

Mike Crang

Placing Jane Austen, Displacing England: Touring Between Book, History and Nation

In this essay I want to think through the popularity of Austen by linking her work to two sets of places. The first is the imagined geographies produced through the text, or perhaps more accurately through its reading, which speak of a vanished English society. The second is the present geographies of tourists who visit Austen-themed places in contemporary England. The juxtaposition of these imagined cartographies raises three issues that this essay tries to unpack. First, a nostalgic geography of a lost English society which has a specific appeal and specific political implications. Second, the effect of this imagined landscape on the reshaping and marketing of the current landscape as a tourist product. Third, the need to then interpret that tourism as part of a disseminated practice of reading--where the action of reading is to connect disparate worlds from the text to home, to tourism and so forth. To coin a phrase, this essay discusses the worldliness of the text and the textuality of the world. It considers the geo-graphy of reading Austen as literally writing the world. I want though to suggest that doing so reframes both the conception of the world used in tourism and of writing in literary studies.

This essay is less concerned with interpreting Austen's works than engaging in what we might call reading at a distance. That is, I am more interested in what others actively make of her writings than in the writings themselves.¹ It is not a matter of assessing how well Austen depicts a place, nor how accurately her fictive places are mapped onto supposed inspirational sites, nor for that matter of how well readers and visitors can recall and understand her work. It is not about the accuracy of any of these representations. Rather, it is about interpreting reading and visiting as doing, as shaping real and imagined landscapes--creating what J. Hillis Miller has called "atopical space"

or, as James Donald glosses that, space which is “less the already existing setting for such stories, than the production of space through that taking place, through the act of narration.”² The production of space in this manner involves two issues: first, it avoids creating an assumed reading, where the interpretations and actions of readers are drawn from immanent patterns in the text; second, it means that judgements about what is “authentic” do not stand above the practices of reading but are part of the currency within them. What it focuses upon is how Austen’s work is appropriated and circulated to produce senses of “hereness,” which inscribe identities into places. To illustrate this I begin with critiques of Austen-mania as part of a “heritage industry” in the UK, that suggest her work is used to sustain a reactionary and deeply conservative vision of Englishness. I then want to examine literary tourism as a practice by which key texts are mapped onto what becomes or is transformed into a mythical landscape. However, I suggest we move from metaphors of textualised landscapes to ideas of reading practices which open up a pluralised version of the geographies created. I thus try to suggest a disseminated landscape comprising different, multiple places and times of reading, and multiple stories told by the linking between times and places.

Think of England

From the 1980s in Britain there has been an expansive celebration of the national past and a growing intellectual critique of that celebration. This seemed to be occurring at a range of levels, from official political discourse to a plethora of new museums, to a burgeoning tourist industry, to local history societies, to period costume dramas on screens big and small, to conservation districts in towns and villages. Critical accounts looked at this and, invoking the Frankfurt School, heralded the birth of a “heritage industry.” The promotion and manipulation of the past was argued to provide a compensatory nostalgia for a time when Britain was Great, in, for instance, the rash of films adapting classic imperial fiction.³ Critics pointed out that part of this was the recovery of a “traditional England” in the face of a multicultural Britain, an Englishness

that invoked history to both cloak and set a purported Anglo-Saxon ethnicity against other Celtic, Asian, and African Britons.⁴

One of the most cogent criticisms located a “cult of the country house” as creating a symbolic heartland for this nostalgic English nationalism.⁵ The country house was a favoured symbol for conservative commentators who could use it to stand for a stable, hierarchically ordered society which symbolised the “English character.” In the country house the Right promoted a set of “virtues” as intrinsically English and associated them with a period of national “success.” Various analyses indicated the symbolic centrality of the country house, which forms a disproportionate amount of preserved (and subsidised) landscape,⁶ archetypically located in a rural lowland landscape. This lowland idyll has long been used to suggest a controlled, and we might say domesticated, country, which was well ordered and carefully managed--in sharp contrast to upland British landscapes, which tend to suggest wildness and uncontrolled emotion.⁷ In terms of landscapes typically associated with certain authors, the southern county of Hampshire (where Austen’s home of Chawton is located, although none of the main sites of her novels are explicitly based in that county⁸) and the country house geography have become linked with Austen.

Austen calls forth a specific type of landscape that in turn authorises a particular version of English history. Country house landscapes support an essentialised English identity through a static, enclosed sense of the past, in terms of both geography and history. In terms of geography it is an enclosed English landscape that is divorced from contemporaneous imperial dominions. It takes the shrunken little England of the present and projects it back to find an essence in rural, elite society. But at that time England was inextricably bound up with wider imperial processes. Most famously, Edward Said has pointed to the exclusions in *Mansfield Park*, where oblique references to plantations point to a hidden history of England.⁹ In Derridean terms this is the constitutively excluded outside that allows the textual creation of polite society and which forms strategic

silences and absences through the novel.¹⁰ The extent to which this polite society was dependent upon plantations for its income was often empirically small,¹¹ but that is hardly the point. What is of concern is how this sense of a discrete and self-contained world offers a discrete and self-contained England for contemporary political appropriation.

Let me illustrate the political stakes by thinking through two moments centered around Caribbean sugar plantations. First, let us turn to contemporaneous campaigns over the abolition of slavery. In one of the earliest consumer boycott campaigns, abolitionists urged the British public not to use Caribbean sugar. The terms of this argument linked themes of domesticity and femininity, mobilising fears of morally and literally contaminating the body-politic and the bodies of female consumers with the blood and sweat of black slaves working on sugar plantations. Its drew its rhetorical force from the linking of female bodies and the national body-politic, both being contaminated by soiled produce.¹² Let us jump ahead now to contemporary multicultural England. When we look at Asian and Black British groups we find they are written out of “our island story” (as former Prime Minister Thatcher called it), which reads current national space back into the past. A ruefully mirthful Stuart Hall perhaps best expressed this when he spoke of his arrival from the Caribbean:

people like me who came to England in the 1950s have been there for centuries; symbolically, we have been there for centuries. I was coming home. I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantations that rotted generations of English children’s teeth. There are thousands of others besides me that are you know the cup of tea itself. Because they don’t grow it in Lancashire you know. Not a single tea plantation exists within the United Kingdom. This is the symbolisation of English identity--I mean what does anybody know about an English person except that they can’t get through the day without a cup of tea? Where does it come from? Ceylon--Sri Lanka, India. That is the outside history that is the inside history of the English. There is no English history without that history.¹³

Austen, through the landscape and enclosed society drawn from her novels, has been appropriated by discourses that support this insular notion of English identity. Her works bring to life a particular form of society, in Austen's famous phrase "Three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on," . Not only is this thus a spatially contained world, but a world socially focused around the institutions of country house life. Most readings for instance see this point expressed in the opposition of stability and politeness at Mansfield Park to the rowdy, turbulent life of Portsmouth.¹⁴ The politics of a celebration of rural stability thus become entangled with the modern experience of her work. In temporal terms, the world of the country house forms a timeless past, a static cameo, rather than an ongoing historical process.¹⁵ This moment is essentialised as authentically and unchangingly English, a period before the fall into a modern world of mass culture and state regulation. This is not entirely a modern reading since Raymond Williams noted that nineteenth-century literature offers a "receding escalator" of nostalgia, where truly authentic rural society is always located some 30 years before the then writer.¹⁶

A closer reading of Austen's work suggests a landscape that, far from being an unchanging rural scene, was shifting and developing. So recent commentary has suggested that Austen is using Portsmouth to literalize the hidden reality of Mansfield Park as full of contention and jealousy.¹⁷ Indeed, in terms of rural life Austen charts changing landscape tastes through her main heroines.¹⁸ In *Sense and Sensibility* she provides an elegant picture of the different moral and aesthetic visions behind picturesque and Rousseauist versions of nature.¹⁹ However, the dominant frame is spatial and social exclusion where country houses reshaped the landscape around them, to both reflect and reinforce the exclusivity of the owners. Indeed, far from being a symbol of rural harmony, they symbolised and materially enacted divisions in rural society:

The mansion thus lay in the midst of an insulating sea of turf, hidden from view by encircling belts

[of trees]. And once established as a sign and symbol of exclusivity, the patterns of social contact which the park engendered could only serve to perpetuate the emerging divisions in rural society.²⁰

The rather enclosed world of Austen reflected power relations that enabled the wealthy to physically and socially distance themselves from the rural poor. That said, it should also be noted that her works, in gender terms, are often marked by leaving home and a more itinerant role for leading female characters that suggests a certain instability.²¹ It is also true that, punctuated by departures and absences associated with naval duties, something Austen knew from her own family life, novels such as *Persuasion* and the unfinished *Sanditon* situate her apparently isolated estates rather more critically in the theatre of imperial geopolitics.²² My concern though is not how a fixed geography of class, gender and empire may be reflected or destabilised in her texts themselves, but how these geographies are interpreted in the twentieth century. Indeed, critiques of imperial connections in *Mansfield Park* are now incorporated into film versions, such as Rozema's in 1999, with abolitionist sentiments ventriloquised into characters--much to the horror of purists such as Edward Mullan, who decries "film-makers and literary critics ... in cahoots. The film of *Mansfield Park* is full of references to slavery. Fanny Price even discovers a sketch book of horrors perpetrated by Sir Thomas Bertram on the slaves who work his Antiguan plantations. These clearly echo the way the novel has been 'reinterpreted' by critical postcolonialist academics such as Edward Said."²³ So also the National Maritime Museum of London uses "a Jane Austen-like figure sipping tea, with a sugar bowl on the table. On the floor below her, a black hand stretches in supplication through the hatch of the slave ship," drawing upon Austen's father's slave connections and the known issue in *Mansfield Park* to try and explicitly open up British history.²⁴ What is notable is that it still seems that the conjunction of a canonical woman writer (and both terms seem important) with empire can be used for shock effect. Fraiman²⁵ argues that this effect of "[the] yoking of gentle Jane to sex and slavery" animates Said's

choice of targets, and it certainly provoked such a row in the National Maritime Museum that the exhibit has since been replaced by an exhibition of the carved wooden figures from the bows of ships emphasising the banning of slavery in 1807.²⁶ It is to how Austen gets appropriated and fixed in the current landscape that I want to turn now.

Locating Pemberley

Although Austen does not set any major scenes in Hampshire, using for instance her brother's manor but transposing it elsewhere, it is clear that her work is informed by that landscape. Her books are not though regional novels--say like Hardy's are. That Hardy provides a fairly direct transliteration of Dorset and its surroundings into his Wessex is clear.²⁷ However, literary Wessex cannot be judged on how closely it corresponds to "real" Dorset. The relationship of fictive and real landscape is complex²⁸ but the model of mapping literature on to landscape (or vice versa) has proved enormously appealing to the tourist industry, to such an extent that most of England is now carved up into different literary zones--until in 1988 the British Tourism Authority produced a literal map of "literary England."²⁹ "Literary Hampshire" focuses upon Austen (with walk-on parts for Gilbert White and Dickens, and notwithstanding the absence of novel settings in the county); Haworth is the centre of Brontë country; Stratford is Shakespeare Country; North Devon is Lorna Doone country and so on. As the last begins to suggest, it is not just the classic canon, for we have Herriot Country in Yorkshire, through to South Tyneside and Cleveland, boasting Catherine Cookson country. Mundane and otherwise unremarkable scenery is invested with significance (and revenue generating potential) by the magic of literary association.³⁰ Tourism is thus, as George Hughes argues, "a spatially differentiating activity which has the potential to realize different 'geographies' in a semiological way."³¹ Of course, associations are often not clearcut, since various sites are over-coded by multiple associations--thus the Cobb at Lyme Regis is both a place of Austen pilgrimage and the setting for the final scene in the

film of the *French Lieutenant's Woman*. The British Tourist authority currently runs promotions listing settings for various films. The cycle of movies, video release, TV reruns (and international syndications) means that, even aside from classic novels, the effect of screen adaptations is marked and long running.³²

The relations of fictive and real are complicated even by Austen's style, which rarely used direct references to existing places. So if we take Pemberley (*Pride and Prejudice*), it "is a fictitious literary landscape created in the same way that Gilpin said he composed his picturesque landscape; ideas are taken from the general face of the country not from any particular scene ... the Pemberley chapters had almost certainly been written based on her concentrated reading of Gilpin."³³ Austen thus based a fictional place on a textual composite made by a writer who himself developed amalgams of key places. Austen also studied Repton's Red Books for planned improvements, as well as his actual work at Stoneleigh, alongside Gilpin's writing. It is not merely then that her landscapes are open to multiple interpretations, but that they are themselves compound forms where text and landscape are not distinct categories. The landscape itself was a vehicle for expressing a range of ideologies of ownership, improvement, modernity and, not least, sensibility.³⁴ Moreover landscaping had changing fashions as people emulated other places.

The way Austen is linked to places reminds me of Derrida's analysis of Joyce-- where he speaks of traversing the haunted work of the text, where the authorising signature is permanently displaced.³⁵ Derrida suggests that disseminating the work, and reciting it, in the name of the original, inevitably buries and displaces that original. Perhaps a resonant example is in the marketing of "Proust's Normandy"; indeed, that proprietorial naming of it can be found on a 1930s tourist map, where "Proust's identification with Illiers is important today not because it has made it possible to create a local shrine to the writer but because it encourages a convenient, idealized identification of reality with fiction, which always makes for easier reading."³⁶ For Austen we have not

merely fictive landscapes founded upon theoretical landscapes but films and series that then seek approximations to those landscapes--looking for sites that offer both the right scene setting and resonances. A number of times the original site (if it is known) is not suitable, so a new site is introduced. Of course this site has its own history that is thus drawn into the story. So for instance Pemberley is widely regarded as inspired by Chatsworth--though Cottesbrooke Hall and the grounds, but not the building (Ilham House), also have their supporters. However, its most recent film setting is Lyme Park, but with Sudbury Hall being used for interiors. Putting Austen on the map is thus not a simple task.

However, that is exactly what a growing form of tourism endeavours to do. Faced with overseas competition and changing tastes, the English tourist industry has turned to specialist tourism as a means of selling places. In a world where people are increasingly mobile, distinguishing each locality becomes ever more important. Alongside this goes the popularisation of high culture, what Lash calls the structural de-differentiation of mass and high culture distinctions.³⁷ It is in this moment that literary tourism can grow as a form of specialist tourism: touring sacred sites of secular saints in a modern day reverential ritual that shares features of pilgrimage. Indeed, discussing this essay with a friend, she produced the self-description of “a Jane Austen Pilgrimage to Bath” at the age of seventeen. We may for instance look at the relationship of texts and itineraries as conforming to that most venerable of spatial narratives--the lives of the saints.³⁸ In classic terms this involved tracing the sites of events derived from the text on to the terrain of a saint’s life. Jane Austen tours likewise comprise visits to and the reading of scenes from novels in particular locations. As a practice it echoes narration, as each individual site becomes part of a larger itinerary binding them together in a spatial story, with an almost Aristotelian structure of beginning, middle and end.³⁹

Here I want to pick up on the spatial stories this process suggests. The Hampshire tourist department, for which Austen serves as a lure for getting people to spend time in

Hampshire, advertises that “Exploring ‘Literary Hampshire’ is one of the most pleasant ways to discover our traditional English countryside, romantic stately homes, historic cities, bustling market towns, picturesque villages and delightful coastline.”⁴⁰ This description not only draws upon intertextual connotations (stately homes are always romantic, the countryside is always traditional), but also “bundles” attractions together. So one of the “sites” of literary Hampshire is the New Forest--whose association with Austen goes as far as the occasional boat trip--while of course the cafe in Chawton is called Cassandra’s cup. Meanwhile the literature on tourism highlights a quest for authenticity⁴¹--one where the spatial story marks out and stages what is to be treated as authentic. Tourism is seen as a semiotic system that writes significance onto the landscape through markers, often quite literally signs. So sites that would be unnoticed are brought to notice by being marked out--by plaques, guide books, etc. In an effect familiar from structuralist interpretation, then, the signifier has only a conventional or arbitrary relationship to any “reality.” In literary tours this implies that defining the markers of sites thus shapes what is experienced very strongly. In this reading, the content of sites becomes hollowed out and mapped in terms of empty difference: “The marker itself can become a sight, and the sight is inevitably seen as a marked site, one which, like the Saussurian sign, exists only because it is different from any other.”⁴²

This is the transformation of a *site* into a tourist *sight*, something to be seen, witnessed and possibly recorded on film.⁴³ In other words, although tourism seems to be looking for evidence in the landscape, it is shaped by markers and invisible elements. Thus brochures point to the Austen house in Castle Square in Southampton, which no longer exists. We are guided to its location next to the city walls, which also no longer exist, and we see the contemporary “Castle Inn.” And at Steventon only an historically doubtful, and hardly inherently distinctive, pump is left of the rectory. The interpretative landscape depends crucially on invisible markers. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests, “Increasingly we travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places. This is one of several

principles that free tourism to invent an infinitude of new products.”⁴⁴

The combination of visible and invisible landscapes is mediated through a range of texts and objects. Thus “Regency Bath” plays up its Austen associations (and downplays her unhappiness there). Regency Bath is itself, of course, impossible to visit,⁴⁵ but the tour through contemporary Bath takes each street and accompanies it with a more or less specific and authorising quote from one of the novels. From the injunction “to discover the Bath of Jane Austen, walk! Just as Jane did,” we are led to retrace Isabella Thorpe’s shopping itinerary in Milsom Street (from *Northanger Abbey*) or to find Mrs. Croft’s drawing room in Gay Street (from *Persuasion*). The National Trust “Pemberley Trail” at Lyme Park restages scenes of the film--making the location of Austen’s fictional site more solid. So far I have suggested that we have textual universes created through the books for its readers--imagined and depicted places of Regency life which are fictional, to state the obvious--overlain on “real” sites--though these may be the filmed settings of later screen adaptations or the half-erased traces of the author’s life. Tourist sites connect these as signifiers and signifieds. And around this we have the intertextual associations that both reinforce this pattern, genres of literature and period drama, and pluralise it as sights become overcoded with multiple and indeterminate literary references. However, to persuade someone to actually visit somewhere, the experience of being there has to be important. Something has to be offered there, not elsewhere. So Kirshenblatt-Gimblett goes on to note that it is not the real world site that authenticates fiction but the other way round—“The production of hereness in the absence of actualities depends increasingly on virtualities.”⁴⁶ So if we look at a travel diary entry of Lauryl Lane, on a tour of bath, she writes, “The Assembly Rooms were really neat. I felt pretty proud of myself--recognized exactly where Anne Elliot/Captain Wentworth/Lady Dalrymple scene was filmed from *Persuasion*. Could just imagine how wonderful it would be to try to have another REAL ball there.”⁴⁷ Not only signs, but prior knowledge and anticipation produce an expected landscape, and visitors often come prepared to see, to have knowledge confirmed rather

than changed.⁴⁸

However, the actual place does play a role in authenticating tourist knowledge in an accumulatory economy where sites are “done” and “ticked off.” Indeed, part of the exchange among groups of readers involves lists of places to visit and debates over their “authenticity.” But, rather more, the practices at these sites create a range of numismatic rituals where objects suggest a connection to an imagined place. So, at Sudbury Hall one of the attractions is a gallery of costumes worn in the film *Pride and Prejudice*.

Meanwhile, at other “Austen sites” there are explicitly encoded souvenirs on sale, from badges and guidebooks to postcards and tea towels, alongside generic products made special solely because they were acquired while at that site. Purchasing an object may be a vital part of the “successful” visit, as it will allow the site to be enjoyed in later times and other places--and authenticate the visit to other audiences. Some souvenirs then seem striking in this context--Chawton offers Austen paperbacks for sale when the majority of visitors have already read them. Possibly these are intended to introduce the novels to those who have come after having viewed Austen films--for alongside them are both BBC(1997) and Gwyneth Paltrow (1996) versions of *Emma*. In part these objects are meant to provide a wide range of “Austen” products to an interested audience, but Chawton imbues them all with material links to the author. Passing through the house, a visitor reaches beyond the ropes to touch the desk where Austen wrote. Although they know it is forbidden to touch the desk, and knowing why too much contact could damage the artefact, nevertheless the compulsion to physically touch, to make contact, comes through. Elsewhere forbidden photographs are taken when custodial eyes are turned elsewhere. This sense of contact then comes through original artefacts, such as Austen’s writing box unveiled at the British Library or the opportunity offered to the tour by the Jane Austen Society of North America to read from and hold original manuscripts, but the magic also extends to replicas and souvenirs, right down to admission tickets or other ephemera that may be kept as souvenirs. These are numinous objects offering contact

with other worlds--both that of the authors and the place-time specific to the experience of visiting. The latter is too often missed by academia's "rigorous exclusion of all that may awaken the emotional response of personal association,"⁴⁹ and we are reminded that many tourist memories are not "semantic-based" knowledge about places, but episodic memories that are time and context dependent (framed in terms of remembering what the group was doing at a particular point).⁵⁰ Too often linguistic analogies lead to a focus on tourists as sightseers, as "all eyes, no bodies (and sometimes no brains)."⁵¹ I want to take a different linguistic approach, that highlights performative and active reading practices.

Placing reading

In the tourist literature there is a large sub-field devoted to visitor responses, as managers have become increasingly concerned with what visitors make (or do not make) of their products. A concern with who visits, and why, follows from this. It should also be noted that there has been a growing concern with those who do not visit, and why not? Thus, for instance, visitor surveys to museums report favorable reactions, but the sample is selective. Extending research to non-visitors found a negative reaction to museum ambience and displays.⁵² Putting it bluntly, museums preach to the converted. Austen books and heritage are social and cultural artefacts that have specific gendered, ethnic and class appeals. Surveys of heritage use and non-use in the UK show over and over again an upper- and middle-class visitor base. The limited data on Chaworth and other Austen sites also suggest that 60% of visitors are social class A/B.⁵³ The implications of this are that we cannot treat Austen's works as floating free of current class understandings and positions--their audience is located within a particular class fragment. To think this through we might usefully draw from the interpretations of reading as a practice and from the notion that that practice varies between different interpretative communities.⁵⁴ One helpful starting point has been to see communication in terms of a circuit of culture⁵⁵ that moves us from one-way processes to viewing discourse as circulation--and I shall suggest

dissemination. Communication in this sense moves from transmission models, which involve a more or less fixed message more or less successfully delivered to waiting receivers,⁵⁶ to a model that involves interpretations being made available to a public that then re-interprets them through various of their own ideas and backgrounds. So the experience of places is not fixed but is open to wider cultural values and varying intertextual sources brought into play by the visitors. It therefore becomes important to trace the social and spatial trajectories that frame different readings.

I do not want to create typologies of people; I prefer rather to think about different practices which may be combined in a variety of ways by people.⁵⁷ The practices may range from a passing interest, to “cultural tourism” involving visits to places of historic or cultural interest, or to what Stebbins calls “serious leisure”⁵⁸--that is, people who work at their hobby, attending classes lectures and joining dedicated literary and study tours about Austen, weighing in at a hefty \$3500 or so. Indeed, we might revisit Benjamin’s distinction between auratic objects that draw in the involved spectator and modern life dominated by a culture of distraction, where the spectator indifferently passes by more or less interesting objects. As Meaghan Morris put it, “The past-in-the-present is now a look, not a text” for the casual visitor.⁵⁹ Or the very “visibility” of history marked out for the tourist glance--where past times are more “naturally” absences--distinguishes tourist places, an example of what Virilio calls the aesthetics of appearance.⁶⁰

However, rather than opening a debate about the authenticity of sights, I want to think about modes of experience for the audience. Box Hill (*Emma*), for example, is a National Trust property that attracts something over 1 million visitors per year, of whom very few are on tours doing reading scenes from Austen. Detailed semiological examinations far too often omit this range of practice. Museum studies have indeed come up with a colloquial typology of reading practices--streakers, strollers and students in declining order of speed--to refer to the pace with which people interact with material. So when I have wandered about and made “field notes” on exhibits the two things that strike

me are that, first, as I linger over labels and ponder their theoretical interpretation, I am likely to be run down by people walking through at a steady pace and, second, I am one of very few solitary visitors. The experience of touring is basically social. Far from quiet reading in a solitary room, here people discuss, reenact and indeed play out various moments of film and book. Thus visitors, a little illicitly, pose against the mantelpiece used at Chatsworth by Mr. Darcy/Colin Firth. Few silently contemplate without a guide, be that someone a member of a family group (perhaps the only one to have read Austen), or a member of a formal tour. In this sense the story is narrated.

I draw upon the idea of reading as a literal and figurative practice in order to suggest that the “identity of the text, as distinct from the work, lies in its destiny not its origins, in the moment of its consumption not of its production.”⁶¹ Or as Fish would suggest, reading involves a notion of text considered as a series of temporal--and here I shall add spatial--operations.⁶² That is, to see Austen as being read in a series of encounters linking episodes and places together. Thinking of tourism as a practice like reading that involves travelling, assembling and interpreting an itinerary of sites highlights three sorts of wanderings through Austen. First, there is the sense of wandering through her texts, second the travels--real and imagined--between the reader and the text, and finally the real and imagined travels around historic sites. In the first sense, Iser’s evocative phrase “wandering subjectivity” suggests readers moving through the fictive worlds of the novels--with possible detours and manoeuvres through films, “pass notes” adaptations, and so forth. More to the point in this essay are the second and third wanderings, which locate the experience of Austen in terms of personal, class, gender and national trajectories.⁶³ Let me offer a personal positioning as a way into the second itinerary of encountering Austen. For me, her works, and period drama more generally, trigger memories of school or rather the Sunday evenings when period dramas seemed to infest the TV schedules. Thus, for me, they evoke that melancholy sense of the weekend ending and work looming. Meanwhile, I also saw the great wave of “period drama” to

which I reacted with increasing scepticism through the eighties--looking at the rightward drift of politics, the mobilisation of ideas of a “past nation” and “our island story.” Nor am I entirely alone in this as when in a discussion project a student confessed (or is that proclaimed?) “Period dramas. Hmmh... the very phrase sends unpleasant shivers down my spine.” Furthermore, I was brought up in a strongly masculinised educational environment--so for me books were feminised, labelled as something boys did not enjoy. I would like to say that I sneaked off to enjoy them--but I was far too conformist for that to be the case. This may be symptomatic, since female tourists among Austen fans form a much more visible grouping than in other sectors. Whereas for me Austen is a melancholy half memory of school, for many visitors from North America, she is filtered through an imagined England--which frames her and to which she contributes. As Shelagh Squire has argued, in the context of Beatrix Potter tourism, literary England conveys notions of countryside to North American visitors. As summed up by Ben, a librarian: “I think people have a very romantic view of England ... and they expect [it] to be all a land of quiet life and countryside ... and very nice gardens.” Specific literary meanings get caught up in, appropriated and linked to wider cultural values.⁶⁴

Following from this then is the third journey through the real places, which trigger and enable these associations. Many tourists exhibit a strong sense of personal acquaintance--so the Austen centre endorsements from ordinary visitors refer to her as “Jane” and mention her palpable presence. Sallie Wadsworth, writing an account of a tour organised by Book Adventures for the Jane Austen Society of North America, describes how a select party gathered, in period dress, at “Jane’s” death place and there read Cassandra’s letter before following what must have been the route of the cortege. “The tour director had thoughtfully provided a rose for each of us to add to an arrangement below the plaque to Jane’s memory near her tomb, and not a few sobs punctuated the prayers and thoughts of those gathered.”

Reading Austen involves for these tourists not just the bedside, the school, nor

wandering through textual Pemberleys, but trailing and touring around sites associated with her. In effect, a geography of Austen emerges through itineraries leading to key sites--so Chaworth, Lyme Park, Chatsworth, Sudbury Hall, Bath, and to a lesser extent Lyme Regis, Lacock, Box Hill, Southampton and Winchester get bound into tours.⁶⁵ At its most formal these are organised tours that restage the tradition of peripatetic reading groups--reenacting scenes at appropriate locations—while for others it may be just a gradual accumulation of visits as opportunity arises. Among fans it can also be a way of sharing the text through tourist practices--a sharing of enjoyment. Indeed, this can be a shared ironic engagement, as when Lauryl Lane describes Lacock (used for Meryton scenes in *Pride and Prejudice*): “It was cute, quaint etc. Very enjoyable.” This sense of a community of readers, for whom Lauryl and others are writing, suggests that we also need to unpack the experience of visiting.

Since the places mentioned are bound into these wider stories, I would suggest that they are “disseminated.” Not only may they be “read” in terms of films or novels, but also of souvenirs, suggesting a “reading” practice that is distanced and dispersed in time and space. So postcards tell distant others of the “reading,” while souvenirs allow the reading to be revisited later. The value of souvenirs lies in the context of their consumption; they are encoded by the narrative of the possessor, not just the authorial narrative. Indeed the souvenirs act as metonymical markers of an extra-ordinary space and time, where normal patterns and practices need not hold. They speak of unique experiences: “We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality escaped us, events that exist only through the invention of narrative. Through narrative the souvenir substitutes a context of perpetual consumption for its context of origin.”⁶⁶ At a social level interpretation and reading are thus fragmented and dispersed in space and time through a range of practices occurring not just at the site but later and in other places. Souvenirs are mementoes around which stories get woven and rewoven.⁶⁷

Overlaying this social interaction in places associated with Austen is thus a further geography of practices and conversations about her work. “The Republic of Pemberley,”⁶⁸ an electronic discussion and resource forum modelled on an imaginary territory of “Pemberley,” with areas devoted to different aspects of her life, works and times (and meditations around touring sites), makes these otherwise invisible conversations apparent. In this sense one textual geography is folded inside another, both bouncing off a set of places that are fictive and real. The engagement with Austen can also be through non-textual practices, such as replica clothing, Regency dance events, and so forth. Thus the Friends of the English Regency, who put on costumed events, invite us to join them: “Do join us, especially if you are at least reasonably frivolous.” All of which should remind us that this is all about pleasure. Even though participants are ‘having fun’ making costumes can require considerable skills and personal research on clothing of the period. I would also add that the knowledge gained by performance again creates different perspectives on Austen. For instance, wearing female costume can bring home what shifts in corsetry and design can mean in terms of freedom of movement and so forth, not just by representing femininity but in its lived practice. So other registers of knowledge and imagination are in play.

The distanced subject of Austen tourism

The reader and Austen are both located and mobile, present and absent in the landscape. Austen we have seen is made present through a range of commemorative symbols, sites and, indeed, shrines, and made mobile through the circulating networks of books and films. However, whereas conventional tourist studies look at the circulation of countable, touchable visitors, this essay reveals a dispersed practice of reading Austen. What this leaves us with is, I think, a rather more interesting if less concrete sense of Austen as a phenomenon. She is present—“with us”—as her books circulate alongside “period” souvenirs and collectible items. She is used to produce what we might call senses of “hereness” in stories of identity ranging from the nation to tourism. And yet

what we are depicting here is a geography of deferral and absence. We have visitors trying to connect personal readings (which may or may not be “accurate”), public representations and specific sites. Each is marking the other, each forming a chain of signification. Now, at one level tourism to see original sites just becomes a tour to see signs of tourism. Similarly, the sites are enchained together as equivalent items and interchangeable items (‘today is Wednesday it must be Bath’), each mediated by the sequence in which they are encountered instead of being self-fulfilling wholes. So while sites ostensibly make the past--Jane Austen’s world--present, they are also more equivocal spots haunted by the invisible worlds of the past, as reconstructed in accounts and imagined versions of Austen’s life, and by imagined worlds from her books. This then is a moment of uncertainty and openness where meaning occurs between the various components. This is a geography of betweenness, less a fabric woven from significant sites than a stitching together of gaps. As Susan Stewart put it, “Whenever we speak of the context of reading, we can see at work a doubling which undermines the authority of both the reading situation and the situation or locus of the depiction: the reader is not in either world but rather hovers between them.”⁶⁹ In the case of touring sites, I have tried to suggest that this rather more than doubles the complexity of the situation. Let us look at one of the high points of Kaliopi Pappas’s “Tour of Jane Austen’s England” in 1997, during which, after visiting Wilton, with its many Jane Austen related exhibits--costumes worn by actors in screen adaptations--she travels to Lyme Park in Cheshire:

I did Lyme Park, the exterior location for Pemberley in [the BBC version of] *Pride and Prejudice* and Chatsworth--which some say inspired the REAL Pemberley in a single day. The sight of the great house nestled into the deep green hillside, surrounded by dark mist, was certainly a sight! It was a Marianne Dashwood moment.

The complexities of presence and absence, in both temporal and spatial terms, of what is

standing for what--the real house for a fiction, the comparison of real houses, the fictional character as a way of expressing experience, the evocation of landscape--run round and round each other. Nor is it simply a matter of defining "real" or "authentic" in terms of provenance, as Pappas's travel journal cited above shows, she is aware of what are replicas, film sites or originals.

All the readings and reenactments seem to try and make something concrete and present, but point instead to the absences and gaps. It gives us then a twin sense of the instability of meaning and creative work of interpretation that we need to take on board. The question is not so much whether the landscapes of tourism accurately represent Austen or whether tourists develop an accurate understanding of her work. It is a performative sense of bringing together and articulating a range of imagined connections. This means that interpretation is a work of assembling and connecting that is always partial and bound to different geographies. Our interpretation of Austen's role today should not use metaphors of representation or mirroring, but conversation and language in action, a sense of re-presenting, of making present. In that sense we can perhaps see the continuing appeal of her work through the way people connect with it, and connect it to their personal worlds. From politics to personal life Austen is a vehicle through which people can articulate different cultural values.

Notes

¹ I am aware here of Sharp's recent criticism of not only traditional geography mining literature for commentaries about places, but equally of critical geography treating literature just as a cultural product. She argues cogently for a sense of authorial voice and textual structure to be a focus, to look at how novels shape textual landscapes, which I address in my essay. However, I also wish to add a concern with how those novels are read. J. Sharpe, "Towards a critical analysis of fictive geographies," *Area* 32.3 (2000): 327-34.

² J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 7, and J. Donald, "This, Here, Now: Imagining the Modern City," in S. Westwood and J. Williams, eds., *Imagining Cities: Scripts, Signs, Memory* (London: Routledge, 1997), 183.

³ R. Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 107-22.

⁴ One of the highlights of a series on race in England was to see a senior right-wing politician cheerily inform the (black) presenter that, while they were both British, only he was English. Darcus Howe, *White Tribe*, 2000, Channel 4.

⁵ P. Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985).

⁶ K. Walsh, *The Representation of the Past in the Present: Museums and Heritage in a Post-Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁷ R. Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁸ For a map of locations of scenes in the novels, see D. Herbert, "Place and Society in Jane Austen's England," *Geography* 76 (1991): 206.

⁹ E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London, Vintage Books, 1993), 100-16.

¹⁰ Post-structuralist readings have also seen this as a deliberate ironic critique of social relations, in which Austen uses the relations of property implied in slavery to undermine Sir Thomas--for instance, in the "dead silence" of the response to questions on the plantation. See for instance M. Ferguson, "Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism & Gender," *Oxford Literary Review* 13.1-2 (1991): 118-38. My point is not whether Austen is culpable in some way but rather how she is read by the population at large.

¹¹ Recent work, for instance, suggests that we need some caution regarding claims that Mansfield Park would not have been possible without the slave trade--in terms of how common sugar plantation holdings were, or rather were not, in Northamptonshire, but even in terms of detailed analysis of the likely scales of investments, working from figures in Austen's text itself, which relate income to dowry sizes. See the painstaking calculations in T. Lloyd, "Myths of the Indies: Jane Austen and the British Empire," *Comparative Criticism* 21 (1999): 59-78.

¹² C. Sussman, "Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792," *Representations* 48 (Fall 1994): 48-69. While less clear in Austen, the high Victorian, nationalist and heroic epic poetry of Felicia Hemans stressed again an "assumption of an intrinsic connection between the values of domestic sanctity and of imperial domination." See T. Lootens, "Hemans and Home: Victorianism, Feminine 'Internal Enemies,' and the Domestication of National Identity," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 109.2 (1994): 238-53.

¹³ S. Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," in A. King, ed. *Culture, Globalization and the World System* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 48-49.

¹⁴ Herbert, 200.

¹⁵ E. Cromley, "Public History & Historic Preservation Districts," in J. Blatti, ed., *Past Meets Present: Essays About Historic Interpretation and Public Audiences* (Washington, D. C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 30-36; D. Lowenthal, "The Timeless Past: Some Anglo-American Historical Preconceptions," *Journal of American History* 75.4 (1989): 1263-80; D. Lowenthal, "British National Identity and the English Landscape," *Rural History* 2.2 (1991): 205-30.

¹⁶ Rosaldo, 116.

¹⁷ S. Fraiman, "Jane Austen and Edward Said: Gender, Culture and Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 21 (1995): 809-10. It has to be said that this essay turns on a close reading suggesting that the phrase "If tenderness were ever wanting" (at Mansfield Park) is meant to convey to the reader that indeed it often was, and thus align it with the ensuing tumult described for Portsmouth.

¹⁸ M. Batey, *Jane Austen and the English Landscape* (London: Barn Elms, 1996), 8.

¹⁹ The Romantic movement itself has informed and been linked to literary tourism in the Lake District. See S. Squire, "Wordsworth and Lake District Tourism: Romantic Reshaping of the Landscape," *Canadian Geographer* 32.3 (1988): 237-47.

²⁰ T. Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Garden and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns

Hopkins University Press, 1995), 102.

²¹ See S. Morgan, "Adoring the Girl Next Door: Geography in Austen," *Persuasions On-line* 21.1 np, www.jasna.org/pol02/morgan.html.

²² Though we might see this as a recuperative gesture wherein a naval meritocratic Austen played out a criticism of regency politics by making "imperial war the arena in which the gentry could rediscover the manly authority necessary to govern effectively." T. Fulford makes this point in "Romanitizing the Empire:

The Naval Heroes of Southey, Coleridge, Austen, and Marryat," *Modern Languages Quarterly* 60.2 (1999): 186. Fraiman also points to the naval characters and brings in the provincialism of the colonial core (814); see also K. Kuwahara, "Sanditon, Empire and the Sea: Circles of Influence, Wheels of Power,"

Persuasions, 19 (1997): 144-48, for an argument that the instability posed by these outside forces seems to be finally overwhelming Austen's last, albeit unfinished, work.

²³ E. Mullan, "Fanny's Novel Predicament," *The Guardian*, March 2, 2000.

²⁴ J. Ezard, "Empire Show Arouses Pride and Prejudice," *The Guardian*, August 23, 1999.

- ²⁵ Fraiman, 806.
- ²⁶ J. Ezard, "Britannia Rules are Waived," *The Guardian*, August 7, 2000: 9.
- ²⁷ See for instance the early work of H. C. Darby, "The Regional Geography of Thomas Hardy's Wessex," *Geographical Review* 38 (1948): 426-43.
- ²⁸ See the different mobilisations of landscape in J. Johnson, "Literary Geography: Joyce, Woolf and the city," *City* 4.2 (2000): 199-214.
- ²⁹ R. Riley, D. Baker and C. Van Doren, "Movie Induced Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research* 25.4 (1998): 920; see also D. Hardy, "Historical Geography and Heritage Studies," *Area* 20.4 (1988): 333-38. The ubiquity of this tactic is such that ironic postcards in the Lake District show a house with a plaque bearing the inscription "This house has absolutely nothing to do with Wordsworth" (R. Dilley, "Wordsworth and the Lake District: A Reply," *The Canadian Geographer* 34.2 [1990]: 157).
- ³⁰ G. Dann, *The Language of Tourism: A Sociolinguistic Interpretation* (Wallingford, Oxon: CAB International, 1996), 59.
- ³¹ G. Hughes, "The Semiological Realization of Space," in G. Ringer, *Destinations: Cultural Landscapes of Tourism* (London: Routledge, 1999), 18.
- ³² N. Tooke and M. Baker, "Seeing is Believing: The Effect of Film on Visitor Numbers to Screened Locations," *Tourism Management* 17.2 (1996): 87-94; see also Riley, Baker and van Doren.
- ³³ Batey, 76.
- ³⁴ See for instance S. Daniels, "The Political Iconography of Woodland in Later Georgian England," in D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 60-75; S. Daniels, "The Political Landscape," in G. Carter, et al., *Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardener, 1752-1818* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 1982), 110-21; and S. Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the U.S.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).
- ³⁵ J. Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone," in *Between the Blinds* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 589.
- ³⁶ A. Compagnon, "Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*," in P. Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past. (2) Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 226.
- ³⁷ S. Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990).
- ³⁸ M. Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans T. Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 280-82.
- ³⁹ G. van den Abbeele, "Sightseers: Tourist as Theorist," *Diacritics* 10.2 (1980): 9; M. de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourses on the Other*, trans B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).
- ⁴⁰ Hampshire County Council brochure, nd, p. 3.
- ⁴¹ For example, D. MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers* (London: Routledge, 1992).
- ⁴² Van den Abbeele, 4.
- ⁴³ J. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage, 1990); M. Crang, "Picturing Practices: Research through the Tourist Gaze," *Progress in Human Geography* 21.3 (1997): 359-74.
- ⁴⁴ B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 171.
- ⁴⁵ To point out such time-travel is impossible and is in one sense banal, but the jarring of periods does have impact on claims of "experiencing" Austen's world. So, whereas Austen was struck by the glaring whiteness of the newly-built Bath, the same streets have now mellowed and possess an antique patina.
- ⁴⁶ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 169.
- ⁴⁷ Lauryl Lane published at www.lauryllane.com/england/england3.htm, last accessed 11/4/01.
- ⁴⁸ D. Pocock, "Catherine Cookson Country: Tourist Expectation and Experience," *Geography* 77 (1992): 263-40.
- ⁴⁹ J. Glynn and R. Maines, "Numinous Objects," *Public Historian* 15.1 (1993): 21.
- ⁵⁰ P. McManus, "Memories as Indicators of the Impact of Museum Visits," *International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* 12.4 (1993): 367-80.
- ⁵¹ O. Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 9.
- ⁵² M. Hood, "Staying Away: Why people Choose Not to Visit Museums," *Museum News* 61.4 (1983): 50-57; E. Hooper-Greenhill, "Counting Visitors or Visitors who Count?" in R. Lumley, ed. *The Museum Time Machine: Putting Cultures on Display* (London: Routledge, 1988), ch. 10; N. Merriman, *Beyond the Glass*

Case: The Past, the Heritage and the Public in Britain (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991).

⁵³ D. Herbert, "Artistic and Literary Places in France as Tourist Attractions," *Tourism Management* 17.2 (1996): 81. The figure is similar to most "heritage sites" in the UK.

⁵⁴ S. Fish, "Narrative and Reader Response," *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980); R. Schole, "Is There a Fish in this Text?" in M. Blonsky, ed., *On Signs* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1985); W. Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

⁵⁵ See for instance S. Squire, "Accounting for Cultural Meanings: The Interface Between Geography and Tourism Studies Re-examined," *Progress in Human Geography* 18.1 (1994): 1-16.

⁵⁶ For example, Herbert 1996; R. Prentice, "Measuring the Educational Effectiveness of On-site Interpretation Designed for Tourists: An Assessment of Student Recall from Geographical Field Visits to Kidwelly Castle, Dyfed," *Area* 23.4 (1991): 297-308.

⁵⁷ T. Edensor, "Staging Tourism: Tourists as Performers," *Annals of Tourism Research* 27.2 (2000): 322.

⁵⁸ R. Stebbins, "Cultural Tourism as Serious Leisure," *Annals of Tourism Research* 1997.

⁵⁹ M. Morris, "At Henry Parkes Motel," *Cultural Studies* 2.1 (1988): 2.

⁶⁰ According to Hoffman, "the aesthetics of appearance asserts place identity and a sense of rootedness, creates spaces and times of individuation and of social or universal connection" (439). Although in this case these sites are a fragile balance between a promise of this and a feeling that they are manufactured or inauthentic (G. Hoffmann, "The Aesthetic Attitude in a Post-ideological World: History, Art/Literature and the Museum Mentality in the Cultural Environment," *American Studies* 34.4 [1989]: 423-79).

⁶¹ D. Bennett, "Wrapping Up Postmodernism: The Subject of Consumption Versus the Subject of Cognition," A. Milner, P. Thomson, and C. Worth, eds., *Postmodern Conditions* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1990), 24-25.

⁶² I am wary that accounts that stress the indeterminacy of texts and the primacy of interpretative communities can either end up with a reader response determined by that community or return the "decentred subject to an imaginary autonomy and transcendence" (Bennett, 31).

⁶³ For one take on this national framing, and how British productions pick up on class, while those for a North American audience gloss over it, see C. Dole, "Austen, Class and the American Market," in L.

Troost,

and S. Greenfield, eds. *Jane Austen in Hollywood* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 58-78.

For more discussion of the connections of tourism, gender and heritage see Aitchison, where she recounts how many nationalist sites are overwhelmingly masculinised (C. Aitchison, "Heritage and Nationalism: Gender and the Performance of Power," in Crouch, ed., *Leisure/Tourism Geographies: Practices and Geographical Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1999), 59-73.

⁶⁴ S. Squire, "The Cultural Values of Literary Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research* 21.1 (1994): 110-16.

⁶⁵ Cf. M. Crang, "On the Heritage Trail: Maps of and Journeys to Olde Englande," *Society and Space* 12 (1994): 341-55.

⁶⁶ S. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir and the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 4.

⁶⁷ Stewart, 135. See also C. Lury, who looks at the circulation of objects that evoke memories of travel at home and evoke home while travelling (C. Lury, "The Objects of Tourism," in C. Rojek and J. Urry, eds., *Touring Cultures: Transformation of Travel and Theory* [London: Routledge, 1997], 75-95); and B. Gordon, "The Souvenir: Messenger of the Extraordinary," *Journal of Popular Culture* 20.3 (1986): 135-46.

⁶⁸ Its home page is <http://www.pemberley.com/>.

⁶⁹ Stewart, 44.