

A New Kind of Pastoral: Anti-Development Satire in *Sanditon*

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In *Emma*, just before Mr. Knightley returns from London to propose, Emma walks out into Hartfield's enclosed garden. Setting this scene, the narrator tells us:

The weather continued much the same all the following morning; and the same loneliness, and the same melancholy, seemed to reign at Hartfield—but in the afternoon it cleared; the wind changed into a softer quarter; the clouds were carried off; the sun appeared; it was summer again. With all the eagerness which such a transition gives, Emma resolved to be out of doors as soon as possible. Never had the exquisite sight, smell, sensation of nature, tranquil, warm, and brilliant after a storm, been more attractive to her. She longed for the serenity they might gradually introduce. . . . (424)

Emma walks in the garden, but attends to the sun, wind, and sky. Her response suggests an opposition between the confinement of her father's house and grounds, and the freedom of nature beyond them, anticipating, perhaps, the relative freedom that will develop in her marriage to George Knightley.

In *Sanditon*, after Charlotte Heywood has been shown the developing resort village, her party arrives at the Parkers' new place:

At Trafalgar House, rising at a little distance behind the Terrace, the Travellers were safely set down, & all was happiness & Joy between Papa & Mama & their Children; while Charlotte having received possession of her apartment, found amusement enough in standing at her ample Venetian window, looking over the miscellaneous foreground of unfinished Buildings, waving Linen, & tops of Houses, to the Sea, dancing & sparkling in Sunshine & Freshness. (384)

Here a different kind of tension appears, between the barrier of waving laundry and incomplete resort houses and the freedom represented by sea and sky—the natural world beyond the control of Mr. Parker's and Lady Denham's speculation.

These two passages suggest the complexity of pastoral motifs in Jane Austen's fiction. Emma walks in an enclosed garden; an ambiguous symbol in all pastoral, in this novel it suggests both safety and her confinement by her hypochondriac father; additionally, her attention focuses upon what pastoral poetry traditionally celebrates, unbounded nature: the sun, wind, and sky. Moreover, these natural forces console her as she fears she has lost Mr. Knightley to Harriet. For Charlotte, the sea and sky are partly blocked by an unpleasant "miscellaneous foreground." As she gets

to know the leading citizens of Sanditon, she finds some of them unpleasant, too, but amusing.

While some disagreement exists about the exact nature of pastoral conventions, there is consensus on its general definition: literature favoring rural life, either on a farm or estate or in a small village, with an emphasis upon the individual's relationship to nature.¹ Since its creation by Theocritus and Virgil, pastoral takes two forms, what classicist Peter Marinelli calls the "decorative" and the "serious" (6-7). We see both kinds in Austen's fiction; *Sanditon* is fundamentally serious, but it incorporates satire of the decorative. Decorative pastoral poetry presents an idyllic rural setting in which debates take place between shepherds, often competing for the love of a shepherdess or milkmaid; it is what Alexander Pope recommends ("Pastoral Poetry"; Preface, *Pastorals*). The opening of Pope's "Autumn" illustrates the best of this kind of poem:

Beneath the shade a spreading Beech displays,
Hylas and Ægon sung their rural lays,
This mourned a faithless, that an absent Love,
And Delia's name and Doris' filled the Grove. (ll. 1-4)

By the early eighteenth century, pastoral poetry had declined into trite imitation, either of Virgil and Theocritus (Curran 85, 91-91). Insipid productions invited parody and inversion. From about 1720 through 1830, serious pastoral was gradually revived, in part, paradoxically, through the influence of antipastoral poems such as John Gay's *The Shepherd's Week* (1714), a parody of pastoral given a realistic setting. From Virgil on, serious pastoral has been a vehicle for social and political criticism. Its modern form is owing largely to Wordsworth's transformation of it at the turn of the nineteenth century in such poems as *Michael: A Pastoral Poem* (1800) and *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* (1800), with their realistic treatment of personal hardship caused, in part, by corruption associated with the city.

As Curran explains, "[T]he enduring feature of pastoral is its double vision. It may enact a retreat [from the corrupt city], but it brings its civilized auditors with it, guaranteeing a tension of values" (88). Tension also comes from ambiguous tropes such as the enclosed garden. Still another tension resides in the apposition of characters living according to pastoral ideals with characters who invert the ideology of serious pastoral. In *Sanditon* we experience that apposition through the discerning "double vision" of Charlotte Heywood.

Significant to the evolution of pastoral, Austen's novels, including *Sanditon*, are the first serious pastorals whose central consciousness is female. Charlotte comes from a family exemplifying the pastoral ideal, a simple country life spent in contact with the natural world.

Mr. Heywood threshes hay with his workers; the Heywood family has created a self-contained community; and Charlotte reads imaginative literature and essays with an understanding that enables her to resist Mrs. Whitby's "rings and Broches" (390). From this background, Charlotte views with amused detachment the people of Sanditon, several of whom engage in antipastoral activity as they ride the hobby-horse of speculation.

One "new direction" *Sanditon* takes is toward the use of pastoral motifs to criticize certain cultural paradigms that gained prominence during the post-Napoleonic Regency: speculation, both commercial and sexual; and, related to both kinds of speculation, exploitation of nature.² In *Sanditon* speculation is the central trope for antipastoral behavior—whatever undermines a harmonious community whose dominant attitude toward the natural world is appreciation. An analogy seems to be developing: as the *cottage orné* is to commercial speculation, so misuse of the vocabulary of the sublime is to sexual speculation. We shall see that in *Sanditon* the *cottage orné* and debased sublime are associated with decorative pastoral.

In 1815 Austen's brother Henry lost nearly everything from speculation in his bank, and his brother Edward £10,000 (Fergus 163), which might have resulted in the Austen women's losing their house on his Chawton estate. Henry suffered public disgrace, and Edward and consequently his mother and sisters managed not to go under—but just barely (Fergus 162-63; Honan 376). The danger in speculation—to individuals, families, and villages—was an evil Austen herself must have felt keenly as she composed her last novel.

After 1800 many in the governing class argued that Britain's freedom depended on economic development (Cain & Hopkins 78). One prominent venture was speculation on seaside resorts, which had accelerated during the Napoleonic Wars. Throughout the Regency and the Prince Regent's reign as George IV, Brighton became "virtually a second capital." Its success encouraged other development (Corbin 179). By the early nineteenth century, every coastal county had at least one resort (Walton 15-16). In *The Lure of the Sea*, Corbin says *Sanditon* is the first novel addressing "the sociability organized around sea bathing"; Jane Austen does so scornfully, as did a number of diarists and essayists of the time before and during which Austen was composing (271).

The Regent first visited Brighton to treat his goiter, but his lavish living soon became paramount, and other pleasure-seekers followed in his wake. "In short," Corbin says, "for the first time, a shift took place from therapeutic aims to hedonistic ones, and this was to characterize all the great Continental resorts during the nineteenth century" (272). This new attitude toward the resort as place of self-indulgence emerged alongside a radical view of nature as commod-

ity and means of self-gratification (Worster 58-60). *Sanditon* records a cultural watershed, in which for the first time open profit-seeking among the upper classes was becoming widely accepted. In *Sanditon*, we get no explanation for the "activity run mad" of Mr. Parker and Lady Denham; they do not need more income. Perhaps their efforts reflect what historian Linda Colley describes as British post-Waterloo "disorientation," a lack of focus for cultural energies in a period of strikes, riots, and economic turmoil (321-22)—a salient context Austen's contemporaries would have known without overt reference. Perhaps also these seaside resorts may have served some as a buffer between their world and the "mob" surrounding it.

These projects to increase personal wealth involved natural resources.³ Environmental historian Donald Worster writes that beginning in fifteenth century Europe but accelerating greatly at the end of the eighteenth, a "reorganization of nature" occurred, which was based upon a new view of land as a commodity (58). Such a view entailed a "radical simplification" of nature, beginning in Britain: destroying species and ecosystems to grow one or two crops, abandoning self-sufficiency in favor of specialization (58-59). Mr. Parker illustrates these trends by setting up old Mr. Stringer as a greengrocer. When Mrs. Parker expresses nostalgia, typically pastoral, over her old kitchen garden, he tells her to buy from the Stringers even though she can get free produce from their old home, even suggesting she waste food: "when any Vegetables or fruit happen to be wanted—& it will not be amiss to have them often wanted, to have something or other forgotten most days;—Just to have a nominal supply you know, that poor old Andrew may not lose his daily Job—" (382). Mr. Parker has just introduced an early form of price supports, and his fragmentary syntax indicates his own discomfort with his inconsistent argument. For the first time in history, land use for economic gain was seen as a just reason for individual action and behavior (Worster 58; Colley 231-32). Mr. Parker and Lady Denham's rental houses and Sir Edward's unfinished *cottage orné* exist for profit only. Profit even justifies dropping customary hospitality to visiting relatives: Lady Denham will refuse to have Sir Edward and Miss Esther Denham stay with her "to the prejudice of Sanditon," so they will be forced to rent one of the vacant houses she and Mr. Parker have gambled on filling (401-02).

In the *cottage orné* Sir Edward is "running up . . . on a strip of Waste Ground Lady D. has granted him" (377), Austen links ill-timed commercial speculation with an element of picturesque landscaping associated with debased pastoral. By the early nineteenth century, say landscape historians Hunt and Willis, such emblematic architecture was ceasing to be fashionable (358-60). Perhaps a contributing factor was the lampoons targeting the Prince Regent

and his mistress playing at pastoral life in their *cottage orné*. Garden historian Sir Roy Strong explains the purpose of the Prince's Royal Lodge in Windsor Great Park, begun in 1813, in a way that implies its affinity with pastoral:

Such buildings embodied aristocratic yearnings for the simple life away from the draughty grandeur of the great house and were seen as especially appropriate to men of taste and discernment, providing ideal settings for conversing with friends, communing with nature and study. (86)

In one cartoon, the Prince Regent, wearing an apron, shirt sleeves rolled above his elbows, is leaning on a hoe while his mistress operates some form of watering system. The caption above reads "Brobdingnag Castle" and below "Rusticating" (rpt. in Strong 86). An ornament in a picturesque landscape, the *cottage orné* could be a permanent house for a laborer or a play house for the owner. As the toy of the wealthy, it is an emblem of the intersection of picturesque in the visual arts with decorative pastoral in the literary—it allowed its owners to play at the idyllic life of Pope's *Pastorals*. In real life, decorative pastoral, or picturesque architecture, suggested a preference for the artificial over the native or practical.

Similarly, Mr. Parker adopts the moribund picturesque fad for building on cliffs or mountaintops: "Trafalgar House, on the most elevated spot on the Down was a light elegant Building, standing about an hundred yards from the brow of a steep, but not very lofty Cliff" (384). Its vulnerability to the raging storms of the English Channel recalls its opposite, Donwell Abbey, with "its suitable, becoming, characteristic situation, low and sheltered . . . with all the old neglect of prospect" (*Emma* 358).

Like the *cottage orné*, Sir Edward's ideal site for Clara Brereton's "seduction" Tombuctoo is past its prime. In Austen's last years Tombuctoo was inflated by the popular press to a site of both commerce and sexual license. The puffs of its commercial image suggest Mr. Parker's promotion of Sanditon. Tombuctoo's exotic aura grew out of Mungo Park's 1799 and 1806 travel diaries and J. G. Jackson's 1810 journal; because of these and others it was also popularly—and incorrectly—assumed to be a major site of African commerce (Lock 98-99). Actually, Tombuctoo had been an inland commercial center two hundred years before Sir Edward learns of it, but by 1800 it had shrunk to a village (Balandier & Claquet 319).

Tombuctoo made news at least five times during Austen's lifetime: the publications of Park's diaries in 1799 and 1806, also the year of his death; in 1810, Jackson's diary; and in newspaper articles in 1816, the year before she began *Sanditon*, and the month she started it, January 1817. In 1816 American sailor Robert Adams' narrative of his visit to Tombuctoo was discussed in the *Edinburgh*

Review and the *Monthly Review*. The argument that Austen invokes the Tombuctoo myth for a specific reason gains force with an *Edinburgh Review* comment that Adams' narrative disproves earlier accounts: Adams writes that he "observed no shops there" (21-22)—this in June 1816. The *Monthly Review*, published just as Austen began to write *Sanditon*, January 1817, echoes this appraisal, using the term *speculation*:

We never partook much of the visionary dreams respecting this metropolis, as it has been called, of central Africa: nor imagined that the greatness of its mart, would open many new views to commercial speculation. . . . (31; emphasis mine)

Most of Sanditon village's shops exist only in Mr. Parker's dreams (383). He seems not to see what Lady Denham notes to Charlotte: "Here are a great many empty Houses—3 on this very Terrace; no fewer than three Lodging Papers staring us in the face at this very moment, Number 3, 4 & 8" (402). The parallel between Sanditon and Tombuctoo may suggest a characteristically pastoral conflict: each is also a rural community threatened by greed.

Exploitation of, and speculation on, the natural environment requires a paradigm in which nature is objectified—made a means to an end. Similarly, exploitation of other people requires dehumanizing them to some extent—reducing their status as rational, feeling creatures. In her last work Austen appears to place in apposition the exploitation of land and the exploitation of people.

Sir Edward's pretensions to sublime feeling seem to have no more depth than his scheme to abduct Clara Brereton. Exclaiming on the charms of the seacoast to Charlotte, Sir Edward runs on

through all the usual Phrases employed in praise of their Sublimity, & descriptive of the *undescribable* Emotions they excite in the Mind of Sensibility.—The terrific Grandeur of the Ocean in a Storm, its glassy surface in a calm, its' [sic] Gulls & its Samphire, & the deep fathoms of its' Abysses, its' quick vicissitudes, its' direful Deceptions, its' Mariners tempting it in Sunshine & overwhelmed by the sudden Tempest. . . . [Charlotte thinks his language] rather commonplace perhaps . . . and she cd not but think him a Man of Feeling—till he began to stagger her by the number of his Quotations, & the bewilderment of some of his sentences. (396)

Both the picturesque and the sublime are the heirs of pastoral; their descent into cliché is, I believe, a corollary to insipid decorative pastoral poetry throughout the eighteenth century. Sir Edward trivializes the sublime to flatter young women for his own exploitative purposes. He describes to himself his sexual speculation, his wish to "carry . . . off" Clara Brereton; in the language of commerce: "He knew his Business." His ideal site for the "seduction" is Tombuctoo—if only he could afford passage (405). The staples of trade between

western Africa and European countries were gold, ivory, and slaves (*Times Concise Atlas* 60-61). Although British slave trade was officially abolished by Parliament in 1807, the use of slaves already in British colonies continued throughout Austen's lifetime (Colley 351; Porter 37). So while Tombuctoo was not, at the time Sir Edward contemplates it, engaged in abduction and enslavement, it was still popularly associated with this practice.

Speculation serves as a metaphor for sexual aggression, allied in Lady Denham's mind with financial. In one breath she wishes to Charlotte that a propertied heiress might visit Sanditon "'for her health [to spend money]—(and if she was ordered to drink asses' milk I could supply her)—and as soon as she got well, have her fall in love with Sir Edward!'" (401)—so that the heiress could supply *him* with *her* money along with her person. Similarly, along with the proposed exploitation of Miss Lambe, the West Indian mulatto (409), Sir Edward's Tombuctoo fantasy parallels sexual with economic exploitation. In Miss Lambe Ruth Perry shows Austen's association of women's roles with colonialism, especially the slave trade (101). I find another in the convergence in Tombuctoo of two kinds of speculation: colonial trade in products seized from nature (gold, ivory) and the proposed sexual exploitation of Clara, who, being poor, is even more vulnerable than Miss Lambe.

Tombuctoo's alleged promiscuity was the focus of J. G. Jackson's 1809 *Account of the Empire of Morocco* as well as Adams'. Sir Edward has "read all the Essays, Letters, Tours & Criticisms of the day" (404), so he knows these books. Given his perverse reading of Richardson, we can assume he ignored the periodicals' discussions of African trade, taking in instead the salacious passages. However, Austen inverts the plot of the sentimental novel, making the success of Sir Edward-as-Lovelace's would-be rape of Clara-as-Clarissa as unlikely as the Denham-Parker speculation in real estate.

Male characters are also objects of exploitation. Lady Denham's hope that Sir Edward will "captivate" an heiress is a wish to use his charm to take him off her dole. One of Mr. Parker's reasons for wanting his brother Sidney to visit is his usefulness as bait for wealthy young women, who might flock there when news of Sidney's visit spreads: "'Such a young man as Sidney, with his neat equipage and fashionable air,—You & I Mary, know what effect it might have: Many a respectable Family, many a careful Mother, many a pretty Daughter, might it secure us, to the prejudice of E. Bourne & Hastings'" (382).

In addition to its negative connotations, in the early nineteenth century the word *speculation* carried another meaning, associated with Clara Brereton and Charlotte Heywood: *speculation* also meant "intelligent or comprehending vision" or the action of such ob-

ervation.⁴ In a reversal of gender roles reminiscent of Austen's early fiction, Sir Edward is naive, while the woman, Clara, speculates: "she *saw* through him, & had not the least intention of being seduced" (405; emphasis mine). Charlotte's speculative gaze takes in the sordid designs of her nephew on Clara Brereton as well as Lady Denham's behavior (391, 295-96). In the tantalizing twelfth chapter, Charlotte, walking with Mrs. Parker towards Sanditon House, glimpses "something White and Womanish in the field on the other side" of the fence:

stepping to the pales, she saw indeed—& very decidedly, in spite of the Mist; Miss B—seated, not far before her, at the foot of the bank which sloped down from the outside of the Paling & which a narrow Path seemed to skirt along;—Miss Brereton seated, apparently very composedly—& Sir E.D. by her side.—They were sitting so near each other & appeared so closely engaged in gentle conversation, that Ch. instantly felt she had nothing to do but to step back again & say not a word.—Privacy was certainly their object.—It could not but strike her rather unfavourably with regard to Clara;—but hers was a situation which must not be judged with severity. . . . Among other points of moralising reflection which the sight of this Tete a Tete produced, Charlotte cd not but think of the extreme difficulty which secret Lovers must have in finding a proper spot for their stolen Interviews. . . . They were really ill-used. (426-27)

Charlotte can penetrate mists to comprehend a scene. Her pastoral vision is double in a productive way, for she knows what she sees is not the whole picture, given Clara's dependent position and given Charlotte's intuition that Clara "sees through" Sir Edward's plot. At the same time, Charlotte views the scene with amusement, as if it were taking place in a conventional sentimental novel, in which a rendezvous is thwarted by the appearance of a visitor. More importantly, she knows the difference between the danger in this real situation and the make-believe worlds of fiction and the visual arts.

It seems the only true vision in Sanditon belongs to Charlotte, along with Clara, Mary Parker, and perhaps Sidney. Clara's name implies her clear vision of Sir Edward. Mary sees the danger as well as impracticality of their new windswept cliffside Trafalgar House versus the sheltered old homestead, but her objections are suppressed. Sidney points out the foolishness in his siblings' behavior.

In *Sanditon* as we have it, attaining the pastoral ideal is unthinkable for all but the few like Mr. and Mrs. Heywood, and their quiet social harmony seems a bit dull. In contrast, despite the antipastoral forces' ineptitude, they are altering the fishing village and its natives for the worst. This aspiring resort stands as a trope for many resort towns along the coast of early nineteenth century Britain. Austen herself speculates about the future of nature at the mercy of careless commercialism. She also shows us the danger in appropriating the

language of popular culture to rationalize public or private actions. *Sandition* presents the dangers of viewing any historic moment simplistically—here, according to versions of the decorative pastoral. Finally, her fiction allows us a speculative gaze at the tensions within pastoral, modified by an author for whom “imagination is everything.”

NOTES

- ¹ For the significance of word *nature* during the period in which Austen lived, see Beach 12-13, 15-17; Rosenmeyer 181; and Williams 219. For pastoral conventions, see Marinelli 3, 8-13, 17-18, 54-55; Ettin 55; Garber 453; O’Loughlin 10, 175-77; and Curran 85-99.
- ² The paradigms concerning speculation are, of course, in addition to those treated by Sales (201-10), Litz (160-69), and Ebbatson (45-51).
- ³ This goal is justified in Adam Smith 4-5; qtd. in Worster 58. See also Chambers and Mingay 54-76; Fussell 7-18.
- ⁴ The OED records this use in effect from the fifteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries.

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