



Sense and Sensibility: 3 or 4
Country Families in an
Urban Village

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“Her inviting you to town is certainly a vast thing in your favour.”

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3 or 4 families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on.

9 September 1814

IN 1788, AFTER A holiday in Kent and a dinner with relatives in Sevenoaks, Mr. and Mrs. Austen, Cassandra, and Jane continued on to London where they had been invited to visit Mr. Austen's sister, Philadelphia Hancock, and her daughter, Eliza de Feuillide, in their lodgings on Orchard Street, in the area of Marylebone that borders Mayfair. Phylly Walter had met the Austens when they dined in Sevenoaks, and writing to her brother James on 23 July 1788, she announced that on that visit she “began an acquaintance with [her] two female cousins” but that she had not been impressed by her “whimsical and affected” cousin Jane, who was “not at all pretty & very prim” (Le Faye 86-88).¹ Cousin Eliza, a spirited and effusive letter writer, documents the Austens' visit to London quite superficially in a letter to Phylly dated 22 August 1788. In one short paragraph, Eliza praises Mr. Austen's “Looks” and amiability and ends her paragraph enigmatically, or perhaps diplomatically, telling Phylly, “I believe it was your first acquaintance with Cassandra & Jane” (88).

It is most unfortunate that Eliza neglected in this letter to mention anything noteworthy about Jane's conversation or appearance; it is even more unfortunate, however, that there are no letters from the twelve-year-old Jane Austen describing this visit to her aunt and cousin, for the area around Orchard Street must have made a considerable impression on the imagination

of the young writer. Orchard Street is within walking distance of all the major street addresses in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen's first published novel. Mrs. Jennings's house on Berkeley Street, for example, is situated diagonally across Portman Square from Orchard Street. Only a block long, Orchard Street runs north from Oxford Street to the southeast corner of Portman Square and is a block to the east of Portman Street, which turns into Park Street, where Mrs. Ferrars lives. Farther to the east, on Bond Street, Willoughby has rooms; a block away, at Hanover Square, the Palmers reside; and on Conduit Street, which connects Bond Street and Regent Street, Sir John and Lady Middleton have their convivial house. Colonel Brandon lodges on St. James's Street, south of Piccadilly, but close to the Middletons. The John Dashwoods have taken a very nice house on Harley Street, considered in the early nineteenth century to be a "respectable residential street"²—before the doctors moved into the neighborhood later in the nineteenth century (Porter 110). Harley Street stretches northwards from Cavendish Square to Marylebone, within easy walking distance of the network of cousins, in-laws, and friends who inhabit this particular corner of Mayfair. A short journey to the west of Cavendish Square, down Wigmore Street, would bring the John Dashwoods to Mrs. Jennings's house on Berkeley Street—a house essential to the action of the novel.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, perhaps the most urban of all her novels, Jane Austen collects her 3 or 4 country families, transports them to London, and then uses street addresses in Mayfair and Marylebone to explore family relationships, class snobbery, and the tension between humanistic and economic values. Austen observes in the urban landscape and in the expansion of London such social changes as patterns of migration and clustering according to professions, class, and ethnicity; she explores the increased freedom of young ladies in their sampling of the social amenities the city offers. In *Jane Austen and England*, Maggie Lane points out that while Jane Austen "disliked" London, "to have ignored London as an aspect of life for the cultivated classes would have been . . . unthinkable parochial. . . . So she introduced London into her work as a background presence, a constant threat to country life, a range of shades on her moral spectrum, an aid to the fine discriminations she calls on her readers to make" (177). In *Sense and Sensibility*, however, London emerges from being a "background presence" into an urban landscape as vibrant as Henry Fielding's in *Tom Jones*. As Celia Easton points out, "By focusing on the moral choices of her characters, Austen redeems urban life and rejects the stereotypes of Richardson's and Hogarth's narratives. . . . Austen opens the novel to modern social change. The city is a place where people earn money,

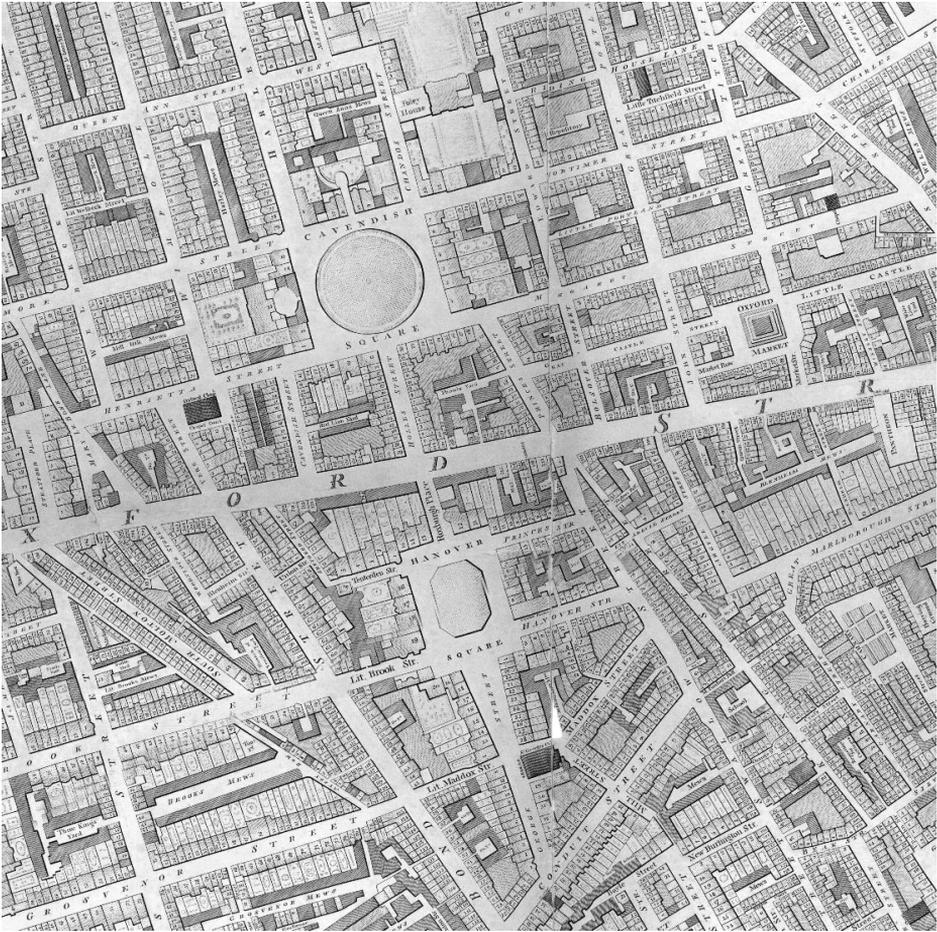
and earning money does not make them socially inferior” (135). Austen allows Marianne to dislike London, but it would appear from the text and from her letters that the author herself understood that short visits to the capital challenged one’s prejudices and opened one’s mind.

As she lays out the intricate street-patterns of Mayfair, a thriving, elegant “village” within the “Village,”³ Austen chronicles the joys and disappointments, pleasures and miseries, anxieties and deceptions elicited by the invitations attached to the houses where she has collected her characters. If in her letters, especially those to members of her family, Austen is specific about her addresses (“Steventon,” “Castle Square,” “Chawton,” “Henrietta Street,” “Godmersham Park,” and “23 Hans Place”), in *Sense and Sensibility*, she is just as particular about designating where her characters live and the paths of their perambulations as they criss-cross Mayfair and Marylebone on their visits to each others’ houses. This particularity reinforces what Janine Barchas refers to as “the realism of her art”: Austen’s realism, Barchas asserts, “modestly veils a steady habit of smart cultural allusion” (147).

In this novel Austen heightens the realism by using actual shops and locations—a stationer in Pall Mall; a jeweller, Gray’s, in Sackville Street—that her intended or “common” readers recognize as the most elegant emporia and residential addresses. Acute readers interpret accordingly Mr. Robert Ferrars’s epic struggle to choose a toothpick-case. Astute theatre-goers may even have recognized in Robert Ferrars’s appearance and behavior the qualities of the Regency bucks portrayed in George Colman the Younger’s 1797 play *The Heir at Law*.⁴ Shocked at his son’s West End ways of “talking, walking and dressing,” Lord Duberly rebukes him, but his son replies that “[a] young fellow is nothing now without the Bond Street roll, a toothpick between his teeth, and his knuckles cramm’d into his coat-pocket” (qtd. in Porter 180). When Robert Ferrars walks out of Gray’s “with an happy air of real conceit and affected indifference” (251), he seems to imitate the style of the Bond Street flâneurs satirized in Colman’s play. Willoughby’s address on Bond Street, “the most fashionable shopping street in Regency London” (Copeland 472), also carries a certain cultural éclat, for this is a man who is for sale, who can be “bought” by the bride who is the highest bidder.



The 3 or 4 country families who find themselves together in London (it is, after all, the high season) are linked in a complicated familial network: the



Richard Horwood's Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster . . . , from Conduit Street to Hanover Square to Harley Street (1792). © Trustees of the British Museum.

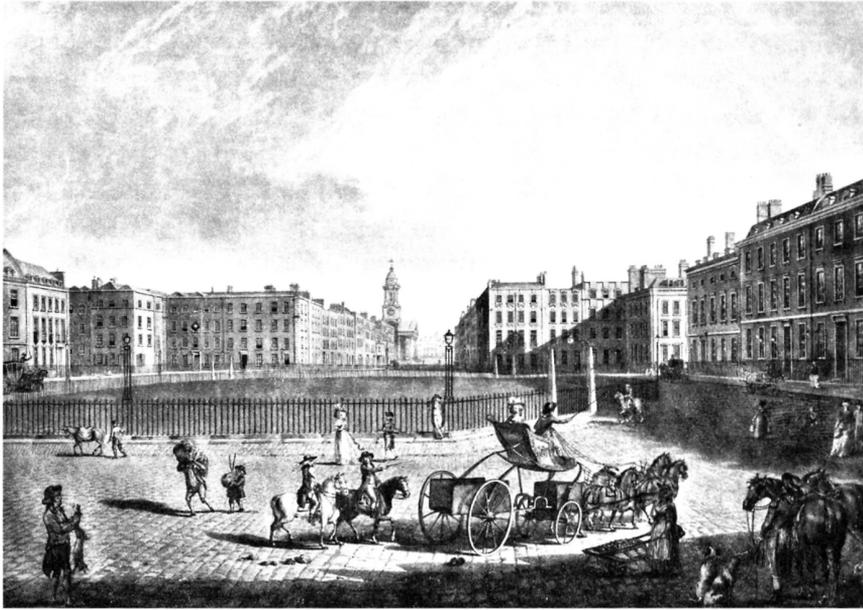
extended Middleton family, for example, includes the Dashwoods, although it is never clear exactly how they are related; it includes as well, through marriage, the Jennings family members, Mr. Palmer, and the Steele sisters. The Ferrars family includes (through Fanny's marriage to John) the Dashwood family, and, through the Dashwoods, the Middletons, and, ultimately, the Steele sisters. The two parts of the Dashwood family seem to be related to everyone. Mrs. Jennings succinctly summarizes for John Dashwood the family lines: "they were all cousins, or something like it" (253). These 3 or 4 families meet again and again: proximity forces interactions on almost a daily basis; these interactions then demand rather stringent codes of polite behavior, codes ignored by Fanny Dashwood, Mrs. Ferrars, and even Marianne herself. Through

the invitations that are extended back and forth among the families, social and personal virtues like generosity, prudence, and the fear “of giving pain, of wounding expectation” (277) are constantly tested, both publicly and privately.

An intricate system of invitations commits these 3 or 4 quite diverse families to a social agenda that carries them from one end of Mayfair to another. “Family” and “invitations” are central concepts shaping the novel. The first sentence of *Sense and Sensibility* focuses on “[t]he family of Dashwood”; the first paragraph makes explicit the invitation that initiates the plot. When the death of his sister brings “a great alteration” into the home of the elderly Gentleman who owns Norland, “he *invited* and received into his house the *family* of his nephew Mr. Henry Dashwood” (3; emphasis added). Although the anonymous reviewer for *The British Critic* found that “[t]here is a little perplexity in the genealogy of the first chapter, and the reader is somewhat bewildered among half-sisters, cousins, and so forth” (Johnson 315-16), this network of relationships forms the backbone of the novel.

At Barton and in Mayfair, through Sir John the Dashwood sisters find themselves inundated with invitations to dine and to play cards with Lady Middleton, to meet the Palmers, to form an acquaintance with the Steele sisters. Austen qualifies the myriad invitations that structure the plot. There are “kind,” “general,” “cold,” “warm,” “faint,” “pressing,” “joint,” and “frequent” invitations—all of which prompt afternoons and evenings that produce corresponding responses of elation or boredom. What is worse for Elinor and Marianne: stressfully intimate or crashingly dull conversations? Seven and a half minutes of Fanny Dashwood’s silence or Mrs. Ferrars’s rudeness and cold insolence? The uncomfortable interactions resulting from mismatched guest lists of family members reveal what Raymond Williams identifies as the “social confusions and contradictions” that complicate every aspect of human conduct, especially in an “openly acquisitive society, which is concerned also with the transmission of wealth” (115). Austen demonstrates how money shapes the way relatives—the John Dashwoods, for example, and Mrs. Ferrars—extend or withhold invitations to socialize, especially when it comes to poor (or poorer) relations.

Metaphorically and actually, Conduit Street is a fitting address for Sir John and Lady Middleton, for this address provides Sir John with innumerable opportunities to meet up with family members and friends (including Willoughby) and extend spontaneous invitations. Slanting off from Regent Street and connecting with Bond Street, cutting through the neighborhood like a



Hanover Square, after Edward Dayes (1787). © Trustees of the British Museum.

channel, Conduit Street offers Mrs. Jennings and the Dashwood sisters “a convenient, brief walk from Berkeley Street through this fashionable area of London” (Copeland 482). Conduit Street is very close to the Palmers’ house in Hanover Square, so daily visits between Lady Middleton and Mrs. Palmer are possible, even in Mrs. Palmer’s delicate condition. Furthermore, as Edward Copeland points out, Conduit Street is an address “appropriate” to Lady Middleton’s “aspirations of exclusivity” (473), but it is also a street that channels Sir John’s spirit of generosity, officious though it sometimes is. Sir John thrives in London, for he is the conduit of generosity, the beneficent extender of invitations leading to the subtle social interactions that Austen dissects in this novel.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Mayfair, a notch in the topography of the larger village of London, had been expanding rapidly northwards, toward Marylebone. With this expansion, rigid and perplexing class hierarchies and social codes changed. The world Jane Austen describes in her novels, says Raymond Williams, “is no single, settled society”; rather, her novels depict an “active, complicated, sharply speculative” population that is in the process of coming to terms with “the complicated interaction of landed and trading capital” (115). In

London Austen's characters cluster together, forming, in effect, their own "village" and their own "close social dimension" (Williams 117). In this circumscribed area that comprises the environs of Berkeley Street, Park Street, Conduit Street, Harley Street, Hanover Square, and Bond Street, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood suffer the anxieties of proximity. There are so many relatives, so many invitations, and so many social events, the sisters have little time for reflection.

Two invitations in this novel require particular scrutiny, for they dramatize the dilemma of what Austen terms "the anxiety of expectation and the pain of disappointment" (189) inherent in a social commitment. With Mrs. Jennings unavailable on one particular evening, Lady Middleton chaperones Elinor and Marianne "to a party" (199). Austen's generic description belies the importance of what is in fact a major confrontation at the center of their London sojourn. Lady Middleton expects an evening of cards and entertainment. Elinor, knowing the fragile state of Marianne's nerves, expects nothing of the evening, and she seeks out chairs for herself and Marianne. Marianne, "wholly dispirited, careless of her appearance, . . . seem[ed] equally indifferent whether she went or staid" (199). When Lady Middleton and her guests enter the "splendidly lit up" but very crowded room, Marianne's bad humor seems to be conveyed not only to Elinor but to the narrator as well, who reports that the sisters "ascended the stairs, heard their names announced from one landing-place to another," curtsayed to the hostess, mingled with the crowd, and "[took] their share of the heat and inconvenience, to which their arrival must necessarily add" (199-200).

As they sit at the periphery and observe what must be an extraordinarily colorful assembly of the *bon ton*, both young women appear petulant and anxious. They continue in this miserable mood until, across the crowded room, Marianne, "her whole countenance glowing with sudden delight," sees Willoughby—only Willoughby, and not the fashionable young lady with whom he has been speaking. In a concise two pages, Austen encapsulates the range of emotions arising from Lady Middleton's invitation: boredom, "an agony of impatience," "wildest anxiety," "agitation," "misery," and "exclamations of wretchedness" (200-02).

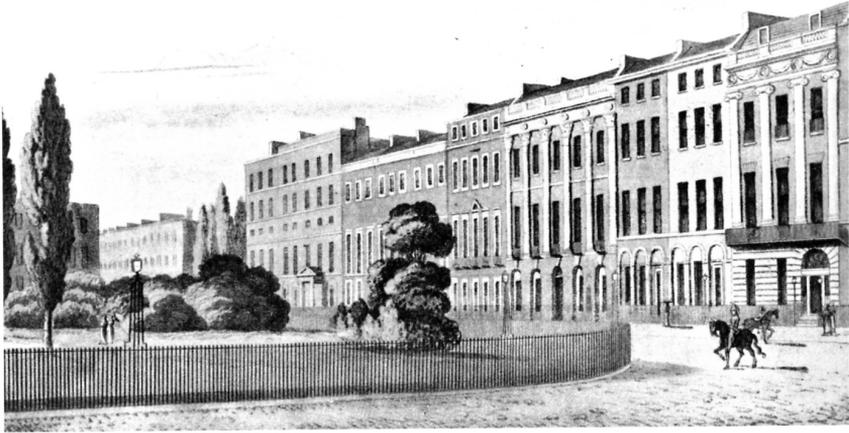
Lady Middleton's invitation to the Dashwood sisters to accompany her to "a party" results in Marianne's public emotional collapse. Only days later, a flurry of invitations from the John Dashwoods to the whole clan engulfs Elinor in a series of stinging humiliations. John and Fanny, finding that they are "prodigiously delighted with the Middletons," extend dinner invitations to

the 3 or 4 country families that make up the tangled skein of family connections in this novel (262). The highlight of the dinner party, we are given to understand, is an introduction to Mrs. Ferrars. The Dashwood sisters and Mrs. Jennings “were invited likewise” (an invitation that seems almost an afterthought), and John Dashwood “was careful to secure Colonel Brandon”; the Miss Steeles ingratiate themselves so thoroughly with everyone that Lady Middleton “was as ready as Sir John to ask them to spend a week or two in Conduit-street,” and an invitation to Conduit Street to stay with the Middletons assures for them an invitation to Harley Street and Fanny Dashwood’s table (262–63). Lucy Steele “had seldom been happier in her life than she was on receiving Mrs. John Dashwood’s card” (263), and throughout dinner Mrs. Ferrars, ignorant of Lucy’s “engagement” to her son, bestows every attention on her. Although Fanny and John were “not much in the habit of giving any thing,” as the narrator reports, their “dinner was a grand one”; around the table, “no poverty of any kind, except of conversation, appeared” (262, 265–66).

After the grand dinner, when the women withdraw to the drawingroom, Mrs. Ferrars, having slighted Elinor at the dinner table, then dismisses Elinor’s art work—which she has not even regarded—with the epithet “very pretty” (268). Her pride, cold insolence, mean-spirited arrogance, and lack of family feeling are all on show at Harley Street. The evening ends with Marianne in tears and Elinor acknowledging that “a farther connection between the families [was] undesirable” (271).



In *Sense and Sensibility* Austen repeats the street names so often (more than fifty times) that the reader gains familiarity with the connections, squares, and intersections that make up this urban village. Edward Copeland reminds readers that in *Sense and Sensibility* “the map of London functions as a textual substitute for first-hand experience. The addresses of the various families in London are presented as designations in the social topography of the city, and are in no way evocative of London atmosphere or street life” (lix). Austen’s repeated use of the street names, however, seems to indicate that there is indeed a significant subtext to the topography; in her depiction of the socially active characters, Austen does capture the essence of genteel life—especially for women—in Mayfair in the early nineteenth century. Roy Porter points out that “Mayfair always remained a touch villagey, with cottages and even pockets of poverty in the backstreets and mews, whose tenants waited



Portman Square, North Side, after *Gingal. R. Ackermann (1813)*. © Trustees of the British Museum.

upon the upper crust” (107). At the John Dashwoods’ dinner party “the servants were numerous” (265); the shopkeepers at Gray’s in Sackville Street are so busy “that there was not a person at liberty to attend” to Elinor’s errand (250). Returning to Berkeley Street “[r]estless and dissatisfied” (187) after a shopping trip to Bond Street and finding no letter from Willoughby, Marianne reveals how she takes the servants for granted. She questions Mrs. Jennings’s footman: “Are you certain that no servant, no porter has left any letter or note?” (188). By showing the carriage drivers, servants, “emigrant” needlewomen (288), and shopkeepers at work, Austen evokes the essence of the activities that make up the elegant daily life of the 3 or 4 families who sojourn in London during the high season.

When Mrs. Jennings, the rich widow of a man who had done very well in trade, invites Elinor and Marianne to her home on Berkeley Street near Portman Square (not to be confused with the tonier Berkeley Street off Berkeley Square), she is opening up for them a vast array of social experiences, especially in terms of the invitations they receive to visit the grand houses of their relations and their relatives’ friends. Although both sisters find her vulgar and effusive, Mrs. Jennings is “liberal,” “invariably kind” (191), and as generous as her son-in-law. Her house is “handsome and handsomely fitted up” (182). She is well

situated “outside ultra-fashionable Mayfair proper, in Berkeley Street . . . , a respectable neighbourhood of upper gentry and wealthy merchants, where in 1801, Austen’s brother Henry had taken a house” and “where his sister Cassandra visited and no doubt took note of the minute social distinctions of London addresses” (Copeland lix, 470). Like Sir John, Mrs. Jennings crosses class boundaries, refuses to stand on ceremony, and visits old friends as suits her own social code rather than the more elegant precepts current in the West End.

Mrs. Jennings’s handsome house near Portman Square resonates with more than just respectability, for this Square, “intended for the very rich” (Thorold 138), drew to the area some of the most interesting people in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century society. In 1771, for example, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, the “Queen of the Bluestockings,” began building her house there. She moved into Montagu House in 1781; hence, she was living in the square close to Orchard Street when Jane Austen and her family visited London in 1788.⁵ In Lady Middleton’s antipathy toward Elinor and Marianne, Isobel Armstrong identifies a connection between the Bluestockings and the Dashwood sisters. The Dashwood sisters despise the insipid conversation in Lady Middleton’s dining and drawing rooms, they are bored and irritated by Mrs. Palmer’s repetitive chattiness, and they are plunged into silence by extended discussion about the comparative heights of children. Lady Middleton thinks of Elinor and Marianne as “intelligent and critical women, who ‘because they were fond of reading, [must be] . . . satirical: perhaps without exactly knowing what it was to be satirical” (Armstrong 364). Austen “implicitly” connects the Dashwood sisters, Armstrong suggests, with the Bluestocking Circle, “an association which included women intellectuals who gathered together for conversation, and who made a very considerable impact on high society and intellectual life in the metropolis” (364). Austen strengthens the Bluestocking connection by having the Dashwood sisters reside in Mrs. Jennings’s house on Berkeley Street, for she situates them just around the corner from Mrs. Montagu’s house on Portman Square.

After she arrived in London in 1802, the famous portrait painter Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun also took lodgings in a house on Portman Square. It is intriguing to imagine Portman Square when first Mrs. Montagu and then Mme. Vigée-Le-Brun lived there, and even more intriguing to imagine that, with Eliza’s French connections, Henry Austen and Eliza de Feuillide occasionally crossed paths with the Bluestockings or with Mme. Vigée-Le Brun. After a stay in Portman Square, Mme. Vigée-Le Brun moved to Maddox Street, where she would have been only a block away from the Middletons’

house on Conduit Street. From Maddox Street Mme. Vigée-Le Brun could have walked to Mrs. Jennings's house on Berkeley Street; and in Bond Street she could have met members of all 3 or 4 families during the requisite shopping trips that seem to make up part of each day's outings. In her *Memoirs*, Mme. Vigée-Le Brun expresses her sentiments about the English codes of entertainment—sentiments that match Elinor and Marianne's when they accompany Lady Middleton to the hot, crowded party where Marianne finally meets up with Willoughby:

Two or three hundred individuals walk up and down the rooms, the women arm-in-arm, for the men usually keep aside. In this crowd one is pushed and jostled without end, so that it becomes very fatiguing. But there is nothing to sit on. At one of these routs I attended, an Englishman I knew in Italy caught sight of me. He came up to me and said, in the midst of the profound silence that reigns at all these parties, "Don't you think these gatherings are enjoyable?" "You enjoy yourselves with what would bore us," I replied. I really did not see what pleasure was to be got out of stifling in such a crowd. (Ch. XVI)

Close to Portman Square, and quite close to Mrs. Jennings's house on Berkeley Street, is Mrs. Ferrars's house on Park Street, an address that should not be confused with the much more upscale Park Lane, which Copeland describes as "the most aristocratic and exclusive of London addresses" (lix).⁶ If there is anything Mrs. Ferrars covets, it must be an address on Park Lane. Park Street, geographically closer to Orchard Street than to Park Lane, runs behind Park Lane and has a lesser pedigree of importance. In this novel, Austen refers to Berkeley and Harley Streets more than a dozen times, but to Park Street only once: Lucy Steele assures Elinor that "Mr. Edward Ferrars, the eldest son of Mrs. Ferrars of Park-street," is indeed the man to whom she is engaged (150). Other characters do not refer to the address on Park Street; John Dashwood is very particular about arranging to call on Mrs. Jennings in Berkeley Street and about asking to be introduced to Sir John and Lady Middleton on Conduit Street (252-53), but neither John nor Fanny mentions the Park Street address. In Mayfair society, "Mrs. Ferrars of Park Street" certainly would not have the same social and economic cachet as "Mrs. Ferrars of Park Lane."

Mrs. Ferrars's address on Park Street is ambiguous, considering her hauteur, for the street itself offers "mixed" accommodation that is possibly less grand than the designation "Park" suggests. Weinreb and Hibbert point out

that since “many of the original houses in Park Street were built on the shallow return frontages of plots in these greater streets, they were therefore generally small, their occupants often being tradesmen” (584). The Ferrarses’ address thus raises a question not answered in the novel: what do we know of Mr. Ferrars? How did he amass the capital that Mrs. Ferrars wields with such pomposity? Was he in trade? Weinreb and Hibbert also point out that “near the southern end of the west side [of Park Street] . . . there were larger houses with gardens overlooking Hyde Park. At the north end . . . stood the house in which Mrs. Fitzherbert married the Prince of Wales . . . in 1785” (584). By 1788 Prince George, having married and then ditched Caroline of Brunswick, was already the target of political cartoons and broadsides (Murray 134–35). Before he became Prince Regent in 1811, the Prince’s conflicts with his father, about money, primarily, were the subject of lampoons. Douglas Murray describes James Gillray’s popular cartoon “Dido Forsaken,” detailing “the Prince’s 1787 renunciation of Mrs. Fitzherbert in exchange for an extra £10,000 per annum” (135). Did Jane Austen select the Park Street address for Mrs. Ferrars because of her disgust with the Prince’s behavior? Is the area “tainted” with hypocrisy, delusions of grandeur, and disinheritance associated with marriage?

The Palmers, an up-and-coming family with political ambitions, live in Hanover Square, the first of the three great Mayfair Squares. Laid out early in the eighteenth century, and promoted by the Earl of Scarborough and Lord Cadogan, Hanover Square quickly attracted a wealthy set of residents, “persons of distinction” (Porter 106), including other Whig generals and veterans of Marlborough’s campaigns. This Square provides an example of social clustering, in that the residents tended to be “a grouping of rich with common sympathies . . . Hanoverian, Whig and military” (Thorold 87). With its “topically patriotic name” (Porter 106), this address implies that Mr. Palmer’s political aspirations are Whig rather than Tory. Mr. Palmer’s residence in a fine house at Hanover Square suggests that he will indeed succeed in his quest for a seat in Parliament (131). Charlotte Palmer relates how, at Cleveland, Mr. Palmer “is always going about the country canvassing against the election” (130), an expensive, time-consuming, and “extremely social” activity (Copeland 464). In what is as much a political as social stratagem, Charlotte invites the beautiful young Dashwood sisters to spend Christmas at Cleveland, where there are “so many people come to dine,” but Elinor and Marianne, almost in self-defense, twice decline her invitation. Finally, the Hanover Square Rooms provided an important concert venue for J. C. Bach, Haydn, Paganini, and Liszt (Porter 106). If Portman Square seems to be a premier artistic and literary address, then

Hanover Square was associated with music. In a most subtle way, Austen binds the arts most admired by Elinor and Marianne Dashwood to the addresses in the novel.

Like Mrs. Jennings, the John Dashwoods live north of Oxford Street, where addresses were considered to be somewhat less posh than those south of Oxford Street. Yet, Austen is careful to inform the reader that the Dashwoods “had taken a very good house for three months” (262). Their address in Harley Street situates them on what Weinreb and Hibbert term “a smart residential street” (265). Kitty, Duchess of Wellington, lived here in 1809–14 when the Duke was fighting in Portugal; Allan Ramsay, the portrait painter, lived here in 1770–80. Although Copeland says that in the Regency Harley Street “attract[ed] social climbers and arrivistes” (483), it was perhaps a coup for the Dashwoods to find a house on Harley Street. The houses here were well built, the area was thriving, and the Dashwoods had the capital needed for the grand improvements that always followed the acquisition of property.



After more than two months in town, Mrs. Jennings, Elinor, and Marianne “received a very warm invitation from Charlotte to go with them” to Cleveland, an invitation “inforced with so much real politeness by Mr. Palmer himself” that they “accept it with pleasure” (316). A short call to Harley Street to say good-bye to Fanny and John engenders a “faint invitation from Fanny, to come to Norland whenever it should happen to be in their way, which of all things was the most unlikely to occur,” and then, in early April, “the two parties from Hanover-square and Berkeley-street set out” (341). And so ends the Dashwood sisters’ sojourn in London. They leave behind them the entertainments and shops, the miseries and anxieties, the pleasures and disappointments, the humiliations and joys that Mrs. Jennings’s original invitation had stimulated. When Elinor and Marianne leave what the Reverend Sydney Smith (1771–1845) praised as that “parallelogram between Oxford-street, Piccadilly, Regent-street, and Hyde Park [that] encloses more intelligence and human ability, to say nothing of wealth and beauty, than the world has ever collected in such a space before” (qtd. in Porter 178), they are more grown up, more experienced in the complexities of society, and more knowledgeable about the by-ways of Mayfair. Jane Austen has moved her 3 or 4 country families into an urban space that tests not only family loyalties and relations, but also the Dashwood sisters’ moral strength and their powers of recovery.

NOTES

1. Tomalin points out that “Phila’s” “bad report” was the “first direct description of Jane, in which she is singled out within the Austen family, and we are at once made aware of the power of her personality” (60). Tomalin says this description was included in a letter to Phila, but Deirdre Le Faye says that the letter of 23 July 1788 was written by Phylly to her brother James.
2. While Copeland states that Harley Street was an address sought by the nouveau riche, Weinreb and Hibbert suggest that Harley Street was fashionable at the beginning of the nineteenth century (365).
3. The OED points out that the term “village” was “applied jocularly to a large town or city, especially London” (204).
4. Jane Austen was staying in Cork Street, close to Conduit Street, in the summer of 1797 when Colman’s play was on at the Royal Haymarket, but I have not discovered that she saw the play though she refers to it in *Mansfield Park*.
5. Mrs. Montagu lived in Montagu House on Portman Square from 1781 until her death in 1800.
6. Copeland says that “[a]mbitious Mrs. Ferrars, the richest of the characters, is housed in Park Lane,” but, in fact, Mrs. Ferrars’s house is in Park Street.

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