Social Jane

Social Jane:
The Small, Secret Sociology of Jane Austen

By

Christopher Wilkes

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To Cheleen Ann-Catherine, who, like Jane Austen,
sees and understands more than most.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have Judith Butler to thank for this effort. One Saturday afternoon, I found myself struggling with Butler's epistemology as part of a larger book project on social epistemology for graduate students in sociology. The struggle was an unequal one, and I had begun to lose faith in the whole undertaking. My wife put her head round the door, and suggested we watch a Jane Austen film. I never went back to Judith Butler, but fell instead into the arms of Jane Austen. Very soon after, I was asked to write a book chapter about food and the English. I used Austen's use of food in her novels, and the discussions that take place in her letters, to write that chapter.[1] Having enjoyed writing about Austen, I decided to implicate Bourdieu's theory of social practice in the broader enterprise of assessing the four fields of social activity analysed in this book.

While I dug deeply into Austen's texts again and again for evidence of her sociological wit and insight, and while I read the letters and the biographies carefully, I also depended very heavily on other scholars' work to complete this book, and I am delighted to acknowledge their contributions here. Two obvious debts are clear – Austen herself wrote works of genius, and this is especially so given the small canvas on which she could work, according to her own account. Everyone who writes about Austen is compelled and intrigued by the range and the depth of this work, and we are all indebted to it. Pierre Bourdieu, a social theorist of the highest prominence and enormous influence,[2] lurks as a gentle presence in the book. I was lucky enough to work with him briefly in the 1980s, and his social logic is everywhere in my thinking.

Among contemporary writers, I am much impressed and influenced by the writings of Claudia Johnson, whose insights into Austen's politics are truly breath-taking, and turned my own thinking on its head. Amanda Vickery's historical work on the Georgian era has been valuable, as have

[1] Culinary Jane, in Mahar, Cheleen. 2010. *Cuisine and symbolic capital: food in film and literature*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars. This chapter became chapter four of this book.

[2] Bourdieu's work has just been cited at the BBC website at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21953364, as the intellectual source of the BBC's own 'Great British Class Survey', which has gained wide currency recently. (Retrieved April 10th., 2013.)

the critical histories of Roy Porter and E.P. Thompson. Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* was never far from my mind. My view of landscape in Austen's era is greatly influenced by Nigel Everett's *The Tory View of Landscape*, Simon Schama's *History of Britain*, and the work of John Barrell. In each case, I make extensive use of their work to develop a theory of landscape that I propose Austen might herself have used. I am persuaded by Alan Everitt and David Spring's work on social structure and Austen's role in it, and their pinning down of her own position in the pseudo-gentry. On several occasions, the analysis of Kay Dian Kriz has proved very valuable.

The chapter on economics depends on a re-reading of Adam Smith's two major works, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* and *The Wealth of Nations.* I am indebted to the work of Joseph Baldacchino and Vernon Smith for their critical takes on Adam Smith. During 1990, I was at the Arbetslivcentrum in Stockholm, Sweden, where, as a 'guest researcher', I was able to read Smith very carefully, and to write about him. Thanks in this instance are due to Casten Von Otter, who provided the financial support for this work. Venetia Murray's work on the Regency world crops up in this chapter and in others, and proved to be a valuable resource. James Heldman from Western Kentucky University has done tremendous work trying to sort out the finances of the Austen households, and I use his work here, especially his table summarizing the income and wealth of these families. Ellen Moers writes in highly original fashion on Austen economics, and she has contributed greatly to my understanding of this topic. Sheryl Bonar Craig offers up valuable insights in her *Persuasions* article on the issue of income in Austen's era. Thanks also to Phil Ruder, who read the chapter on economics.

My analysis of Austen's culinary practices relies heavily on Amy Trubek's work on the history of French cuisine, and on Maggie Lane's *Jane Austen and Food.* I have also made wide use of Black and Le Faye's *The Jane Austen Cookbook. Tea with Jane Austen* by Kim Wilson also proved a fruitful resource. A brief piece by Tanya Lewis called *Soup and Snobbery* found on the web offered some very ingenious insights into Austen's understanding of food.

Marsha Huff writes thoughtfully about Jane Austen and fashion, and this writing influenced my own views. Roger Sales and his book *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* led me to a better understanding of this era, for which I am grateful.

Hazel Jones' *Jane Austen and Marriage* helped me organize my thoughts about the conclusion to this book. Her history of this period surrounding the evolution of marriage is invaluable, and I have made use

of it extensively. Chloe Kessinger of Pacific University, in an exceptional undergraduate essay, underscored the value Austen places in the modest life of the clergy, and I thank her for this. David Vandervort, a Pacific student, acted as teaching assistant for my Jane Austen seminar, and did sterling work around the course, checking the text references, and generally doing much to solve problems. I am grateful to him. The students in this same Jane Austen seminar, with whom I read the novels, ate cake and drank tea, as well as watched the Austen films, provided me with many more insights than I gave them, which is usually the way with teaching.

Finally Sharon Harrigan, a star graduate of Pacific's MFA program, and a marvellously innovative writer, proof-read the entire manuscript critically, and offered many improvements, for which much thanks. Pauline Beard, my colleague in English, and with whom I gave five seminars on Austen, each year for five years, during women's history month at Pacific, read several chapters painstakingly and caught me in many an error. Pauline is that rare colleague one dreams of having who takes your writing seriously. A debt is owed here. The massed ranks of Jane Austen supporters, and especially those who run all the specialist websites, and particularly the JASNA *Persuasions* Journal, both online and off, provide a limitless source of information and insight. I am especially fond of the Republic of Pemberley website, where one can scour the novels electronically, and feel safe within its boundaries. Lastly to Cheleen Ann-Catherine Mahar, who offered the initial thought for the book, and who cheered me to the finishing post. Thanks.

CDW
April 10th, 2013

ABBREVIATIONS

MP	Mansfield Park
S&S	Sense and Sensibility
P&P	Pride and Prejudice
P	Persuasion
NA	Northanger Abbey
E	Emma

(All by Jane Austen)

WN	Wealth of Nations
TMS	Theory of Moral Sentiments

(Both by Adam Smith)

CHAPTER ONE

SUBJECTIVITIES, HIERARCHIES, CONTEXT

Reading Austen Reading Society

I have little doubt that Jane Austen would have hated this book. When I talk about the book to a group, I imagine her sitting in the front row of the audience, writing intensely in that tight hand of hers in a notebook, full of fury, waiting only for me to quieten down so that she can turn her alarmingly powerful satirical lens on me. But in spite of her imagined and compelling presence, I find myself driven to argue that there is something in Austen's work that is sociologically powerful and uniquely interesting. Indeed, I want to treat Austen herself as a sociologist who spends much of her time reading society.

There are three parts to this claim. *First*, I find something very valuable in the *smallness and subjectivity* of her analysis. This is not an obvious asset for sociological work. Pierre Bourdieu once said of Erving Goffman that his was the sociology of the infinitely small. Bourdieu was driven to this view because of Goffman's interest in the minute details of a faculty cocktail party, the workings of the tiniest social gatherings, the individual, human gestures of power and subordination played out on the body itself. Austen's world may be even smaller. Her focus on subjectivities allows us to enter the internal turmoil of human consciousness, that place where we ponder if a lecture is ever going to end, what's for dinner, or how my leg is hurting, even while we should be concentrating on something else. So my first claim is that the very smallness of Austen's analysis allows us to interrogate the social subjectivities of Georgian England in a unique way.

Second, there is her brilliance, expressed on almost every page, in her exposure of the *social hierarchy* of her time. Here is a typical passage picked at random from many other similar passages. It comes from *Emma.* Miss Woodhouse is talking of the marriage of Mr. Elton, the local clergyman, to a neophyte, a “Miss Hawkins”, who is about to join the Highbury community:

> Of the lady, individually, Emma thought very little. She was *good enough for Mr. Elton, no doubt* ; accomplished enough for Highbury – handsome enough – to look plain … As to connection, there Emma was perfectly easy … *What* she was, must be uncertain; but *who* she was, might be found out ... She brought no name, no blood, no alliance. Miss Hawkins was the youngest of the two daughters of a Bristol – merchant, of course, he must be called ; but as the whole of the profits of his mercantile life appeared so very moderate … all the grandeur of the connection seemed dependent on the elder sister, who was *very well married,* to a gentleman in a *great way* near Bristol, who kept two carriages ! That was the wind-up of the history ; that was the glory of Miss Hawkins.[1]

Emma's intention here is to place Miss Hawkins in a very particular location in the complex rankings of the rural social order which Miss Hawkins is now entering. Like any advanced social analyst, Emma does it by estimating her wealth (10,000 pounds in the funds; her social rank (lowly, from trade, and not wealthy trade at that); her accomplishments (limited); her taste (vulgar and uneducated); and her connections in society[2] (non-existent among people that matter). Through this mechanism, Emma is able to assign the new arrival to the role of a parvenu on the edge of her own social circle. Austen offers up these kinds of judgments endlessly in everything she writes, and, taken together, she sharply reveals the broad dimensions of hierarchy, what counted as socially correct behaviour, and what mattered to the people she wrote about. She exposes the basic circuitry of social rank in her own society. Indeed, Austen's writing brings into view, as perhaps no-one in her time was able to achieve, the vast apparatus of judgment and domination that undergirded the Regency world. Knowing this, we are much better able to make sense of why people operated as they did, how they orchestrated their lives, why they learnt to play the piano well, fold a cravat in a certain way, herd cows, or hold dances. And, of course, these judgments were not trivial; they shaped the very limits of the social world.

Third, historical *context* is all important in making meaning around Jane Austen. I am interested in making sense of these social judgments, the sensibilities and the architecture of social domination, in terms of the social context in which Austen lived. This can only be done by historicizing Austen's period, following Marx, Thompson, Abrams and Jameson, elaborating as fully as possible the key elements of social,

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[1] *Emma,* 183. This is the Chapman edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988. (My italics in the first and second lines; the remainder appear in the original.) All references in the book are to these Chapman editions, unless otherwise cited.

[2] Bourdieu calls this dimension "social capital".

economic and political life. This then allows us to bring to light the nature of Austen's understandings in the context of her historical period. So if Austen brings smallness, subjectivity and hierarchy to her sociology, I argue we need to bring historical context to the task of understanding her novels.

Treating Austen sociologically has not traditionally been attractive to the sociological community, and much of the reason lies in the intense focus on interiority in her work. Pages of internal musings suggest little for the sociologist to work on, and the privacy and "smallness" of the worlds Austen constructs do not, at first glance, lend themselves to sociological analysis. But I would claim that the opposite is true. While we certainly start with individual musings, even these private thoughts are directed towards the social, are shaped by the social, and are acted upon in the social world. Indeed, for me, much of the power of her work lies in her capacity to reveal the social, and especially the hierarchical, in such rich detail. To develop this argument further, I rely on Pierre Bourdieu's celebrated theoretical innovations.

Bourdieu's acknowledged master-work *Distinction*[3] sets out to create an ethnography of France. No such claim can be made of Austen's work about England. Its literary ambitions mean it has none of the "scientific" pretensions of sociology, however flimsy these sociological claims might be. There's no evidence that she planned to recreate the story of a nation. Yet Bourdieu's theoretical work in expanding Marx's familiar tale of economic capital into the realms of the social, political, cultural and symbolic worlds is, in another sense, a precisely parallel enterprise to Austen's achievement. At its heart, Bourdieu's theoretical stratagem is perfectly exemplified by Emma's tale of Miss Hawkins. Faced with a challenge to her own position in a small society in which she presently reigns, Emma uses all her analytic powers to identify the criteria, the forms of capital, as Bourdieu might say, by which such a person as Miss Hawkins might be judged. Knowing this, Emma is able to conclude, and with some certainty, the exact location that this newcomer will achieve in the existing ranking of Highbury society.

And so it proves. Yet none of this struggle for social position happens as a matter of individual prejudice and caprice. Instead it requires agency and human endeavour to bring about, and, for this judgment to have any social power, it must be agreed upon by the social group as a whole. Working out who counts in this small society, how these social judgments

[3] *Distinction*, Harvard University Press, Boston, 1984, first published in French in 1979.

are made, and what work is needed to maintain the rules of conduct and the boundaries of social judgment, constitutes a major theme of this book – and all of Austen's novels. She is, in short, a specialist in delineating for us *a social judgment of the critique of taste*[4] in the small, domestic and largely rural, settings she wrote about. This book makes use of Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus in setting out this architecture of social conduct in the Austen novels.

Bourdieu's general argument, which is used lightly throughout this book, can be simply stated. Bourdieu's theory of the social field is a good starting point. Imagine a game of football or tennis. You play when you are young because you like it, you continue playing because it's fun. You go to a school where you are encouraged to play. You become good at it. The rules fall away, and you develop an intuitive "sense for the game".[5] This metaphor of the game is the simplest way into Bourdieu's general theory of social relations. Actors in Austen's social fields spend their childhoods learning the rules of the game. History, family and personal interest, as well as caprice and chance, play a part. Throughout their history they acquire forms of habit, and are able to place themselves strategically in the world, both accepting the world as it is, and seeking to change the rules at the same time. In this book, I look closely at four such fields of social activity – landscape; food; fashion; and economics. As we see in the Miss Hawkins example above, all such fields have capitals – things that matter, for which people strive – and all fields have rules and strategies that people may or may not follow.[6]

So people enter games or fields, learn the rules of the games, learn the stakes (capitals) that are in play, and become different as a result. They develop a form of consciousness - Bourdieu calls this consciousness habitus,[7] a set of dispositions or attitudes that enable participants to

[4] This is the subtitle of Bourdieu's book.

[5] "Sens de jeu" is a familiar Bourdieu phrase used widely in his writings.

[6] Bourdieu's break with structuralism, always mentioned but rarely fully understood, implies that while, like Marx, Gramsci and many others, he fully accepts the overwhelming force of political and economic domination in everything we do, he does not accept the hyper-determinism of Althusserian logic, or the intellectual Stalinism of his era. This means that active agents are central in his account.

[7] We should be careful here. "Habitus", a central idea in Bourdieu's lexicon, may be thought of somewhat differently from the way I have described it in the text. It refers to durable dispositions – commanding viewpoints, we might say, that direct specific actions. People enter these fields of activity with already-existing sets of habitus, but these ideas will change decisively if they commit to another form of

function and act in this new social field. Armed with this knowledge, the understanding of the stakes in play, and a sense of the shape of the "field", agents are ready to take their place in the social world. But furthermore, given his interest in social practice, Bourdieu also wants to underscore the fact that agents devise plans to move in various directions in these same fields, (strategy) and to overcome the forms of domination that they experience (struggle). The outcome will be that, through their resulting practice, they will *shift the very nature of the field itself*, and thus alter the rules of the game. I use this general argument to account for the strivings, the failures and the successes that Austen traces in her novels.

Austen is familiarly described as a brilliant writer, but why this might be so is less clear. Certainly, the use of language is exceptional, and the insights she shows are obviously unusually sharp. But we must add to her more obvious qualities at least two more that make her so interesting, particularly to students of social structure and social practice. First, she provides an extraordinarily rich account of the internal and external lives of her characters, so that we have lush territory on which to work. Pages are full of internal debates, and three of four sides of an argument are routinely canvassed. A small canvas, perhaps, but a miniaturist's detail, certainly. So there is no want of raw material concerning the tiniest elements of human musings and actions that form the backdrop to social action, even if it is social action writ small. One must also comment on the slowness that this structure of internal debate imposes both on the reader and the action of the characters. This pausing in time that Austen gives us, the chance to trace actions slowly, thoughtfully, and from so many vantage points, is almost cinematic, and it draws the reader into a very intimate relationship with the author and her characters. Austen requires us to meditate on the motivations of individuals bound up in the business of making the social.

None of this might be so interesting if Austen did not also make her individuals so self-referential at all times. Her characters are never allowed merely to act. Instead we are continually made privy to their internal reflections on these actions, certainly, but also to the interpretations of the actions of others. Thus we emerge, at the very least, with a double understanding – an account of the social acts of judgment that fill the lives of these individuals, and the meanings they invest in these goings-on. From this double hermeneutic, we are able to see both the appearance and the meaning of things. And since these actions are almost entirely social,

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life, the life of an artist, for example. Habitus is formed from personal and social history, but also from human agency, so it is hardly unchanging or deterministic.

Austen's understanding provides nothing less than an advanced self-reflective sociology of her time.

The rest of this chapter outlines the argument to come, visiting the three themes of *smallness and subjectivities*; *hierarchy;* and *context* in turn. After these themes are introduced, the chapter provides an introduction to the *four fields of social activity* that constitute the rest of the book: *landscape; food; fashion; and economics*. Each of these fields is explored in full in the coming chapters.

The Three Elements of Austen's Sociology

1. The Private Becomes Public: Smallness and Subjectivities

In sociology, we might use the phenomenological notion of inter-subjectivity to examine the very *social* nature of subjectivity in Austen's novels. But inter-subjectivity, while it refers to shared subjective meanings right enough, won't do here.[8] Its primary focus on psychoanalytic meaning and social empathy doesn't place history at the centre of things, and for me, Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, durable dispositions shaping action, derived from both personal and social history, is more useful.

So the focus here is on the *social habitus* in Austen. In her six completed novels, we spend a great deal of time in the world of individual consciousness, but the *social* consciousness of the era is everywhere implied and negotiated. We start with the so-called juvenile novel, *Northanger Abbey*. Here, in this parodic romp through the trope, Austen takes us into the universe of the early romance novel, about to be played out in real life by our protagonist, Catherine Morland:

[8] Gordon Marshall and John Scott's "Dictionary of Sociology" tells us that it is 'A term used primarily in phenomenological sociology to refer to the mutual constitution of social relationships. It suggests that people can reach consensus about knowledge or about what they have experienced in their life-world — at least as a working agreement if not a claim to objectivity.' (John Scott, and Gordon Marshall. 2009. A Dictionary of Sociology. Oxford: Oxford University Press) But the way the term works out in sociology through Schutz stays too close to psychology for the purposes of this work. Thus, while shared meanings are important, this term is of most use to social psychology in the discussion of shared therapeutic meaning. It may also refer to the development of empathy. However, we need a more capacious analytic structure that allows in a wider history. For this task, Bourdieu's idea of habitus is more valuable. Bourdieu argues that the term habitus refers to durable disposition shaping action, and it derives from two sources: history and agency. This history itself is not merely familial and personal, but also social in the widest sense. It might derive from the social history of an era.

> … when a young lady is to be a heroine, the perverseness of forty surrounding families cannot prevent her. Something must and will throw a hero in her way.[9]

Catherine Morland, absorbed almost entirely in romantic novels, does indeed get a break from dull, rural idiocy, and is thrown into Bath society by the wealthy Allens, who take a fancy to her, and transport her to Bath. Her head is full of robbers and tempests and heroes, which the grownups do not appear to notice.

In Bath, that glittering metropolis of fashion, things warm up. Here Catherine starts to meet members of a wider social circle, and the first of these is Mr. Tilney. In the Lower Rooms, Mrs. Allen and Catherine meet a man who knows his muslin very well, a matter of extraordinary distinction. He is immediately valued beyond all other men.[10] Catherine resolutely decides to start dreaming about Mr. Tilney, and he becomes an element in her enduring Gothic fantasy.[11] But can Mr. Tilney, a respectable clergyman from a respectable family in Gloucestershire, really fit the bill of Gothic villain? We need someone more ogrous and rough-fashioned to come along, and this happens quickly when the Thorpes appear. Miss Thorpe might certainly be wicked, given her full-time dedication to the art of flirting, but it is her brother John Thorpe who is even more promising to Catherine. To the background of Udolpho and other Gothic novels, John Thorpe appears to her as a snorting, vulgar brute, who lacks any form of social subtlety and merely wants his own way. He grabs Catherine from the Tilneys and spirits her off into the country. Like a present-day car obsessive, he is preoccupied with how fast his horse moves. He takes himself to be a man of money and property, though neither assertion is true.

In contrast to the snorting John Thorpe and the flirtatious Isabella Thorpe, Miss Tilney, the sister of the muslin expert, had:

> … a good figure, a pretty face, and a very agreeable countenance ; and her air, though it had not all the decided pretension, the resolute stilishness of Miss Thorpe's, had more real elegance. Her manners shewed good sense and good breeding ; they were neither shy, nor affectedly open ; and she seemed capable of being young, attractive, and at a ball, without wanting

[9] *NA*, 16-17.
[10] *NA*, 28.
[11] *NA*, 29-30. Austen comments: " … it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her." (*NA*, 30)

> to fix the attention of every man near her, and without … vexation on every trifling occurrence.[12]

The moral landscape is already clear. As the plot unfolds, the Thorpes are brushed aside and the Tilneys start to rise. But, of course, this is not a simple matter. General Tilney, the father of Henry and Eleanor, is truly villainous, and wants Catherine for her money. When this strategy does not produce results, he throws her out of the house.

But what of Catherine's subjectivity? There is much internal musing, certainly, and indeed much of the novel's action takes place within Catherine's head. She now adds the confusion of the fashionable world to the Gothic infrastructure of her imagination. As John Thorpe speaks:

> Catherine listened with astonishment ; she knew not how to reconcile two such very different accounts of the same thing ; for she had not been brought up to understand the propensities of a rattle, nor to know to how many idle assertions and impudent falsehoods the excess of vanity will lead.[13]

This dialogue between several different forms of morality takes up the rest of the internal action. The Thorpes are easily described. But the Tilneys are more complicated – no one single organizing principle is at work here. Captain Tilney, the oldest Tilney child, is an adventurer and user of young women, as he exhibits with Isabella Thorpe, a young woman of much flair but little experience. General Tilney needs funds and is ruthless in gaining them. But his younger children follow a separate path. Eleanor and Henry offer a clear alternative to both the Thorpe perspective and to the senior Tilney view. Between these two poles, Catherine oscillates for the rest of the novel. She first comes under the spell of Isabella and her noisy brother, but soon her doubts set in. In a typical piece of internal monologue, Austen tells us:

> Little as Catherine was in the habit of judging for her self, and unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt, while she bore with the effusions of his [Thorpe's] endless conceit, of his being altogether agreeable. It was a bold surmise, for he was Isabella's brother ….[14]

This brief infatuation, innocently started, is also quickly over. Catherine heads for the quieter climes of walks with Eleanor and Henry, in

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[12] *NA*, 55-56.
[13] *NA*, 65.
[14] *NA*, 66.

the midst of which the invitation from General Tilney to visit Northanger Abbey itself seems to offer a continuance and a deepening of the Tilney connection. Here Catherine enters the quotidian materiality of Gothicism itself – a brooding building, cloisters, stairways, hidden passages, chests and unused wings of buildings, dust and memory plentiful enough for the wildest imagination to dwell upon. She worries about the death of Mrs. Tilney, and fears it must have been awful. Catherine muses on the problems of this poor woman:

> … it suddenly struck her as not unlikely, that she might that morning have passed near the very spot of this poor woman's confinement – might have been within a few paces of the cell in which she languished out her days … In support of the plausibility of this conjecture, it further occurred to her, that the forbidden gallery, in which lay the apartments of the unfortunate Mrs. Tilney, must be, as certainly as her memory could guide her, exactly over this suspected range of cells, and the stair-case by the side of those apartments of which she had caught a transient glimpse, communicating by some secret means with those cells, might well have favoured the barbarous proceedings of her husband. Down that stair-case she had been perhaps been conveyed in a state of well-prepared insensibility ![15]

These revels are upturned when Catherine later talks to Henry Tilney about them, and he abruptly rejects her arguments. Austen comments on Catherine's attitude of mind:

> The visions of romance were over. *Catherine was completely awakened.* Henry's address, short as it had been, had more thoroughly opened her eyes to the extravagance of her late fancies than all their several disappointments had done. Most grievously was she humbled. Most bitterly did she cry. It was not only with herself that she was sunk – but with Henry.[16]

This is the turning point of the novel. What happens next has little to do with interiority. Instead Catherine is released from this private universe and catapulted into brutal social experience. General Tilney finds that Catherine has no fortune, and that she is no use to him. He spares no time in throwing her out of her Gothic fantasy world, and out of his house, and she travels alone back to her rural home. But this, of course, is not the end. Henry's arrival on his white horse recasts subjectivities in the last scene. He arrives in the country to put things aright. Instead of keeping his

[15] *NA*, 188.
[16] *NA*, 199, my italics.

feelings to himself, he is able to express his sensibility fully, and to explain the complex inner workings of the Tilney family.

Gothicism is seen merely as teenage nonsense. Mature thinking arrives when Henry confronts Catherine with the accurate record of his mother's death. The loss of the internal monologue within the Gothic romance, and the arrival of "good thinking" about what men and women should do and think – the shared gender sensibilities – establishes a new terrain of debate and internal musings. The Thorpes clearly manifest the commercial sensibilities of the new social order, with all its gainings and strivings. But Austen is leading us elsewhere. With the first of her several clergy, Austen introduces Georgian social work as the best alternative for couples with limited resources and strong moral intent. In the last chapters, Henry rejects his father's overweening greed and domination, and offers himself to the Morland family as an appropriate suitor for Catherine.

General Tilney's resistance remains an obstacle to perfect felicity. Through another touch of humour, Austen resolves the issue:

> The means by which their early marriage was effected can be the only doubt ; what probable circumstance could work upon a temper like the General's ? The circumstance which chiefly availed, was the marriage of his daughter with a man of fortune and consequence, which took place in the course of the summer – an accession of dignity that threw him into a fit of good-humour, from which he did not recover …[17]

This quiet, private world of the interior now finally boils over fully into the public realm. The broad arena of gender social subjectivities[18] is raised in Northanger Abbey as a territory for debate and complicated positioning. But its argument is simple – mature people, passing beyond childish fantasy, establish households only after matters of property and character are settled. And the question of character is largely centred on gender performativity.[19] Here, Henry Tilney and Catherine Morland settle on a quiet parsonage, and an implied life of good works. And the themes of gender and money come to comprise two of the central elements of the social subjectivities, the private worlds that are shared, in the novels.

This arena of gender subjectivities gets a further working over in *Persuasion.* The story starts with the account of the docile, unmarried

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[17] *NA*, 250.

[18] By which I mean the shared views about the roles of men and women in this context.

[19] Following Judith Butler's widely referenced argument that social roles must be actively "performed" to be achieved. The social quality of this performance is underscored.

woman in a large household, who has neither independent means nor a husband.[20] Patriarchy rules without question, and it is a particularly stupid form of patriarchy in the figure of Sir Walter Elliot. Anne Elliot, the vehicle on which Austen rests most of her argument, is represented as nothing more than a senior servant, and senior only because she has more obligations than the rest of the servants. There is much interior musing by Anne on the nature of her predicament. Here is a typical passage:

> To hear them talking so much of Captain Wentworth … was a new sort of trial to Anne's nerves. She found, however, that it was one to which she must enure herself. Since he actually was expected in the country, she must teach herself to be insensible on such points.[21]

Thus begins Anne Elliot's long and unhappy internal meditation on the man who she has loved all her adult life. In the course of the book, there are many such debates and letters, and a host of internal reflections on the nature of men and women, how men and women should act, what constitutes a good marriage and a poor one, and how money is to be secured and protected. As the agony comes to an end, it is only through the private medium of a letter that Captain Wentworth can finally share his true feelings with Anne. After hearing his friend Captain Harville and Anne debate whether it is men or women who are most constant in love, Wentworth writes a letter to her, even though she is in the same room with him:

> "I can listen to you in silence no longer. I must speak to you with such means as are within my reach. You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone for ever. I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you.[22]

The couple are reconciled and the inevitable marriage, the usual Austen end-product, takes place. But the courtship has almost completely taken place in private, almost unknown to the protagonists themselves. As well, it is a complete surprise to their families, and Wentworth and Anne themselves can hardly believe it. All the work of preparation has been

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[20] See Vickery, Amanda. 2010. *Behind closed doors: at home in Georgian England.* New Haven: Yale University Press, and especially chapter 7, "The Trials of Domestic Dependence", for a more general, detailed account of this period.
[21] *P*, 52.
[22] *P*, 237.

internal, taking place in the worryings and perturbations of the participants. The sources of these anxieties, however, are hardly psychological. They are to found in the social attitudes of the people around them about how men and women should behave, and what kind of fortune is appropriate for matrimony. The social habitus of gender[23] is widely discussed, the lives of women and men tirelessly debated, and judgements made. It is merely in the re-workings of such issues that we come to understand this powerful social dimension, as we are taken inside the consciousnesses of the two main characters. These "durable dispositions" about what men and women should and should not do, what constitutes excellence of character, and how distinction might be achieved in daily conduct, result from the reshaping of received opinion, and often its rejection, as new social arguments are made against the common wisdom. These new opinions, started first in familial and parental settings, are vigorously interrogated and reformed by the heroes of our story, before being presented, again in a new social form, through the exchange of vows. What was for some time private becomes truly social, as the Elliots judge the rightness and wrongness of Captain Wentworth and his new bride.

The same theme of the private reworking of public social norms is widespread in *Pride and Prejudice*. In the famous passages in which Darcy declares his love for Lizzy, and she resents it, his theory of propriety, of good and bad gender behaviour, is again set out in a letter, since he finds he is unable to express himself face to face. The letter is several pages long, and in it Darcy outlines a detailed theory of appropriate male attitudes through the use of two case studies – the treatment of Jane Bennet and his friend Bingley; and the alleged misuse of Wickham. In the letter, Darcy is able to express both his views towards women, and the organizing principles by which he thinks family and business obligations are to be met. Lizzy is thus able to read, as if in a written scholarly paper, the social habitus of Fitzwilliam Darcy, and to decide, on the basis of this argument, whether she finds any common ground with him, or whether the gap between them is unbreachable. Again, the sources of these beliefs are hardly psychological, stemming as they do from his personal history in the Darcy family, from his education and the influence of friends. But the real social action of the plot happens in very private settings.

Darcy himself tells us where his guiding principles came from:

[23] By this is meant the shared dispositions (habitus) about gender, formed first in the social realm, then interrogated privately by Anne and Wentworth, and finally reformed and displayed again in public in a new shape through their marriage.

> As a child, I was taught what was *right*, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles but left to follow them in pride and conceit … I was spoilt by my parents, who though good themselves … allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world … Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty ; and such I might have still been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth … You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled … You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions …[24]

Family history played its normal part in shaping Darcy's views, as indeed it did with Elizabeth. But it is in their private musings, and in their awkward and extended emotional exchanges, that they managed to breach their differences and negotiate a common order of beliefs, beliefs about gender, marriage, property and money that provided the basis for their proposed future life together. And this private musing later finds validation through Darcy's working (again behind the scenes and largely out of sight) to get Lydia married. The social agreement that Darcy and Elizabeth finally develop sets them against Lady Catherine de Bourgh and others in proper society; provides a source of confusion to Lizzy's own father, who had thought Darcy the proudest man in England and the last man his beloved daughter would ever marry; and goes against Darcy's own long-established beliefs.

So the formation of social habitus may begin and end in society, but in Austen's novels a great deal of what we care about happens behind closed doors, away from the public gaze.

Much of the action in the Austen novels, therefore, clearly happens at the level of the infinitely small, within the consciousness of individuals. As well as conversations, letters are the mechanism by which these private meanings are shared and the social habitus is built up, negotiated and tested out. The final test is courtship, of course, or, more precisely, the process of initial meeting and engagement, which, for Austen, takes about a year in her novels on average. It is during this period that private dispositions are shared, agreements and disagreements exchanged, attitudes tested in actual situations and through personal history, and common ground formed, as in the case of Elizabeth and Darcy, Anne Elliot and Wentworth, Henry Tilney and Catherine. Evidence mattered to Austen. A handsome face and a witty disposition, as we see with Henry Crawford and George Wickham, may be diverting, but the evidence of good character in their actions is lacking. In other cases, as with Edmund

[24] *P&P*, 369.

Bertram and Mary Crawford, the differences are extreme, and no alliance is possible. Things blow apart. Most of this action takes place in private, or in letters, or in one-to-one conversations. The sociology of the infinitely small is at work.

2. Hierarchy

I now turn to the second element of Austen's sociology, the focus on hierarchy. In Amanda Vickery's stunning book *Behind Closed Doors,* an account of domestic Georgian England, she comments:

> Hierarchy was the skeleton that structured households, as natural as landscape. We should be careful not to presume that dependence was insufferable, or that rebellion boiled in every conscious underling. The conviction that hierarchy is abnormal is a modern reflex, not a principle of Georgian common sense.[25]

If Vickery is right, what were the elements of this "natural hierarchy" of the Georgian era? I examine four fields in which this proposed natural hierarchy operates here – *landscape, economics, fashion and food*.

1. Landscape

Austen writes about the machinery of hierarchy on every page. It starts with the settings that Austen recounts – the landscapes, houses and land in which her action takes place. In her theory of landscape, memory and nature, Austen comes closest to siding with the Tory Theory of Landscape that prevailed in her era among major elements of the landed classes. The situation is complicated, however. So I want to claim that it is absurd to dismiss Austen as simply a spokeswoman for a challenged class about to lose their land.

Austen certainly had a well-developed *Theory of Landscape.* She believed in benevolent ownership, if the characters of Darcy, Brandon and Knightley are anything to go by. And clearly she made fun of the improvers, those mostly associated with what Everett[26] calls the Whig

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[25] Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: at home in Georgian England,* Yale, New Haven and London, 2009, page 201.

[26] Nigel Everett, *The Tory View of Landscape*, New Haven, Yale University Press, for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1994; John Barrell, The public prospect and the private view: the politics of taste in eighteenth century Britain, in *Reading Landscape: Country-City-Capital,* edited by Simon Pugh, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1990, pages 19-40. See also Simon

Edward Charles Williams, *The Old Roadside Inn*, oil on canvas, 1859. The Tory Theory of Landscape proposed stewardship of the land by those who had the wisdom, time and vision to see into the future, but it clearly masked self-interest behind an ideology of nobility. The Whig Theory of Landscape saw land as a commodity to be bought and sold like any other, ignoring the social relations of the land. In the Tory view, the human figures in the landscape were background; in the Whig theory, they were obstacles to be removed. © Image courtesy of Rehs Galleries, Inc., New York City.

Theory of Landscape. She relished the chance to make Rushworth a fop and a fool, but his 12,000 pounds a year, more funds than even Darcy controls,[27] also meant he was not to be lightly dismissed. Her view is quite unequivocal. Life ought not to be reduced to commerce; rather, land and those who own it have wide responsibilities, of which making money may rank lower than other concerns. While she clearly understood the necessity of sound finance and sensible land management, she was also more than superficially aware of the broad network of people who depended on the benevolent management of estates and villages for their survival. Thus it is in the moral character of those who own the land that she looked to for security. Benevolent landowning, coupled with a clergy who could be depended on to have the best interests of their parish at heart, apparently appeared to Austen to provide the best protection possible for those living in the countryside.

Schama, *A History of Britain, Volume III. The Fate of Empire, 1776-2000*, Miramax Books, Hyperion, 2002, New York, New York.

[27] *MP*, page 40. *P&P*, page 10, has Darcy with ten thousand pounds a year.

I think this is rather more than a simple reactionary view. We must consider what was coming. If Everett and Schama are right, then what was coming was Whiggism[28] – an increasing emphasis on the use of the land simply as a commodity, stripped of its social and historical trappings – a landscape without people – to put it another way. Austen would never have agreed to that, given her very thoughtful understanding of the complexities of rural life, and the way that the social and economic mechanisms of that life depended on large landholders. If Whig improvers planned to despoil the land, and merchants proposed to buy and sell it at will, then memory and nature would be disrupted, and old patterns of courtesy, responsibility and custom would be thrown out. This is a view that, from all we can read, Austen would have resisted. Land and property can display power quite starkly, and offer a site of economic production and wealth, which they do in Darcy's case in particular. They also provide locations where the moral conduct of the owner is continually on display in the workings of the community, and in the judgements people made about the dominant landowners of their region. But land and property can also be seen more abstractly as mechanisms for displaying taste, through landscape gardening and architecture in their highest forms, in which the reformation of nature aspires to the level of art, presenting the sophistication of the owner in front of the public gaze for all to see. In this guise, land and property become a *place*, as Henry Crawford puts it, a venue to which people travel to view and to admire. Finally, property can inspire awe and dominance, reminding the outsider of the status and the social memory that established, hereditary ownership of a landscape implies.

The central question to consider is the politics of landscape. Barrell reveals the political nature of landscape of Austen's time, the "distant perspective" that only the landed interests apparently had, the capacity to see beyond the mundane and take a society-wide perspective, a view that clearly had currency for some time. In this view, the *common folk were merely objects in a landscape to be worked upon*. There were others who, with their permanence in the memory of society, and their permanence in the landscape, should be given authority to rule and to judge. This, at least, is John Barrell's view of the thinking of the time. A certain distance from the common weal certainly sums up Darcy's attitude to a tee. He is distant, not from coldness, though he admits to "no easy sociability". Rather it

[28] By using this term I refer to the Whig theory of history, and the notion of the inevitability of progress. "Progress" and "Improvement" on the land meant changes to the landscape. Whiggism can also refer to antique versions of Whig philosophy, a meaning I steer away from here.