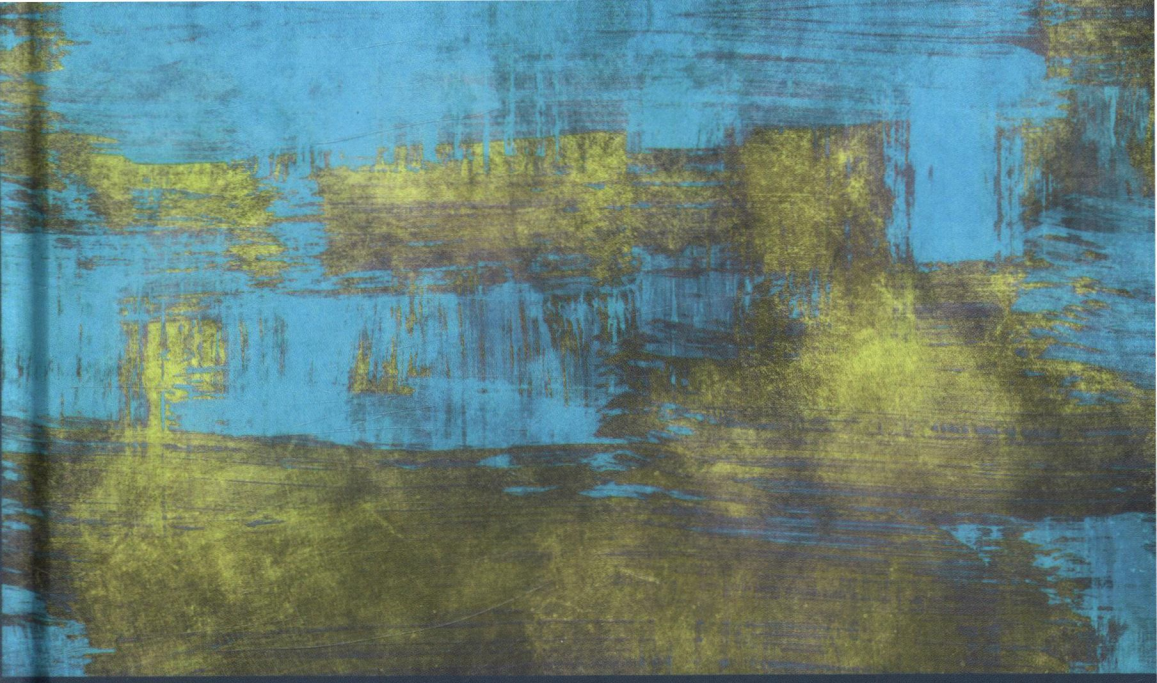
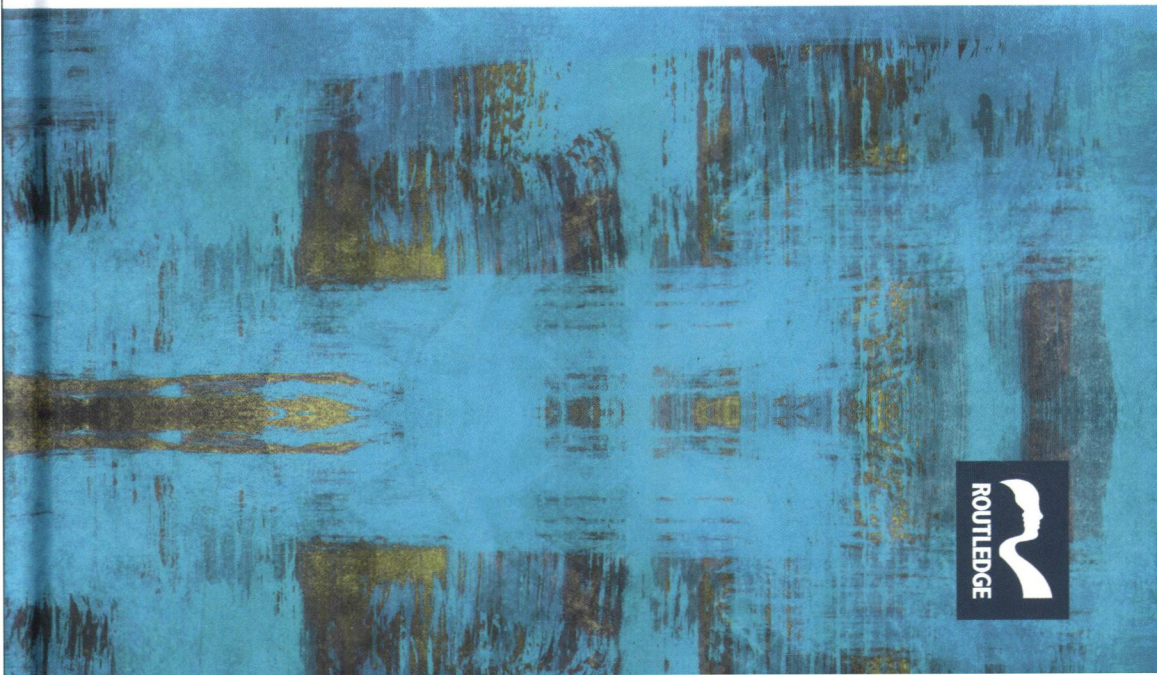


Routledge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature

JANE AUSTEN'S GEOGRAPHIES

Edited by
Robert Clark



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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2018
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
CIP data has been applied for.

ISBN: 978-0-8153-7687-3 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-351-23534-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by codeMantra

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Jane Austen's Geographies

When Jane Austen represented the ideal subject for a novel as "three or four families in a country village," rather than encouraging a narrow range of reference she may have meant that a tight focus was the best way of understanding the wider world. The essays in this collection research the historical significance of her many geographical references and suggest how contemporaries may have read them, whether as indications of the rapid development of national travel, or of Britain's imperial status, or as signifiers of wealth and social class, or as symptomatic of political fears and aspirations. Specifically, the essays consider the representation of colonial mail-order wives and naval activities in the Mediterranean, the worrisome nomadism of contemporary capitalism, the complexity of her understanding of the actual places in which her fictions are set, her awareness of and eschewal of contemporary literary conventions, and the burden of the Austen family's Kentish origins, the political implications of addresses in London and Northamptonshire. Skillful, detailed and historically informed, these essays open domains of meaning in Austen's texts that have often gone unseen by later readers but which were probably available to her contemporaries and clearly merit much closer critical attention.

Robert Clark is founding editor and editor-in-chief of *The Literary Encyclopedia*. He has published essays and books on Defoe, *The Spectator*, Fielding, Fenimore Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, Dickens, Henry James, Angela Carter and Michael Oondatje. He edited Jane Austen's *Emma* (Everyman 1995) and *A New Casebook on Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice* (Macmillan 1994) and has published essays on Austen and farming, the enclosures, landscape gardens, and on British imperialism and *Mansfield Park*.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This collection of essays began to take shape when Penny Pritchard suggested we organize a conference at the University of Hertfordshire to celebrate the bicentenary of the publication of *Pride and Prejudice* and take that opportunity to explore why the novel was set in that county. The conference "Locations of Austen" duly took place in June 2013 with one of its sessions kindly hosted by Sir Simon and Lady Caroline Bowes Lyon at their home, St. Paul's Walden Bury, a house which in size, form and history would make a perfect model for Longbourn, and which also happens to enjoy one of the finest wilderness gardens extant in England today. I am fairly sure the house and garden were unknown to Austen—she had better and closer models in Hampshire—but for those who wish to step back into that aspect of *Mansfield Park* there are few better introductions.

The papers given at the conference showed that "Austen's Geographies" is a much richer topic than any of us had quite realized. Geography in Austen's lifetime was a burgeoning discipline and as the youthful tale "Catherine, or the Bower" makes abundantly clear, it behooved young British ladies to have at least a basic knowledge of the global map, and times and costs—moral as well as monetary—of reaching places far and near. The "Second British Empire" was expanding rapidly, and Austen's class was expected to understand how its opportunities might influence their lives, and mapping was developing its modern importance with the Ordnance Survey map series beginning to appear. We therefore find in her work constant glancing, implicit, and sometimes direct references to country places, London places and far-off places which her alert readers were supposed to comprehend. Whilst Austen does not appear to write about geography, this new sense of geography subtends everything she writes.

A number of those who spoke at the conference thought what we had discovered would be worth developing into a collective volume, and after careful maturation, this collection is now complete. One of its refreshing aspects is that whilst the papers are focused on the same topic, the writers approach it in very much their own ways, some being closely textual, some bringing into view the history of places which is

now largely forgotten, some exploring literary history and how Austen inserts her work within it. All enrich and complement each other and allow the reader of this volume to consider which method might most help them develop their own interests.

We all owe a debt of thanks to Penny Pritchard for the sterling work she put into the organization of the "Locations of Austen" conference. I personally would also like to thank Franco Moretti for his invitation in 2012 to talk at Stanford about maps and *Mansfield Park*, and the Chawton Centre for Women's Writing for their invitation to talk about "Austen's insignificant travel" at their 2014 conference *Reassessing Women's Travel Writing* and, later that same year, about "*Pride and Prejudice* and the Space of Capital," in their public symposium on *Banking in the Age of Jane Austen.* I also wish to thank Deirdre Le Faye, both for her correction of many errors in my own contributions to this volume, and for her extraordinary devotion to Austen scholarship across many decades. I also thank Janet Todd who has been a "friend-in-Austen" for many years.

Robert Clark

Standard References

Citations to the works of Jane Austen are to *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*. General Editor: Janet Todd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005–6.

J *Juvenilia*, edited by Peter Sabor
including
- C Catharine, or the Bower
- JA Jack and Alice
- LF Love and Friendship
- HE Henry and Eliza

NA *Northanger Abbey*, edited by Barbara Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye
SS *Sense and Sensibility*, edited by Edward Copeland
PP *Pride and Prejudice*, edited by Pat Rogers
MP *Mansfield Park*, edited by John Wiltshire
E *Emma*, edited by Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan
P *Persuasion*, edited by Janet Todd and Antje Blank
LM *Later Manuscripts*, edited by Janet Todd and Linda Bree
including
- S *Sanditon*

Citations to Jane Austen's letters are to *Jane Austen's Letters*, edited by Deirdre Le Faye. 4th edition. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. For ease of reference to other editions, the letter number is given before the page reference, thus (*L* 140: 327).

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1 Introduction

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Critical commentary on Austen's geographies began almost a century ago with a seminal essay by Sir Frank Mackinnon in which observed that Austen was the first British novelist to represent locations with geographical precision, a method that seemed to parallel her use of almanacs to ensure that her events fitted the chronology of the year in which they were set. Mackinnon writes

> As she had an almanac for her dates, so, I have little doubt, Jane Austen used Paterson's or Carey's [sic] road books for the travels of her heroes and heroines .... Feigned places, however, are always, and in every way, fictitious. Attempts have been made to identify some of them with real places – e.g. Mansfield Park, or the Highbury of Emma. But they have been the guesses of inaccurate readers .... Jane Austen, I feel sure, never copied a character from a known person: I am sure she never delineated a known place under a fictitious name. But she probably knew the place she conceived as well as the character she created, and knew either as well as her familiar haunt, or her dearest friend—Highbury as well as Steventon, Elizabeth Bennet as well has her sister Cassandra.
>
> (Mackinnon 1925, 184)

MacKinnon's term "feigned places" nicely catches the quality of Austen's imagined houses, towns and villages and was later adopted in the lists of "feigned place" appended to Chapman's Oxford editions. The term, however, sits over a chasm which is hinted at when Mackinnon says Austen "probably knew the place she conceived as well as the character she created." MacKinnon means Austen knew that just as her imagined characters can sometimes be traced to real people whose characteristics they share, so we often sense that her imaginary locations have real-world equivalents. In a published letter discussing Austen's representations of place, R.W. Chapman observed that "the search for originals is not altogether idle. Jane Austen was exceptionally, and even surprisingly, dependent upon reality as a basis of imaginary construction" (Chapman 1931). Today we might simply consider Austen a

"realist," but this conception of the novel would not gain currency until the 1850s. From Austen's own point of view, it is more likely that she was seeking that fine balance between imagination and "the accurate observation of the living world," which Samuel Johnson had praised in his influential essay on the novel in *The Rambler*, March 1750. Nonetheless, Chapman's intuitions seem right, in that the more one examines this aspect of Austen's writing, the more exceptional her dependency appears. There is something very insistent and seemingly concrete about her geolocations, even if, at the same time, they can appear very abstract.

If we compare Austen's work with that of Henry Fielding, we can see how strikingly innovative it is. We know roughly where Fielding's country places are set, but we could never locate them on a map because he gives mileages infrequently, and in round figures, saying a place is "about 200 miles from London," "within a hundred miles of the place," "a full six miles" or "two miles off." Such distances indicate remoteness or proximity but are too imprecise to enable geolocation. They are also relatively rare, appearing once in ten thousand words in *Tom Jones*. In Austen's works, mileages are twice as frequent, and nearly always seem precise (as, for example, "sixteen miles" in *Emma*, "twenty-four miles" in *Pride and Prejudice*). Such designators are rare in Austen's juvenilia but appear with increasing frequency in her published works: 12 times in *Sense and Sensibility*; 26 times in *Pride and Prejudice*; 34 times in *Emma*, her most static novel; and 47 times in the three-volume posthumous publication of 1817 (i.e. 19 times in *Persuasion* and 28 times in *Northanger Abbey*). *Mansfield Park* is the odd one out, having only 20 uses of "miles." Throughout, many of the key places have more than one distance marker provided, which creates the impression that the location could be established by triangulation, augmenting the sense that a "feigned" place can be found, even if the name is fictitious. MacKinnon devoted much of his 1926 article to defenestrating the many proposals which earlier critics had made for the real-world locations of Austen's feigned places, and to do this he used the kind of critical method one would expect from such a distinguished barrister and High Court judge, forensically proving that one place was too far from another and therefore did not fit with the case, and so on. His method, however, has a way of fueling the fire he is trying to put out, recognizing that her imagined places seemed to have very real locations, even when there is little textual information to support this effect.

Five years after the publication of his essay, MacKinnon almost fell into the same trap he had critiqued: he wrote a jocular letter to R.W. Chapman saying that during an afternoon walk he had identified the location of Mansfield Park as Cottesbrooke, Northamptonshire, and asking Chapman if he knew of any connections between Austen and this house. Chapman replied he did not, but a little later he turned up the fact that Cottesbrooke had belonged to Sir James Langham, whose wife had