philosophizing. They were a source of amusement as well as or instruction. Smoking chimneys, for example, inspired him to a 'Philosophical Investigation'; a mundane topic, but in Rumford's system of thought 'connected with many of the most essential enjoyments of life' and thus vital 'to all those who feel pleasure in promoting or in contemplating the comfort and happiness of mankind'.[7] He was capable of dignifying household hints into reflections on the state of humanity and the condition of civilisation, delivered at enormous length. (*Essay X: On the construction of kitchen fireplaces* (1799) is 384 pages long.) In small doses, Rumford is a joy to read, very personal and quirky in style, and always faintly ridiculous for his earnestness and solemnity. His discourses on food, its preparation, cooking and eating go into the most exhaustive detail, down to the correct method for putting the spoon into the mouth, since, as he is careful to explain, 'the pleasure of eating, depends very much indeed upon the *manner* in which the food is applied to the organs of taste'.[8] Altogether, Rumford's writing in this area form a culinary prose epic, veering ludicrously between the sublime and the mundane, a grandiose discourse on the importance of food to the individual and to mankind – a kitchen equivalent to Erasmus Darwin's splendid systematic poems on botany and evolution, *The Botanic Garden* (1789,1791) and *Zoonomia* (1794-6).

Jane Austen must have read Rumford with enjoyment. We hear his voice in the tea-time conversation between Sir Edward Denham and Charlotte Heywood, when he explains to her the dangers of dry toast to the 'Coats of the Stomach' and the protective powers of butter. But Sir Edward is baffled by the effect of green tea: 'The use of my right Side is entirely taken away for several hours!' Unimpressed, Charlotte advises him to have faith in science of the Rumford School: 'It sounds rather odd to be sure - … but I dare say it would be proved to be the simplest thing in the World, by those who have studied right sides & Green Tea scientifically & thoroughly understand all the possibilities of their action on each other' (p.414).[9] Charlotte gives this answer 'coolly'. It is really Jane Austen's answer to Rumford's inflated and optimistic philosophy, the belief that science, including what Rumford called 'mechanical improvement', was an index of the superiority of Regency civilisation. In his Royal Institution *Proposals* Rumford insistent on 'the real importance' of 'improvement': that the pre-eminence of any people is, and ought ever to be, estimated by the state of *taste*, *industry*, and *mechanical improvement among them*' and he expresses his confidence that 'the inhabitants of this happy island, who have meditated profoundly on this interesting subject, will be very far indeed from being indifferent to the progress of improvement … for they well know how powerfully the vivifying rays of Science, when properly directed, tend to excite the activity, and increase the energy, of an enlightened nation'. Jane Austen picks up Rumford with the touch of solemn ridicule. According to Charlotte Heywood, these are the 'rays' to solve the problems of Sir Edward's green-tea paralysis. These *mechanical improvements*, marking the pre-eminence of

an 'enlightened nation', are the inventions with which General Tilney has endowed the convent kitchen.

While we can point to a close connection between *Sanditon* and *Northanger Abbey*, and following the theme of improvement, trace a pattern of continuity with the earlier novels, *Sanditon* is remarkable not for these associations but for the radical change it signifies in Jane Austen's art, away from the comedy of character and towards the comedy of ideas. The rich mental and emotional life of the heroines is missing from *Sanditon*, and there is no longer a focus upon the development of character and the exploration of relationships.

Charlotte Heywood is labelled as the heroine and occupies the heroine's role. She has the heroine's function, too, as Jane Austen's point of observation for much of the story. We can laugh at her jokes, enjoy her impressions of Sanditon, her delight at its bizarre inhabitants, her cool watchfulness and reserve, her primness when Sir Edward begins to warm excessively. However, these attitudes and responses compose a figure at a distance. There is no attempt to bring her within range of our affection of sympathy; no suggestion that she is going to be developed into a living personality as warm and attractive as Catherine Morland. Clara Brereton is held even further off and the rest of the cast are confined to comic roles in an unremitting satire of social and literary manners. The powerfully drawn gallery of eccentrics has an eighteenth-century flavour, with touches of Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. Yet such an extreme mode of artificial comedy, with characters so specifically typed and labelled in their literary and social roles, is unprecedented in Jane Austen and reminds us more of Sheridan and Congreve than of any eighteenth-century novelist.

Nevertheless, Jane Austen may also have been encouraged towards this new style of fiction by two very recent books, both published in 1815, Peacock's *Headlong Hall*, and *The Magic of Wealth* by Thomas Skinner Surr.

Headlong Hall was Peacock's first attempt at a discussion novel, where he brings together a group of opinionated and idiosyncratic characters to indulge their fanaticism on a wide range of contemporary topics. Amongst his targets were 'theorists in all sciences, projectors in all arts, morbid visionaries, romantic enthusiasts' and every variety of humbug and cant. The book opens with four 'illuminati' on board a coach beginning a lively discussion on 'improvements'. Mr Foster, 'the perfectibilian' declares that 'every thing we look on attests the progress of mankind in all the arts of life, and demonstrates their gradual advancement towards a state of unlimited perfection'; Mr Escot, 'the deteriorationist' regards these improvements as 'only so many links in the great chain of corruption'; while Mr Jenkinson, 'the statu-quo-ite' is content to find a state of perfect balance, neither progress nor decline. The forth of the illuminati, the Rev. Dr Gaster, has only time to clear his throat and begin to complain at such 'a very sceptical' and 'atheistical conversation' when the coachman announces breakfast, and in his eagerness to get out, Dr Gaster twists his ankle. The coachman has an intrusive presence in this first chapter; and it looks very much as if Jane Austen is reminding us of *Headlong Hall* at the beginning of *Sanditon*, where in the opening sentences there is an otherwise puzzling focus upon the coachman, and then the injury to Mr Parker's ankle. These resemblances could well be Jane Austen's declaration that she was beginning her own style of discussion novel. With a similar contest of views between Mr Parker and Mr Heywood, the enthusiastic improver versus the sceptical and reactionary gentleman-farmer whose faith is in the sober stability of country life.

Peacock assembles his characters at Headlong Hall, Jane Austen at Sanditon, and in the vivid monologues of Mr Parker, Diana Parker and, most of all, Sir Edward Denham (who is a

ventriloquial mouthpiece for a procession of topics – sentimentalism, melodramatic romanticism, potted science; and with the novel's continuation, doubtless there would be many more topics to follow), there is a satirical comedy-of-ideas pattern interwoven with the immediate social comedy of manners. Jane Austen's allusion to Peacock has the same purpose as the allusion to Fanny Burney in *Northanger Abbey*: not as a tribute, but as an invitation for the reader to see how much more skilful *her* performance is and to see how the novel can really be brought to answer its challenging definition as a 'work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed' (*NA*, p. 38). In Peacock the blatant unreality of the fiction is part of the joke. His literary devices are burlesque and caricature; and the plot and setting are simply a framework to give the characters somewhere to speak, to set them in motion and to bang their heads together. In *Sanditon*, Jane Austen's oblique comment is to the effect that the discussion novel, amusing enough in itself, does not really add up to very much as a work of art; for that, there has to be the reality of human experience, either in the characters themselves or through the author's perception and artistic presence within the novel. Peacock's deficiency is that he is only able to proceed by way of a drastic comic simplification; Jane Austen's artistry in *Sanditon* is to achieve the same comic effect, but without simplification, and within further patterns of meaning.

Like Peacock, Surr was also trying out a new style of fiction and he described *The Magic of Wealth* as a 'Vehicle of Opinions'. The particular aspect of the book that may have caught Jane Austen's attention is in the story of its villain, Mr Flim-Flam, a tradesman grown rich and turned banker, who exploits the current fashion for seaside resorts and changes the fishing village of Thistleton into Flimflampton. This part of the story is probably modelled on actual events: the change, in the 1790s, of the fishing village of Bognor, by a rich London hatter, Edward Hotham, who named the new resort Hothampton. The speculation was a notable disaster and Hothampton became Bognor once again. Flim-Flam is a speculator and projector fired by a 'rage for building' which destroys old England, represented in the Manor House, and puts up in its place a rash of 'gee-gaw' villas. His main opponent is Mr Oldways, whose 'ruling passion' is 'To sustain unsullied the reputation of a gentleman of family and fortune … Born and bred the true old English gentleman, he possessed no particle of the trafficking spirit of the times'.

Surr states these positions very baldly; the hero and the villain are mouthpieces; and altogether the novel is an underfictionalised piece of propaganda, specifically against the recent introduction of banknotes, scathingly called paper money. Tory political economists believed that this easy way of creating wealth (the 'Magic' of the title) was at the root of the country's social problems. It placed power in the hands of the financiers at the expense of the landed gentry, the traditional guardians of the country's stability and its social health. Surr was a banker himself and had his own axes to grind. But his general argument faithfully reflects a widespread anxiety at this change. It is one of the central points in Coleridge's *A Lay Sermon* (Mar 1817), where he laments that post-war conditions made it impossible 'for the gentry of the land, for the possessors of fixed property to retain the rank of their ancestors, or their own former establishments, without joining in the general competition under the influence of the same trading spirit'. A Gentleman, he declares, 'ought not to regard his estate as a merchant his cargo, or a shopkeeper his stock'. For Coleridge, and many other commentators, the selling up of family estates represented the destruction of cherished values in English Society; it marked the triumph of modern profit over the tradition from generation to generation.

In the eyes of traditionalists and reactionaries, seaside resorts were an elegant but depressing symbol of the new cash nexus – a relationship devoid of humanity. Unlike the

humble fishing village they replaced, the resorts had no dependence on the life of the land or the sea. Their raison d'etre was in the frenzy and triviality of fashion, what Cobbett diagnosed as the 'morbid restlessness' of the age, later materialised in the mushroom growth of such towns as Brighton:

> A place of not trade; of no commerce at all; it has no harbour, it is no place of deposit or transit for corn or for goods or cattle: …the Valleys and sides of hills, now covered with elegant houses, were formerly cornfields, and downs for the pasture of sheep. Very pretty is the town and its virandas and carriages, and harnessed goats; very pretty to *behold*; but dismal the think of …
> (*Rural Rides*, Brighton, 28 July 1832)

These arguments are lightly and allusively contained in *Sanditon*. Mr Parker's eloquence is borrowed from the rhetorical flights of the coastal guide-books and the sales-talk of the seaside medical tribe; Mr Heywood is a Country Cobbett, seeing another 'dismal' Brighton in prospect; and the theories of the political economists are fed into their debate about the effect of the new resorts on prices and on the state of the poor. With Lady Denham, Mr Parker is led into a more detailed exposition of the laws of supply and demand and the level of prices and rents, in order to convince her that the arrival of a free-spending 'East-Indy' family will not strike Sanditon with inflation and that as a property-owner, she stands to benefit from the prosperity of the tradesmen. Mr Parker's advocacy is fluent and half-baked. Like Arthur Parker's speculations of the Physics of Perspiration, his flourish of theory comes from one of the contemporary digests of knowledge which equipped ladies and gentlemen with conversational lines with which to edify and impress their friends. The display of scientific knowledge and social theory was the latest accomplishment of an improved society, a sign of its advance.

The 'Charitable hearts' and 'Benevolence' of the Parker sisters are also involved in the improvement joke, for the rise of philanthropy, of organised charity, was another attribute of Regency enlightenment. Formerly, charity had existed in the support of one's friends and neighbours and in the patronage of the local squire, a relationship that lingers on in old-world Highbury. But with the growth of towns, this informal system began to disappear and people with a social conscience, particularly the Methodist and Evangelicals, began to fill the gap. Very soon, charity work became fashionable. As the novelist Mrs Barbauld remarked in 1813, it was inspired 'not so much from a sense of duty as being the real taste of the times'. There was social kudos in belonging to a charitable committee; and charitable activities were also a convenient method of easing the middle-class conscience about its prosperous and pleasure-seeking way of life in an age of poverty and starvation. The bitter contrast was even more sharply defined after 1814, with the rising price of bread, and destitution swollen by returning soldiers for whom there was no work. In *The Magic of Wealth* Surr draws an ugly picture of contemporary conscience-salving at Flimflampton, where subscription dinners and entertainments are organised to raise funds: 'a most grotesque and absurd conjunction of mirth and pity – of gaiety and compassion. Pleasure may be the real motive; but Philanthropy must be the pass-word, even to our amusements'. There is no trace of anger in Jane Austen's account of Diana Parker. Nevertheless, the portrait is ruthlessly exact. This is the type of society woman for whom charity is not a matter of the human heart but an occupation, a business in life, as compulsive and driving as the manic enthusiasm of her brother, and far less endearing. She practises charity at long distance; her causes, scattered around the land, are displayed like a collection of trophies. This is fashionable philanthropy, expressed in terms of getting Lady Denham to head the list of subscribers. Jane Austen saw no need to underline the point of this satire and she had already provided her readers with a model of true charity in *Persuasion*, in

the help that the sickly Mrs Smith struggles to give 'one or two very poor families' in the neighbourhood of Westgate Buildings, and that small detail is within the entire episode of Anne Elliot's visiting, a charity of sympathy which is private, undisplayed and face-to-face; which is, in these respects unfashionable and, as far as her father is concerned, disgracefully *infra dig*.

In its detailed social and literary reference, *Sanditon* is the most packed and concentrated of all Jane Austen's novels. Allusion is one of its methods and also one of its jokes. Undoubtedly, Jane Austen delighted in the sheer virtuosity of her performance in mimicking so many styles of writing and calling up such a variety of literary and social types. The joke even runs to self-parody. One of the artistic feats of *Mansfield Park* is the way in which the visit to Sotherton and the rehearsals for Lovers' Vows are used to foreshadow the pattern of events and relationships that arise later in the novels. In the comedy of errors at the opening of *Sanditon*, Jane Austen plays with this same device. Mr Parker's coach founders up an impassable lane; his ankle unexpectedly fails under him; his wild goose chase for the Willingden surgeon, pursued with such obstinacy and optimism, ends in a confusion of muddle and cross-purposes. In modern critical terminology, this episode would be described as a sequence of anticipatory symbolic action, announcing *Sanditon's* future:

> A very few years ago, & it had been a quiet Village of no pretensions; but some natural advantages in its position & some accidental circumstances having suggested to himself, & the other principal Land Holder, the probability of it's becoming a profitable Speculation, they had engaged in it, & planned & built, & praised & puffed, & raised it to a something of young Renown… (p. 371)

Sanditon is a Regency South Sea Bubble and Jane Austen foretells its fate in the burlesque comedy of the opening pages, a joke which is also turned against her own sophistication of literary technique.

Alongside this allusive mode of satire, Jane Austen also conducts an easy-going descriptive level of local comedy in showing how the 'Spirit of the day', the tide of improvement, is sweeping the village – the fishermen's cottages now 'smartened up', the 'old Farm House' now adorned by 'two Females in elegant white … with their books & camp stools', the baker's shop now regaled by 'the sound of a Harp' from above, and in the shoemaker's window 'Civilization' arrived in the shape of 'Blue Shoes, & nankin Boots!' (p. 383). Improvement has carried the Parkers away from the snug comfort of their old house, the home of Mr Parker's 'Forefathers', and brought them up the hill, to 'modern *Sanditon'*, to their new home, Trafalgar House, 'a light elegant Building, standing in a small Lawn with a very young plantation round it' (p. 384). Here, Mr Parker boasts, he can enjoy 'all the Grandeur of the Storm, with less real danger' (p. 381) - a modern, romantic appreciation of the sea, touched with old-world prudence. The scales are weighted against Trafalgar House. For all its lightness and elegance, it stands in opposition to Mr Parker's old home, the home of his forefathers, another Donwell Abbey, 'well fenced & planted, & rich in the Garden, Orchard & Meadows which are the best embellishments of such a dwelling' (p 379), a snug and comfortable house, which Mrs Parker regrets leaving. Nonetheless, Trafalgar House commands a view. When Charlotte Heywood looks out of her window for the first time, over Sanditon and out to the sea, her impression is real and vivid – not Mr Parker's stormy grandeur, not those '*undescribable* Emotions' which 'the Sea & the Sea shore' should 'excite in the Mind of Sensibility' (p. 396), according to Sir Edward Denham, but a scene whose vitality and charm belong to this present moment in *Sanditon's* development: 'the Miscellaneous foreground of unfinished Buildings, waving Linen, & tops of Houses, to the Sea, dancing & sparkling in Sunshine & Freshness' (p. 384). This is the clear and immediate vision of a heroine whose mind

is uncontaminated by the new theories of romanticism or by the old theories of sentiment and the picturesque. Charlotte Heywood looks at Sanditon with the uneducated eye of youth, ready to be interested and amused, a point of view that carries the writer's own responsiveness to the phenomena of improvement.

But the delightful and decorative 'spirit of the day' that breathes over Sanditon has another face in the 'spirit of restless activity' that Charlotte Heywood diagnoses as the fever of the Parker sisters. Sanditon has a local and transitory beauty, the charm of the moment. But there is frenzy to its creation. Charlotte tries to puzzle out the dynamics of the Parker family and concludes that all their frenetic exertions – Mr Parker 's as a 'Projector', the sisters in their 'extraordinary' revolution of 'disorders & Recoveries', and in their 'Zeal for being useful' – come from an excess of energy and an absence of anything to do (p412). Here, Jane Austen puts her finger on the occupational disease of the gentry: prosperous and leisured, they had nothing to do. Hence the pursuit of pleasure and the rise of *Sanditon*. The Parkers are the agents of change, intoxicated by their own wild and wayward energies. To adopt a phrase from Shelly, 'the electric life' that runs through them is 'less their own spirit than the spirit of their age'. Cobbett's 'morbid restlessness' is Jane Austen's 'spirit of restless activity' whose erratic momentum is felt in these characters and throughout the fragment in the story's tempo, in its violence of movement and its extremities of style.

Some recent historical critics place Jane Austen as an essentially eighteenth-century writer, and there has been a further attempt at categorisation, labelling her as a traditionalist with the values and attitudes of a Tory-Augustan. Certainly, there is a mid-eighteenth-century foundation to her moral vision and to the style of its expression. Johnson and Cowper are never far away and Cowper's views on seaside resorts and the strengths and virtues of old-world rustic simplicity are alluded to in *Sanditon*.[10] An amusing strain of eighteenth-century decorum informs Charlotte Heywood's primness, which is both an affirmation and a joke. This decorum also extends into the language and metaphors of *Sanditon*, with the effect of a delicate and ladylike constraint, a stylistic holding-back, played off against energies of character and expression which are wilder and freer. Jane Austen's commitment is not partisan: she has no causes to argue in the manner of Cobbett or Surr, nor any breath of Coleridge's grave indignation and urgency. Her commitment is artistic: to the hilarious comedy of eccentricity extravagance and collision, and to the subtler tensions of uncertainty and change. Her personal roots and sympathies lie with Mr Heywood; his 'very quiet, settled, careful course of Life' in the country, 'rendered pleasant by Habit' (p.374), is the very situation in which she was able to work best, as we know from the way in which her creative drive returned as soon as she settled at Chawton Cottage in 1809.[11] But part of Jane Austen's continuing triumph as a writer was her openness to fresh experience and her readiness to explore new means for its expression.

In the Harcourt Brace students' edition of Pride and Prejudice, Bradford Booth includes as a contextualising piece one of Washington Irving's essys on Regency life. It provides an extremely interesting account of the inter-linkings in the structure of English society and the position, within this, of country houses like Pemberley, seen through the eyes of a visitor from the new world, fascinated, as later in the century Henry James was to be, by the cultural antiquity of the old. 'The great charm' Irving discovered in the English landscape, something more than its 'captivating loveliness', was what he defines as 'the moral feeling that seems to pervade it. It is associated in the mind with ideas of order, of quiet, of sober well-established principles, of hoary usage and reverend custom'; and he goes on to describe an ancient church, a village and an old manor-house: 'all these common features of English landscape evince a calm and settled secuity, and hereditary transmission of home-bred virtues and local

attachments, that speak deeply and touchingly for the moral character of the nation'.[12] Less sweepingly, less grandiosely, Jane Austen's unimproved houses and grounds belong to Irving's theme. But her inclination towards the traditional order of country neighbourhoods unimproved is never transposed into such a static, sentimental idyllicism as Irving indulges in. Indeed, Jane Austen is nostalgic about the past. But it is a nostalgia that she admits to, just as she admits to the attraction of improvement, the very thing that threatens the past, just as she admits to her own insecurity in the pull of these forces. In *The Statesman's Manual* (1816) Coleridge speaks of 'that restless craving for the wonders of the day'. This is a craving to which Jane Austen's imagination was not immune, and *Sanditon* is a confession to the beguiling power of the new 'wonders' of the Regency-Romantic age and a testimony to the continuing freshness and inventiveness of her response.

AFTERNOTE

This essay is a literary critic's attempt at historical interpretation. Predictably, as the Alberta Conference, where it was first delivered, its thesis was questioned. In particular, David Spring of Johns Hopkins University wondered whether the period of Jane Austen's lifetime really was such a watershed in English history, between the so-called 'old' society and the 'new', as I claim here. My only answer to this can be to refer to the contemporary commentators and historians who supposed that such a change was taking place, and to Jane Austen herself (see, for example, her account of this change as it is seen in the different generations of the Musgrove family, quoted here). But Professor Spring's concern is to be welcomed, as is that of any historian, since to my knowledge only Harold Perkin, Professor of Social History at the university of Lancaster, has provided any account of this question (in *The Origins of Modern English Society* 1780-1880, London, 1969). I should stress, however, that his analysis is purely historical and extra-literary and that the account I offer here was informed but not guided by his book. My starting point was in Jane Austen and the excursion into history was directed by issues that seemed to be raised in the text. It is very possible, as Professor Spring suggests, that I have been guilty of misunderstanding of misemphasis; and in that case, my attempt will at least have drawn attention to some of the pitfalls that literary interpretation can encounter on historical terrain. So this note can be taken as an appeal for the historians to offer us a helping hand. More and more critics are venturing into this (to them) strange territory and Jane Austen studies seem set on a historical course for some years to come.

Notes

[1] I belong to the former group and my argument for regarding the manuscript as a developed work is set out in chapter 7 of *Jane Austen's Literary manuscripts* (London, 1964).

[2] *The Nation and the Athenaeum*, 21 Mar 1925, p 860; reprinted in Abinger Harvest (London, 1936).

[3] *Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton, N>J>., 1952) pp. 257-8.

[4] Alistair Duckworth has explored the house-and-grounds aspect extensively in *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* Baltimore and London, 1971). With the availability of a facsimile edition of *Sanditon* (ed. B.C. Southam, London, 1975) readers will be able to come to their own conclusions on this question.

[5] Entry for 20 Aug 1791.

[6] Count von Rumford (Sir Benjamin Thompson), *Essays, Political, Economical, and Philosophical* (London, 1796) I, p. 197.

[7] *The Complete Works of Count Rumford* (Boston, 1870-5) II, p. 485.

[8] *Ibid*., IV. P. 452.

[9] In fact, green tea is a narcotic and does affect the nervous system; and Jane Austen's Joke is not so very far-fetched: in the *Times Literary Supplement* (19 Sep 1975, p. 1063), Miss Elizabeth Suddaby cites an instance of green tea being studied scientifically during Jane Austen's lifetime and of its causing paralysis in an arm.

[10] Mary Lascelles has pointed out that the discussion between Mr and Mrs Parker about the best situation for a house seems to take up points from *The Task* (1784) where Cowper makes fun of improvers. *Jane Austen and her Art* (London, 1939) p. 46.

[11] In the eight years previously, Jane Austen had lived an unsettled and unproductive existence in a succession of temporary homes. As soon as she came to Chawton Cottage, where she remained until 1817, she took up the manuscripts of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* to get them ready for publication.

[12] First published in *The Sketchbook*, 1819-20. Reprinted in Bradford Booth's edition of *Pride and Prejudice* (New York, 1963) p. 179.