

Austen and Empire: A Thinking Woman's Guide to British Imperialism

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The fiancé of Jane Austen's beloved sister Cassandra, Reverend Thomas Fowle, died of yellow fever off Santo Domingo in February 1797 and was buried at sea, to the "great Affliction" of all those at Steventon. Eliza de Feuillide wrote to her cousin Philadelphia Walter: "He was expected home this Month, from St. Domingo where he had accompanied Lord Craven, but Alas instead of his arrival news were received of his Death. . . . Jane says that her Sister behaves with a degree of resolution & Propriety which no common mind could evince in so trying a situation."¹ Like Edward Ferrars, who disappeared from Elinor Dashwood's life in *Sense and Sensibility*, offering an opportunity to demonstrate heroic strength of character in suffering—or Bingley, who provides the same exquisite opportunity to Jane Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*—the ghost of Thomas Fowle peers through Jane Austen's novels, the original of all the disappearing suitors. Cassandra's uncommon "resolution & Propriety," just what one would expect from the exemplary eldest daughter, likewise models the qualities of our favorite Austen characters.

Thomas Fowle was accompanying Lord Craven on a military mission to the West Indies as his personal chaplain when he contracted yellow fever. Lord Craven is said to have repented of his choice after the fact, because yellow fever was epidemic among British troops in the Caribbean and he would not knowingly have exposed an engaged man to this danger. Yellow fever killed three times more Europeans than muskets or cutlasses in the colonial wars in the Caribbean theater at the turn of the century. By the time Thomas Fowle died, some 80,000 British soldiers had perished in three-and-a-half years of war with France. In October of 1796 "it was said in Parliament that every person in the country had lost an acquaintance in the Caribbean campaigns"; "the obituary columns of the *Gentleman's Magazine* were strewn with the names of the officers who had died of yellow fever."² The war became as scandalously unpopular in England as the Vietnam war in the United States in the early 1970s. The degree to which the West Indian theater of operations sapped England's strength in her contest with France, the extraordinary casualties from tropical disease, and the growing disapproval of the English public of the slave trade upon which the colonial economy depended—these led to a cease-fire and withdrawal of troops from Santo Domingo the year after Thomas Fowle died.

So England's colonial war in the Caribbean was momentous for Jane Austen's life, and, as it turns out, for posterity. As I have written elsewhere, Tom Fowle's death and Cassandra's spinsterhood helped determine Austen's decision to remain single and to write. Just what the English were doing in the West Indies between 1793 and 1798 deserves closer scrutiny if only to distinguish it from later engagements with France in those same waters.

The official stance of England vis-à-vis slavery in its colonial possessions changed with its changing contests with France and Austen's successive novels map these ideological permutations. The cause for which Thomas Fowle gave his life was implicated very differently in colonial slavery from the contest in which Captain Frederick Wentworth played such a heroic role in 1806 in Austen's last novel, *Persuasion*. Thomas Fowle died defending slavery, whereas Captain Wentworth won his stripes at the battle of Santo Domingo protecting English supremacy in those waters and defending Haiti from Napoleon's attempt to re-enslave it.

Let me pick up the story of English attitudes towards colonialism and slavery in 1788, which is when the colonial competition between England and France tipped in France's favor. With double the land mass of the British colonial holdings in the West Indies, France's colonies were also more individually productive due to diversification of crops (the French pioneered coffee production in the West Indies), irrigation, smaller holdings, and less absenteeism. The wealth pouring into France from her colonies far exceeded what England was able to extract from hers.³ Four-fifths of Britain's entire overseas investment income came from her West Indian colonies; but the French colony of Santo Domingo alone—occupying the western one-third of the island of Hispaniola—produced more sugar than all the British colonies put together.⁴

Sugar production on that remarkably fertile island doubled between 1783 and 1789 thanks to the brisk British slave trade that supplied slave labor for Santo Domingan plantations.⁵ The English government, in the person of William Pitt, motivated by the desire to slow down this spectacular production competing with English sugar on the European market, pressed abolitionist William Wilberforce into service to champion the cause of an Abolition Bill in Parliament, to try to abolish the trade that supplied French Santo Domingo with 40,000 slaves a year and thus enabled her phenomenal prosperity.⁶

Jane Austen was thirteen at this phase of popular abolitionism and just beginning to write her juvenilia, none of which, with the exception of *Catherine, or The Bower*, engages questions of colonialism. Her brother Charles was enrolled in the Royal Naval Academy at Portsmouth and her brother Francis had just shipped out to England's other major site of colonialism, the East Indies, as a midshipman in His Majesty's ship *Perseverance*.

In 1791, as Jane Austen turned sixteen, the shocking news reached London that over 100,000 slaves were in revolt in the French colony of Santo Domingo, murdering whites and burning down plantations. The price of sugar skyrocketed; not coincidentally the abolitionists exhorted the public to boycott West Indian sugar if they wanted to aid the cause and prevent further mistreatment of enslaved Africans.⁷ Stories circulated of dismembered body parts boiled up in West Indian sugar, representations of a society feeding on its poor, not unlike the horror stories told about meat packing plants memorably recorded in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*.⁸ By 1792, Clarkson boasted that 300,000 English consumers had given up sugar.⁹

With the renewal of war between England and France in 1793, official attitudes soured toward *liberté, fraternité* and abolition. French Domingan planters, taking refuge in England, agitated for English intervention in the affairs of Santo Domingo, circulating stories of the brutality of the liberated captives. Reminding English officials of the potential productivity of this valuable colonial possession, they offered their allegiance if England could re-take the island and re-establish their racial hegemony.¹⁰ In September, 1794, the English launched a preliminary expedition against the French West Indies that included some of these French planters. Martinique, Santa Lucia, and Guadeloupe fell, but the losses from yellow fever were enormous. Santo Domingo, by now guided by the able military and diplomatic leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, receiving aid from the revolutionary government in France, proved impossible to re-capture.

This was the phase during which Thomas Fowle died, along with 80,000 other Englishmen (give or take 20,000, the estimates vary), during England's five-year long attempt to re-enslave the finest colony in the Caribbean.¹¹

Jane Austen had many relatives in the planter class. Her father's older half-brother, William Hampson Walter, had two sons (William and George) who settled in the West Indies. There is a letter from Jane's mother, Cassandra Austen senior, to her niece Philadelphia Walter at Christmastime 1786, wishing she were with them, describing the happy family circle at Steventon and declaring "You might as well be in Jamaica keeping your Brother's House, for anything that we see of you or are like to see."¹² Mrs. Austen's brother, James Leigh-Perrot, married Jane Cholmeley, heiress to an estate in Barbados.¹³ James Langford Nibbs, Esq., an Antiguan planter whom Jane's father probably tutored at St. John's College, Oxford, and whose portrait hung at Steventon, was godfather to the Austen's eldest son James. In his marriage articles, James Langford Nibbs designated George Austen as the trustee of his Antiguan property should he die, to arrange for a jointure of £500 per annum to be paid to his wife from that estate. Had Mr. Nibbs died early, Jane Austen's father would have been expected to manage the plantation in Antigua!¹⁴ The first wife of Jane's eldest brother, James Austen—Anne Mathew—was the daughter of General Mathew, Commander-in-Chief of the Windward and Leeward Islands and Governor of Grenada. And Jane's younger brother Charles married Fanny Palmer, daughter of the former Attorney General of Bermuda—whom he met on duty there.

But although family connections are easy to trace, the British planter class's attitudes toward abolition at this time are less than obvious. To begin with, what was at issue was never manumission, or freeing existing slaves, but only the abolition of the "commerce of the human species" as Thomas Clarkson put it. After the English were expelled from Santo Domingo, it was in the interests of the English planters to abolish the slave trade, for they already had three times as many slaves working their holdings as did planters in the French colonies or Spanish Cuba, and Santo Domingo was irretrievably lost as a slave market.¹⁵ Moreover, during the brief Peace of Amiens in 1802-03, when the French colonies were returned to France, British colonial

planters found that it was in their interest not to have the tropical produce of formerly (and now again) enemy colonies protected by British trade agreements when offered on the home market.¹⁶ In short, the West Indian lobby saw that there were few advantages to either a continued slave trade or to the annexation of enemy colonies in the Caribbean.

As landless gentry or lesser gentry,¹⁷ the Austens could be said to come from what William Cobbett called "Britain's 'negro-pampering' upper class," whom he criticized when he called upon laboring people to look out for their own interests and not to worry about Africans or West Indians.¹⁸ Jane Austen's brother Francis opposed slavery, having seen the system first hand on a number of West Indian islands, including Antigua, when captain of HMS *Canopus*. Shortly after the battle of Trafalgar—which he missed, to his great disappointment—he was posted to the Caribbean, where, as you will recall, Admiral Croft was also stationed after Trafalgar in *Persuasion*. There, in 1805, Jane Austen's brother had his hour of glory at the battle of Santo Domingo in a squadron under the command of Admiral Duckworth. He described it to his fiancée, Mary Gibson, in a letter ending

The Admiral is sending the prizes, and such of our own ships as have suffered most, to Jamaica . . . I am in hopes this action will be the means of our speedy quitting this country, and perhaps to return to Old England. Oh, how my heart throbs at the idea!"¹⁹

Frank Austen's share of the spoils of war, as captain of the *Canopus*, made him rich enough to return to England in the summer of 1806 to marry Mary Gibson.

These events, significant in Austen's family, find fictional expression in the adventures of Frederick Wentworth, "who being made commander in consequence of the action off St. Domingo . . . had come into Somersetshire, in the summer of 1806" where he fell in love with the nineteen-year-old Anne Elliot for a short period of "exquisite felicity." Captain Wentworth, like Francis Austen, was defending England's colonial possessions in the Caribbean, and the naval successes which enriched him, like those that enriched Captain Austen, made it possible for him to marry.

Austen refers to the slave trade and England's colonial wars in all three of her late novels with some significant shifts in attitude and emphasis. Indeed, a number of critics have compellingly argued that *Mansfield Park* is predominantly *about* slavery. Margaret Kirkham, Moira Ferguson and Joseph Lew have pointed out that its title is associated with a landmark legal decision of 1772, in which Lord Mansfield declared that all persons of whatsoever race or personal history were free so long as they were on English soil and could not be compelled to return to servitude in the colonies.²⁰ In *Mansfield Park*, as everyone remembers, Sir Thomas Bertram, baronet and member of Parliament, part of the West Indian planter interest, arranges to have Fanny Price brought from Portsmouth to live as a second-class citizen within his household, to serve his wife, as it turns out. Ignorant of the symbolism of global location when she first comes to Mansfield Park, Fanny "cannot put the map of Europe together." Her cousins mock her for referring to the Isle of Wight as "*the Island*, as if there were no other island in the world." She learns

about her uncle's plantation in Antigua as she learns about her own place in the scheme of things, subject to the tyrannies of Mrs. Norris, whose name, as Moira Ferguson has pointed out, was the name of a particularly duplicitous pro-slavery advocate described at length in Clarkson's *History of Abolition*, which Austen read.²¹ That Norris, a slave captain responsible for transporting boatloads of captives (as, in a domestic register, Mrs. Norris is responsible for transporting Fanny to her new servitude in Mansfield Park) represents himself to Clarkson at first as a humane man, opposed to the slave trade, interested in its amendment and even its abolition. But he makes a second appearance in Clarkson's narrative, this time treacherously evading the abolitionist's efforts to bring him before the king's privy council in March 1788 to testify to the corruptions and brutalities in the slave trade. He then appears unexpectedly before the council as a "Liverpool delegate in support of the Slave-trade," arguing that the Africans were so barbaric, cruel, and murderous to one another that bringing them away and introducing them to European culture was actually a blessing.²² He further testified that many of the slaves were prisoners of war and would have been put to death had they remained in Africa, "whereas now they were saved."²³ According to Clarkson, this astonishing testimony carried the day and he soon "had the mortification to hear of nothing but the Liverpool evidence." In due course the convinced privy council returned the verdict that "the major part of the complaints against this Trade are ill-founded."²⁴ Refracting Mrs. Norris' treatment of Fanny through Clarkson's anecdote is chilling, particularly when one recalls her self-justifying explanations, her duplicity, and the extent to which she exploits Fanny all the while exclaiming on Fanny's luck in enjoying the advantages of Mansfield Park. Knowing Clarkson's history of the slave captain Norris gives a sinister edge to Mrs. Norris' unreflecting selfishness.

Like other English colonies in the Caribbean at the time of Sir Thomas Bertram's visit, Antigua suffered from falling prices for sugar and war-inflated rising costs for everything else. Britain's recapture of sugar-producing colonies from France and Holland had flooded the home market and was driving prices down.²⁵ By December 1806, 1,464,102 hundred-weight of sugar was sitting in warehouses or on board ships in English ports.²⁶ Three parliamentary commissions were established between 1807 and 1808 to study planter distress.²⁷ Antigua was particularly hard hit during the period that Austen sends Sir Thomas to see to his affairs there, for in addition to the falling price for sugar, an unusual drought had withered the crop to a third of its usual size.²⁸ Mrs. Norris observes merely that "Sir Thomas' means will be rather straitened, if the Antigua estate is to make such poor returns." But planters on the island were, in fact, unable to meet their taxes. Governor Lavington wrote from Antigua in the summer of 1805: "Bankruptcy is universal, and is not confin'd to the Public Treasury, but extends to the Generality of Individuals resident in the Colony."²⁹

Sir Thomas' business in Antigua between 1805 and 1807, of course, had to do with more than the financial problems of plantation owners during a sugar glut—it had to do with the nature of slavery itself. The Bill to abolish

the slave trade had been ratified in both houses in 1806 and passed into law in 1807, from which date all slave traffic to the Caribbean ceased. When Fanny Price asks Sir Thomas Bertram about the slave trade on his return, she is inquiring about the consequences of this fact. The “dead silence” which follows her query indicates others’ lack of interest or opposition to the measure, quite as much as a breach of decorum through which one glimpses the ugly exploitative relations which undergird the social position and material luxury of Mansfield Park. If there were to be no new slaves brought into the island from Africa, then the treatment of existing slaves in the colonies would have to change so as to encourage their health and reproduction. Fanny’s question also figures her own continued status and treatment at Mansfield Park now that Sir Thomas Bertram has returned. It is prelude to her passive resistance to Henry Crawford’s suit and Sir Thomas’ masterful pressure. They want to write Fanny into a novel in which she plays the obedient and highly sensitive heroine who marries the reformed rake. (Richardson’s *Pamela* and *Clarissa* are experiments with this plot.) But Fanny knows instinctively how those novels turn out and she keeps out of the narrative as best she can.

Edward Said has condemned Austen’s attitudes toward slavery and colonialism as unconscious and unquestioning in his essay, “Jane Austen and Empire,” first published in 1989 and reissued in his latest book, *Culture and Imperialism*. Asking more generally how “humanistic ideas coexisted so comfortably with imperialism,” Said repeats Raymond Williams’ famous comparison between William Cobbett and Jane Austen, observing that although Cobbett is aware of class stratification in his society, Austen’s social vision is restricted to the moral discriminations and social details of a single class.³⁰ Her obliviousness to the privileges of class extend, he finds, to her “uninflected, unreflective citations of Antigua (or the Mediterranean, or India, which is where Lady Bertram in a fit of distracted impatience requires that William should go ‘that I may have a shawl . . .’).” It is precisely because Austen—among others—takes for granted that English colonies must support the Sir Thomas Bertrams of the world, and that these Bertrams must take long and dangerous voyages from time to time to supervise and regulate their overseas property, according to Said, that creates the “broad expanse of domestic imperialist culture without which the subsequent acquisition of territory would not have been possible.”³¹ In other words, Said accuses Austen of referring to Antigua and to the slave trade casually, merely by way of adding decor to her story of domestic rearrangements, and thus contributes to the naturalizing of these unnatural elements, slavery and colonialism.

But, of course, nothing in Jane Austen’s novels is ever “uninflected” or “unreflective,” and I think Said is wrong to imagine the references to the slave trade in *Mansfield Park* as morally neutral—any more than references to colonialism or war in *Persuasion* are morally neutral. Because Said is unable to imagine the dependent status of women, despite his use of terms like “gender” and “feminism,” he does not notice that in all the late novels colonialism is associated with women. Not only is Fanny torn from her family, transported to Mansfield Park, and put at the disposal of Lady

Bertram and Mrs. Norris—all for the price of her maintenance—but she is treated like recalcitrant property when she refuses to marry as Sir Thomas commands. That she, rather than her more privileged cousins, is interested in the slave trade is hardly “uninflected.” And when she raises the question in the context of its recent abolition and is met with “dead silence,” that too means something.

In *Emma*, it is the dependent Jane Fairfax, about to hire out as a governess, who speaks of “offices for the sale, not quite of human flesh, but of human intellect.” Official Augusta from Bristol, England’s premier slave trading port, who has just bought Mr. Elton for “just that amount as will always be called £10,000,” picks up on the reference but not the context.³² “You quite shock me; if you mean a fling at the slave-trade, I assure you Mr. Suckling was always rather a friend to the abolition.” This exchange, with its two levels of meaning and consciousness, is calculated to call attention to the economics of the marriage market and to women’s uncertain and dependent status. “If *all Men are born free*, how is it that all Women are born Slaves?” asked Mary Astell in 1700.³³

One has to read Austen’s fictional references to slavery and colonialism structurally. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny’s question about the slave trade is juxtaposed to Sir Thomas Bertram’s reassertion of control over his property—human as well as horticultural. In *Emma*, these remarks about the slave trade bubble up at the point of crisis in Jane Fairfax’s dealings with her secret fiancé, Frank Churchill, and further expose the hypocrisy of the pretentious and venal Mrs. Elton. Slavery in these novels figures the dependent status of women without money of their own. The “slave trade” is trope for the marriage market and for the tyranny of marriage, a displacement of the subject status of captive Africans onto women. In *Persuasion*, too, colonial possessions are associated with the weakest and most dependent woman in the novel, Mrs. Smith, Anne Elliot’s old schoolfellow who rents a few rooms in the unfashionable Westgate buildings in Bath. Left penniless by the death of her husband, unable to collect what is owed to her by the duplicitous and vicious aristocrat, Mr. Elliot, her alienated property in the West Indies represents at once a literary convention—an older fictional plot device for restoring lost fortunes—and a simultaneous reminder of rock bottom reality: that without a man, a woman’s authority over even her own plantations was null and void. Located in the aftermath of the extended struggle with France over colonial territory, *Persuasion* romanticizes both the long contest and the objects of imperial contention as a proving ground for British manhood. Thus the fruits of colonialism in the form of Mrs. Smith’s West Indian property become a kind of gallantry that Captain Wentworth bestows upon the impoverished and invalidated woman.

However Austen intended to work out the plot of *Sanditon*, her last unfinished novel fragment, she fuses the issues of gender and race in the character of Miss Lambe, an overprotected and privileged half-mulatto West Indian heiress, whom Austen seems to have set up as a target both for money-making schemes and for seduction. The town leaders, commercially minded Mr. Parker and the shrewd, eccentric matriarch, Lady Denham, have

joined forces to turn their sleepy little town into a tourist attraction, a resort for taking wholesome waters, a new Bath. Among their earliest longed-for customers are the headmistress of a finishing school with three of her charges.

Of these three, and indeed of all, Miss Lambe was beyond comparison the most important and precious, as she paid in proportion to her fortune.—She was about seventeen, half Mulatto, chilly and tender, had a maid of her own, was to have the best room in the Lodgings, and was always of the first consequence in every plan of Mrs. G.

Old Lady Denham sees in Miss Lambe the very type of a seaside invalid for their new resort town: rich and sickly, a steady customer for her medicinal Milch asses' milk, and an heiress for her nephew by marriage, Sir Edward, to marry. Sir Edward, on the other hand, aspires to be a rake, a nouveau Lovelace, handsome and dangerous, and this wealthy innocent appears heaven-sent to be his sacrificial lamb. Thus the West Indian heiress, because she is a woman, is cast as the victim of colonialism as well as its beneficiary. I imagine that in the exact moral and spiritual calibrations of this "chilly and tender" character, one of whose grandparents was brought to the island in chains, Austen was planning to calculate the interrelations between the traffic in women and the slave trade with their corresponding moral corruptions—had she lived to complete the novel.

Contrary to Edward Said, it is *because* of Austen's class consciousness, because she understood the economic significance of colonialism for the lesser gentry—as opposed to the landlord class—because, in short, she watched the wars of colonialism over territory enable her brothers' upward mobility, that she revised her estimation of colonialism in *Persuasion*. For that last novel records a change of heart about England's global destiny, informed, no doubt, by nationalistic pride over the triumphal defeat of Napoleon and by her brothers' successful careers within the naval establishment. The years that Austen replays in *Persuasion*, the years between 1806 and 1808—the very years that Sir Thomas Bertram is absent from his English plantations in *Mansfield Park*—become in this late novel not a period of moral anarchy but of idealized personal history for the new self-made man and his mate: a rootless woman, severed from her family, tender and nurturing, ready to follow her man and to support him in his new "profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance."

With "nothing but himself to recommend him," without family or connections, Wentworth rises "as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him" and takes so many ships for his country as to secure £25,000 for himself. The navy, as Sir Walter Elliot complains at the beginning of *Persuasion*, functions here as "the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honors which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of. . . ." And Austen further links this class mobility in her last novel to greater possibilities for domestic happiness in the creation of new kinds of families. Just as Jane Austen's brother's part in the action off Santo Domingo enabled him to marry Mary Gibson, so

England's wars of imperialism permit Wentworth to make a fortune sufficient to marry an aristocrat's daughter. Throughout the novel, the navy enables better domestic arrangements. "Nothing can exceed the accommodation of a man of war," confides Mrs. Croft cheerfully, although a frigate is "more confined." The navy becomes a true brotherhood, a better source of hospitality and neighborliness than relatives; the nation-state supplies the deficiencies of family and community alike.³⁴ Louisa Musgrove, it turns out, was right to be "convinced of sailors having more worth and warmth than any other set of men in England; that they only knew how to live, and they only deserved to be respected and loved." It is no accident that domestic virtue and national importance are coupled in the last sentence of the novel.

Precisely because of her class location Austen found the colonialism's enabling of class mobility very appealing. That is, one is never encouraged to feel that Wentworth's success is at the expense of the labor and property of colonized peoples although the national project in which he proves his worth and makes his fortune is certainly a colonialist project. Austen has no trouble imagining Mrs. Smith enriched by property and slaves in another part of the world. Indeed, she casts Mrs. Smith's story as another story of class triumph, where class has been imposed by gender. The property that Wentworth regains for the widow who lost all at her husband's death is, after all, her rightful inheritance and her inability to claim it has underscored her impotence as a woman. Mrs. Smith has been victimized by a vicious aristocrat and been helped to her rightful West Indian property by a self-made man.

So Austen's relationship to colonialism, not unsurprisingly, was determined by both her gender and her class. Her sensibility was shaped, too, by the increasing nationalism of her culture. She was drawn to the ringing, patriotic diction found occasionally in, say, Frank Austen's letters. It was a higher grade of redcoat mania than Lydia Bennet suffered from—motivated, one could even argue, by family feeling—but it was undeniably the same disease. Here is part of a letter she wrote to Cassandra in 1813 about a book that she was enjoying contrary to her expectations.

I am reading a Society octavo, an Essay on the Military Police and Institutions of The British Empire by Capt Pasley of the Engineers, a book which I protested against at first but which upon trial I find delightfully written and highly entertaining. I am as much in love with the author as ever I was with Clarkson or Buchanan, or even the two Mr. Smiths of the city—the first soldier I ever sighed for—but he does write with extraordinary force and spirit.³⁵

Pasley's book is an exhortation to all right-minded Englishmen to support building a stronger military establishment to defend England. Written in 1808 although not published until 1810, Pasley warns his countrymen in his opening sentence that they live in perilous times.

In times when the British nation is placed in a situation of danger, to which its past history affords no parallel, menaced with destruction by a much superior force, which is directed by the energy of one of the greatest warriors that had appeared; every man in this country must think with anxiety upon the result; every man must feel, that nothing but the greatest unanimity and firmness on the part of the nation. nothing but the wisest measures on the part of the govern-

ment, can save us, and with us the rest of the civilized world, from swelling the triumph of the haughty conqueror.

Written with “extraordinary force and spirit,” Pasley’s *Essay on the Military Police of the British Empire* is a book that privileges and celebrates masculinity—“the first soldier I ever sighed for,” remarks Austen, mocking her own attraction for male heroics in this unabashed document of British imperialism. Pasley could be one of the brave navy men in *Persuasion*, calling for firmness and wisdom on the part of the nation. He reads like the sort of Austen hero that Louisa Musgrove goes into raptures over.

Her conjunction of Clarkson, Buchanan, and Pasley also reveals an interesting turn of the mind (“I am as much in love with [Pasley] as ever I was with Clarkson or Buchanan”), although they may seem an incompatible group to our late twentieth-century sensibilities, trained to distinguish among post-colonial attitudes toward international exploitation and toward the “other.” After all, Clarkson was a fierce polemicist for abolition who lectured in England and France; Buchanan was a missionary in India, agitating for the establishment of an Anglican outpost there; and Pasley, captain in the corps of royal engineers, was an advocate of armed imperialism. But all three men represent engagement with a new international world order, a new way of thinking about territories and markets in the rest of the world—whether to convert, to protect, or to conquer them. Buchanan, Vice Provost of the College of Fort William and professor of classics, was responsible for commissioning the translation of the gospels into Hindustani, Persian, Chinese, Maylay, Orissa, Mahratta, and Bengalese. Buchanan understood his mission as part and parcel of the colonial territorial project³⁶ and believed that his Christianity was an enlightened and humane religion, superior to Hinduism, whose superstitious and sanguinary practices he reported with horror (notably the annual ritual suicides beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut, the immolation of females, and the sacrifice of children).³⁷ Although he failed in his pet project to establish an English ecclesiastical establishment in India, Buchanan undoubtedly achieved a more profound cultural colonization of Asia with the dissemination of the translated, printed gospels than either Clarkson with his rhetoric or Pasley with his sword.

Clarkson, Buchanan and Pasley all were visionaries, looking to the future. They believed in progress, the European enlightenment, expanded horizons, and operations on an international scale—the full consequences of which we are still reaping in our own day. Austen’s casual reference grouping them together reveals a more profound understanding of the changes wrought in her society by commerce and militarism than she is often given credit for.

Austen’s relation to colonialism and slavery is thus neither more nor less than one might have predicted from her gender and her class. Opposed to enslaving anyone, she used the discourse of abolition to comment on the condition of women. But at the same time, because of her own class location, she recognized that the navy provided upward mobility for men without fortune, family, or connections, with nothing to rely on but themselves. Her comparison of Pasley’s book on armies and empire to Clarkson’s *History of*

Abolition (1808) and Buchanan's *Christian Researches in Asia* (1811) shows a sensitivity to the politics of internationalism that is before her time. But her awareness of these socio-economic phenomena should not surprise anyone who grants her extraordinary grasp of other complex socio-economic phenomena of her day. And I do believe she was refining those perceptions about the commodification of persons—and the gendering of that commodification—in *Sanditon*. Austen lived in an expanding imperialist culture and was aware of its ideological pressures as much as she reflected them. Her late novels, in their personal and historical contexts, record her observations for anyone interested in these cultural developments, offered with the detailed perceptions that could only have been apparent to a woman of the lesser gentry.

NOTES

- ¹ Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record* (Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989), 94.
- ² David Geggus, "British Opinion and the Emergence of Haiti, 1791-1805" in *Slavery and British Society 1776-1846*, ed. James Walvin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 128.
- ³ Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), 163.
- ⁴ Lowell Joseph Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean 1763-1833* (The American Historical Association, 1928; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1963), 127.
- ⁵ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: 1938; rpt. New York: Random House, 1963), 55.
- ⁶ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), 147.
- ⁷ Ragatz, *Fall of the Planter Class*, 260-62.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 260-63.
- ⁹ Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 vols. (London, 1808), ii: 349-50.
- ¹⁰ Geggus, "British Opinion and the Emergence of Haiti," 125-26; Ragatz, *Fall of the Planter Class*, 217.
- ¹¹ Geggus, *ibid.*, 126-27.
- ¹² Le Faye, *Jane Austen*, 54.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ¹⁴ Frank Gibbon, "The Antiguan Connection," *The Cambridge Quarterly* XI, 2 (1982): 300.
- ¹⁵ One indication of planter attitudes is the note in Lady Nugent's Jamaican diary of 1802 that she was studying Wilberforce. *Lady Nugent's Journal*, ed. Frank Cundall (London: published for the Institute of Jamaica by the West India Committee, 1934), 72.
- ¹⁶ Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class*, 292.
- ¹⁷ See Jan Fergus' discussion of the Austens' class in "Jane Austen: Tensions Between Security and Marginality" in *History, Gender & Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 258-59.
- ¹⁸ *Cobbett's Political Register*, vol. IV: 933-37, quoted in Geggus, "British Opinion and the Emergence of Haiti": 141.
- ¹⁹ J. H. and Edith C. Hubbard, *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers* (London: John Lane, 1906), 175.
- ²⁰ Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 117-18; Moira Ferguson, "Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism and Gender," *The Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1991): 118-39; Joseph Lew, "'That Abominable Traffic': *Mansfield*

- Park* and the Dynamics of Slavery," in *History, Gender & Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Beth Fowkes Tobin, 271-300.
- ²¹ Frank Gibbon first suggested the association of aunt Norris with Clarkson's slave captain Norris in "The Antiguan Connection," but Moira Ferguson elaborated the connection in "Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism, and Gender."
- ²² Clarkson, *History of Abolition*, i: 378 ff. and 477 ff.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, i: 481.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, i: 482-83.
- ²⁵ St. Lucia and Tobago were captured from the French and Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice from the Dutch.
- ²⁶ Ragatz, *Fall of the Planter Class*, 306.
- ²⁷ Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 149.
- ²⁸ Ragatz, *Fall of the Planter Class*, 306.
- ²⁹ Ragatz, *ibid.*, 306.
- ³⁰ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 82.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 163.
- ³² As Clarkson rode into Bristol to gather information about the slave trade, he "anticipated much persecution . . . and I questioned whether I should even get out of it alive." *History of Abolition*, i: 293-94. He was set upon by assassins in Liverpool.
- ³³ Mary Astell, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (London: 1700), 11.
- ³⁴ This idealization of Wentworth's domestic virtues and the concomitant satire on Sir Walter is elaborated brilliantly in Maaja Stewart's important new study of Austen, *Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993).
- ³⁵ Sunday, January 24, 1813.
- ³⁶ The Introduction to his *Memoir of the Expediency of an Ecclesiastical Establishment for British India* (1805) takes note of this international context for missionary work which is represented in commercial terms as paying off the English debt to India: "Our extensive territorial acquisitions within the last few years, our recent triumph over our only formidable foe; the avowed consequence of India in relation to the existing state of Europe; and that unexampled and systematic prosperity of Indian administration, which has now consolidated the British dominion in this country;—every character of our situation seems to make the present era, as that intended by Providence, for our taking into consideration the moral and religious state of our subjects in the East; and for Britain's bringing up her long arrear of duty, and settling her account honourably with her Indian Empire." (xvi)
- ³⁷ These goals and accomplishments are noted especially in *Christian Researches in Asia: with notices of the translation of the scriptures into the Oriental Languages* (Boston: Samuel Armstrong, 1811).