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## Exhibiting Literature. Austen Exhibited

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How to cite:

Watson, Nicola J. (2013). Exhibiting Literature. Austen Exhibited. In: Kroucheva, Katerina and Schaff, Barbara eds. *Kafkas Gabel: Überlegungen zum Ausstellen von Literatur*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 227–250.

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

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## *Exhibiting Literature*

### **Austen Exhibited**

*Nicola J Watson*

So the day had finally come... The epic and long awaited pilgrimage to Jane Austen's home! We were so excited to be there that we literally seemed to revert to girlhood at the mere site [sic] of the house... Lots of giggling, pictures, and intense moments of quiet...(as if we might somehow will Jane herself to walk through the front door) ensued....

The close second in "surreal moments" of the day was in finding Jane's writing desk, where she penned her stories every day like clockwork. All the novels we've so loved came to life on that desk, under her diligent hand. ...And as Lizzi described: "I was having trouble breathing... I just kept thinking: She. Was. Here." :) Yes, that's right. We are epic Jane Austen nerds. Haha <sup>1</sup>

So one Austen enthusiast described her encounter with 'Jane' on her visit to Chawton Cottage -- 'Jane Austen's house'-- in May 2011. Her account suggests that exhibiting literature on sites of literary interest most properly prompts the visitor to exhibit literature within their own body, to exhibit the symptoms of literary enthusiasm as a performance, in this case, as this visitor went on to record, not just to her friend, but to the gratified reaction of the ladies in the gift-shop. Such an account is by no means unusual. Austen tourism to England is today a profitable and thriving business, whether undertaken by individuals or groups, on foot, on customized tours, or with the Jane Austen Society of America. But it does prompt a set of questions to do with the contemporary business of exhibiting literature, questions about what this literature is that is being 'exhibited', how literature can be exhibited to and by the contemporary reader, and to what ends and effects. We might ask in particular how acts of exhibition determine the idea of the writer, or of individual literary texts. Or, equally, ask how the aesthetics of exhibition relates to culturally dominant readings of individual authors and texts and the proper relation of readers to them. What concerns me here, however, is how literary exhibition is changing under the pressure of the rapid and accelerating re-mediatization of literature and associated representations of acts of reading.

Austen provides at present a particularly charged case-study through which to explore this last question. Scholars have relatively recently turned their attention to the representation and function of Austen within global culture, considering 'Janeitism' and its effects, revisiting the history of Austen criticism and appreciation, and tracing the appropriation of Austen within popular and elite culture. Such attention has been all but forced by what has been termed the 'Austenmania' of the last two decades, which has been both evidenced and fed by a spate of sequels, spoofs, film and television adaptations and latterly, by two films centring on Austen's life. Yet, until very recently, little attention has been paid to the phenomenon of Austen

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<sup>1</sup> [witheverypassingday.blogspot.co.uk](http://witheverypassingday.blogspot.co.uk). last accessed 9 Feb 2013

memorialization, musealization and tourism, evidenced at Chawton and, increasingly, elsewhere.

As Deirdre Lynch has shown, there has long been a fierce struggle over whether to regard Austen as a popular or an elite classic. The Austen tourist may be seen as a particularly extreme exemplar of the Janeite, defined influentially by Lynch as ‘the necessary negative exemplar in a cultural order that...has called on us to love literature but not let our feelings get out of hand.’<sup>2</sup> She (because for more than a century the tourist has been conventionally and actually overwhelmingly female) remains stubbornly a threatening other to the scholar – especially, it might be said, to the woman scholar. The tourist is typically invested in the authorial body. It may be presented as simultaneously present and absent (as in a ghost, or a corpse), or as reincarnated in the body of the modern tourist occupying the same space, looking out of the window that Austen must have looked out of, for example, or playing the same music on the same piano – both experiences related by the blogger above. Tourism of this kind specialises, then, in eliciting ‘surreal’ experience. Scholarship, on the other hand, pretends to itself that it is invested in the text, in a verifiable and authorised object that nevertheless delivers a more virtuously virtual reality. Hence a sort of scholarly shying, very evident in Claudia Johnson’s brilliant essay on Jane Austen’s House where the things on display, mostly not quite authentically Austenesque enough, send her back to meditation on Austen’s suspicion of things in the exquisitely crafted novels.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is now evident that looking at Austen tourist sites and the Austen tourist can give the Austen scholar unparalleled access to what Lynch has described as ‘Austen’s presence in the collective mind’ and to ‘the myriad ways in which involvement with her has given individuals a template for emotional life.’<sup>4</sup> Thus, while Brian Southam demoted any consideration of the so-called ‘pilgrimage essay’ to a footnote in his monumental *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage* (1987), Felicity James has now ably fleshed out the story of early Austen tourism and expanded it to consider some modern tourist investment in Chawton, both in the Cottage and Chawton House itself, while Mike Crang has explored some of the recent manifestations of film tourism around Austen’s fiction.<sup>5</sup> Both are interested in the cultural uses to which Austen is being put, in particular the ways in which the invocation of Austen provides a ‘home’ for the tourist, a home typically coded feminine and English. This essay proposes to intervene in this conversation by setting the history of Austen tourism within a wider setting than that of the study of Austen’s cultural afterlives, within the history of the development and mutations of literary tourism and the exhibition of literary sites more generally.<sup>6</sup> It sets out to trace both continuities and changes in Austenian tourist sensibility across the last 150 years, and

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<sup>2</sup> Deirdre Shauna Lynch ed., ‘Introduction: Sharing with our Neighbors,’ *Janeites: Austen’s Disciples and Devotees* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 3-24, p. 13

<sup>3</sup> Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults and Cultures* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), pp. 153-79.

<sup>4</sup> Lynch (2000), p. 15

<sup>5</sup> Felicity James, ‘At Home with Jane: Placing Austen in Contemporary Culture’, in Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson eds., *Uses of Austen: Jane’s Afterlives* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.132-153; Mike Crang, ‘Placing Jane Austen: Displacing England,’ in Suzanne R. Pucci and James Thompson eds., *Jane Austen and Co.* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 111-32.

<sup>6</sup> For an extended discussion of the comparative history of literary tourism, see Nicola J. Watson, *The Literary Tourist: Readers and Places in Romantic and Victorian Britain* (Houndmills Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

to consider the implications for the current and future display of Chawton Cottage in particular.

The formation and fortunes of the literary terrain popularly known as ‘Jane Austen Country’ can be seen as both atypical and typical of the long history of fashioning and re-fashioning places from the 1780s onwards to exhibit already existent narratives about the relation between writer, text, reader, and locality. Although Austen scholarship tends to deal with the tourist phenomenon surrounding Austen as exceptional, it is in fact exceptional only in being of very late gestation and in its current booming success. Seen in broader context, Jane Austen proved peculiarly resistant to the development of literary tourism. Literary tourism to graves, settings and houses from the outset came into being much more readily around poets such as Gray, Cowper, Burns, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats, than around novelists, especially novelists of the contemporary. Narrating a poet’s oeuvre in relation to a physical place occupied by that poet supplied readers with a useful biographical unity to frame the poems; a visit to a poet’s house such as Wordsworth’s Dove Cottage typically amplified and integrated the poetry within a minutely realised world of domestic detail -- it effectively novelized it. Interest in poetic place was further encouraged by other factors: the romantic view of the poet initiated by Kant and others as a privileged conduit to the transcendent, the romantic sense of the poet as embodying a national landscape; romantic anxiety on the part of poets and their readers about the alienation of print culture and the development of mass readership for fiction in particular. By comparison, narrating a novelist in relation to place risks undoing a satisfactory narrative trajectory and disintegrating an already loved and minutely realised world. Individual fictions have on occasion produced tourist interest through a combination of topographical fidelity and romantic pastness, which encourages readers to try to access a lost world through an actual landscape – this is the desire that drove romantic tourists into searching out Rousseau’s Julie on the shores of Lake Geneva, and Victorian tourists into searching out Blackmore’s Lorna Doone in the valleys of Exmoor. Such tourism is marked by an investment in the characters of the novel in question. Branding a place to the novelist rather than to an individual novel has proved much harder to achieve. The novelist has a tendency to disappear behind the screen of their own fiction, crowded out by the rival glamour of his or her own characters. For the fiction-writer’s homes and haunts to become sites of pilgrimage, the author has to be provided with a strong story of his or her own to complement and reiterate the fiction. This may be derived from an autobiographical persona produced within the fiction and its para- and intertexts, a powerful biographical evocation of their life which preferably should be congruent with the fiction, and/or a real place in which the author lived and which coincides nearly and demonstrably with a famous fictional setting. The Brontë sisters’ home, Haworth Parsonage, has from early on been a conspicuous cultural and imaginative success because it conforms to all of these conditions, allowing readers to create in one physical space a composite quasi-biographical super-novel from the interlockings between the biography and first-person fictions of the Brontë siblings.

Jane Austen fulfils very few, if any, of these conditions. She does not develop a strongly foregrounded authorial persona in the manner of her contemporary Sir Walter Scott, who, as the anonymous ‘Author of Waverley’ inspired readerly curiosity in places associated with his life. The records of her life reveal that it was, for the most part, anti-novelistic – strikingly and inconveniently, and in marked

contrast to her own heroines, Austen never married. Her fiction is for the most part politely vague about place and almost entirely uninterested in landscape, as the *Edinburgh Magazine* noted approvingly in 1819: ‘The singular merit of her writings is, that we could conceive, without the slightest strain of imagination, any one of her fictions to be realized in any town or village in England...’<sup>7</sup> Her fiction was sharply contemporary and therefore cannot be co-opted very readily to romance the legacy of the national past. Given these conditions, the cultural work of making Austen the author frame and narrate her fictions, of making her fictions frame and narrate her, and of helping her fictions frame and narrate the reader, was slow to achieve. The Austen tourist trail was late in emerging, and when it did appear it was formed largely on typical, even generic, biographical models. Nevertheless, for nearly a hundred and fifty years tourists in increasing numbers have sought out, and found, ‘Jane Austen Country’, an ever-expanding terrain compounded of a mix of sites associated with the author, and sites associated with her fiction.

Places associated with Austen attracted very little tourist interest for some forty years after her death. Her gravestone in Winchester Cathedral famously makes no mention of her authorship, and it is not until the 1850s that Austen’s grave emerged as a place of literary interest, when Lady Richardson recorded a visit with her elderly mother Miss Elizabeth Fletcher: ‘we took a day at Winchester and visited the shrine of Jane Austen...we talked over the happy days of reading aloud the delightful novels of Jane Austen.’<sup>8</sup> In making this visit, however, Lady Richardson was humouring family remembrance; another family connection, ‘A.M. Waterston’ (Mrs Robert Waterston) visited in June 1856. This last visit, however, demonstrated the increasing transatlantic saleability of such a pilgrimage; she sold an account to the *Atlantic Monthly* of February 1863.<sup>9</sup> This invisibility gradually dissipated as Austen acquired a more substantial public biography from the late 1860s onwards. The publication of James Edward Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir* in 1870 (enlarged 1871), Caroline Austen’s *My Aunt Jane Austen* (1867) and her *Reminiscences* (1872), together expanded the information provided by Henry Austen’s original biographical preface to the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in 1817 and the ‘Memoir of Miss Austen’ that he had published subsequently in 1832. In turn, these were amplified by Lord Brabourne’s edition of Austen’s *Letters* in 1884. These family memoirs supplied a biographical skeleton and a topography, and letters supplied the first-person voice, the immediacy of autobiographical experience that had so far been lacking. To put it another way, Austen’s growing reputation as the author of a handful of classic novels was now being supplemented with a sense of ‘Jane’. Most pertinently, J.E. Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir of Jane Austen* (1870) contains two short evocations of tourists which would prove prophetic. The first was a story of an ignorant verger bewildered by tourist interest in Austen’s grave which rapidly became a commonplace of the Austen mythos and described a pleasant experience of superiority over the locals reiterated by many subsequent visitors.<sup>10</sup> By July 1870 *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* was publishing just such an account of a ‘pilgrimage’, beginning at the grave, and these would appear, based on real visits and often mildly fictionalised, in a variety of forms – periodical articles, but also

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<sup>7</sup> Cited Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 260.

<sup>8</sup> Cited Deirdre Le Faye (2004), p.275.

<sup>9</sup> Southam, p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> James Edward Austen-Leigh, *Memoir of Jane Austen*, (1870), p. 117.

children's fiction such as Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did Next*, and a range of guidebooks until the First World War.<sup>11</sup> By 1897, however, when the American travel-writer Elbert Hubbard was rewriting the story in *Little Journeys to the Homes of Famous Women* (1897) he was able to report improvement:

Not so long ago a visitor, on asking the verger to see her grave, was conducted thither, and the verger asked, 'Was she anybody in particular? So many folks ask where she is buried, you know!

But this is changed now, for when the verger took me to her grave and we stood by that plain black marble slab, he spoke intelligently of her life and work. And many visitors now go to the cathedral only because it is the last resting-place of Jane Austen...<sup>12</sup>

One reason for this change was that Austen-Leigh had devoted his profits from the *Memoir* to amplifying the reticence of the original gravestone, and moderating the ignorance of the verger, by supplying a supplementary narrative via a memorial brass which read 'Jane Austen/known to many by her/ writings, endeared to her family by the/varied charms of her/ Character, and ennobled/by Christian faith/and piety, was born/at Steventon in the/ county of Hants....' This amplification of the meaning of the gravestone had extended by 1898 to the possibility of raising funds for a memorial window in the Cathedral, which was duly installed in 1900.<sup>13</sup> It spilled over into Winchester as a matter of convention at around the same time: by 1909, Henry C. Shelley's *Literary Bypaths in Old England* was not only providing a photograph of the grave but one of 8 College St, the 'House in which Jane Austen died', which shows the presence of a memorial tablet inscribed 'In this house Jane Austen lived her last days and died July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1817.'<sup>14</sup>

If Austen-Leigh's story of the verger preceded and indeed motivated the marking of the grave and associated places for tourists, his second evocation of tourism, this time to Austen's home in the Hampshire village of Chawton, also precedes its development as a site of literary interest. Although apparently discouraging and dismissive, Austen-Leigh both identifies Chawton Cottage and recognises it as a place with potential for tourist interest if circumstances were altered (at the time of writing it was being used as a labourers' cottage):

The public generally take some interest in the residence of a popular writer... but I cannot recommend any admirer of Jane Austen to undertake a pilgrimage to this spot. The building indeed still stands, but divested of everything which gave it its character...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Southam, p. 150. For a fuller discussion of some of these, see James (2013) especially on Oscar Fay Adams and Josephine Tozier, pp. 136-7.

<sup>12</sup> Elbert Hubbard, *Little Journeys to the Homes of Famous Women* (New York, London: G.P.Putman's Sons, 1897), p. 354.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to *The Times* from the earl of Northbrook. For an extended discussion of the memorials and their installation in Winchester Cathedral, see Johnson (2012), pp. 38-44.

<sup>14</sup> An unidentified cutting in the Chawton scrapbook suggests it had been put up by 'a certain Sir Frank Watney'. Henry C. Shelley, *Literary Bypaths in Old England* (London: Grant Richards, 1909), pp. 383, 385; in 1959 this was replaced by a grey slate plaque.

<sup>15</sup> J. E. Austen, p. x.

Considering how well-established the genre of the writer's house and the recounted visit to the writer's house was by the end of the nineteenth century, it is striking how relatively little mention Chawton Cottage gets in the many late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century publications designed to cater to the real or virtual tourist with literary leanings. The energetic Hubbard, for example, made his way to Steventon, Austen's birthplace, rather than Chawton.<sup>16</sup> The Cottage seems to have come into imaginative visibility only with the publication of the *Letters* in 1884, which enabled visitors to project the imagined body of Austen within the building and its environs. Reviewing the *Letters*, the journalist T.E. Kebbel wrote at length about a supplementary visit he paid to Chawton: 'the dining-room and drawing-room are still nearly as they were; and we may people the former with the authoress and her little writing-desk, seated at a table by the window, without any effort of the imagination.'<sup>17</sup> He wanders in the garden, imagining (just as Lizzy and her friend would more than a century later) Austen walking there too 'as the Elliotts and the Musgroves, and the Eltons and the Bertrams grew beneath her hand.'<sup>18</sup> These strategies for imagining the apparitional author at work in her home were well-established, even hackneyed, by this date, as is the move by which Kebbel then coalesces real and fictional settings, arguing that a visit to Chawton gives access to the fiction as well as to Austen's life as a woman and as a writer:

...the scenes, the houses, and the classes of society which we find in her delightful stories are exactly those with which she was familiar at home; and it is impossible to walk through the village of Chawton without feeling that we are in the presence of old acquaintances to whom we were introduced in the pages of *Mansfield Park* or *Emma*. The cottage in the village, otherwise called the White House belonging to Sir Thomas Bertram, to which Mrs Norris retired on the death of her husband, the vicar, what can it be but the identical cottage belonging to the owner of the 'Great House' to which Miss Austen herself retired?<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Kebbel tellingly characterises Austen's fiction as a way into the past as well as an assertion of continuity with the past – both of which are sources of consolation. Although Kebbel notes that 'Chawton is untrodden of pilgrims', he predicts its future appeal as the spiritual home of Regency costume-drama:

while English society remains what it still is, with so much to remind us of what it once was, and while the manners of one generation melt so

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<sup>16</sup> This despite his prophetic paean to the idea of Austen as an escape-route from modernity into the rural England of the past.

Jane Austen lived a hundred years ago. But when you tramp that five miles from Overton, where the railroad station is, to Steventon, where she was born, it doesn't seem like it. Rural England doesn't change much. Great fleecy clouds roll lazily across the blue, overhead, and the hedgerows are full of twittering birds that you hear but seldom see; and the pastures contain mild-eyed cows that look at you with wide-open eyes over the stone walls, and in the towering elm trees that sway their branches in the breeze crows hold a noisy caucus. And it comes to you that the clouds and the blue sky and the hedgerows and the birds and the cows and the crows are all just as Jane Austen knew them... p. 330.

<sup>17</sup> T.E.Kebbel, 'Jane Austen at Home', *Fortnightly Review* (Feb. 1885), vol 4, pp.262-270, p.265. For a more detailed reading of Kebbel, see James (20120, p. 135-6.

<sup>18</sup> Kebbel, p.266.

<sup>19</sup> Kebbel, p. 264.

imperceptibly into those of another that the continuity hardly seems broken, so long will the interest in Jane Austen continue to strengthen and expand...<sup>20</sup>

Subsequent evocations of places associated with Austen would reassert just this uneasy consciousness of change managed by an assertion of consolatory continuity. F. W. Bockett's chapter in his little book, *Some Literary Landmarks for Pilgrims on Wheels* (1901), for example, insists that although the house is not what it was, the view and the village are: 'from her window, as she sat writing, she would see these same thatched cottages, the gently rising wood-crowned hill opposite, with its slopes covered with brilliant green grass, the row of fine old lime-trees facing the front door...'<sup>21</sup>

The piece of travel-writing by far the most important to the invention of Chawton Cottage as the centre-piece of 'Austen-land' was Constance Hill's *Jane Austen, Her Homes and Her Friends* (1902). It is contemporary with the six-volume Hampshire edition of 1902, which included for each novel, as Kathryn Sutherland puts it, a 'reality-to-fiction conversion index in the form of a map of the actual area in which the plot was set plus a plan of the imaginary neighbourhood', with the 'real' country and town on the front end-papers and the environment of the characters on the back.<sup>22</sup> Both this edition and Hill's volume are thoroughly conventional for their time, though nicely achieved; the edition reiterates editorial and illustrative practices associated with Scott, Blackmore and Hardy, amongst others, and Hill's book develops an aesthetic of spatialised biography inaugurated by Oliver Howitt's influential travelogue-cum-biographical enterprise *Homes and Haunts of the Most Celebrated English Poets* (1848).

Hill's book describes a tour taken in the company of her sister with the object of visiting all the locations they can find that are associated with Austen. It thus locates and records places associated with Austen; but it also models a way of visiting and enjoying them for future tourists. This involves drawing together and interlocking a personal experience of place, such loco-description as can be gleaned from Austen's letters, biographical information, details from the novels themselves, and information poached from other literary contemporaries. It also, importantly, describes the exchange of enthusiasm for Austen's life, works, and places as supporting and enhancing a sisterly relationship that echoes that of Jane and Cassandra. One typical chapter opens with an account of Hill's drive to Austen's birthplace at Steventon, enlivens it with information about Austen's parents' move there derived from Austen-Leigh's *Memoir*, tells of identifying the site of the old parsonage through quizzing the locals, and details other pleasures including checking what the locals say against the testimony of the *Letters*, sketching the site, picturing the now vanished house with the help of 'two old pencil views', noticing the stumps of elms described in Austen's letters, remembering the description of the shrubbery of Cleveland in *Sense and Sensibility* and wondering whether this was the original, and engaging in fanciful reanimation of 'two girlish forms...Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra.'<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kebbel, p. 270.

<sup>21</sup> Kebbel, p. 150.

<sup>22</sup> Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> Constance Hill, *Jane Austen. Her Homes and Her Friends* (London and New York: John Lane, 1902), p.14.



The following chapter uses information about Mary Russell Mitford's roughly contemporaneous life just down the road and her evocation of it in *Our Village*, details drawn from Gilbert White's diaries at neighbouring Selbourne, and quotation from Anna Lefroy's manuscript memoir to give more substance to an account of Jane Austen's daily life. To peep 'in through the window of the parsonage', Hill plunders both the description of Uppercross in *Persuasion* and Austen's favourite poet Cowper's description of his room at Olney in the 1780s in his lengthy poem, *The Task*. On reaching Chawton Cottage, Hill engages in similar imaginings to reanimate it as Austen's home despite its contemporary function as a working-man's club.

Hill's efforts to imagine Chawton Cottage at the heart of what she called 'Austenland' culminated in a campaign to place a commemorative marker on the building. In 1917, she and her sister were the moving spirits in the funding and design of a plaque on Chawton Cottage to mark the centenary of Austen's death. The plaque, and the ceremony surrounding it, sealed Austen's importance as evoking and guaranteeing the continuities of English life in the face of historical change. The speeches given at the unveiling ceremony set up a series of interconnected meanings for the cottage as a site of continuity, a place of refuge and source of consolation in wartime, as the classic literary ground of England connecting Mary Russell Mitford, Jane Austen and Gilbert White, and as a site that connected the Anglophone cultures and allies Australia, North America, and England.<sup>24</sup> As one speaker put it:

It is perhaps a remarkable thing that., in these days of war, we can turn aside, even for a day, from the sterner demands of the moment to come together to pay this homage to the genius of Jane Austen, and may we not take from this thought a new hope of the civilisation that we are fighting together to save?<sup>25</sup>

Nor was this impulse to mark Austenian places as immune to the changes being brought about by the War confined to Chawton village; in Southampton, too, where Austen had been schooled for a number of years, a further memorial was erected. It read 'Jane Austen/Author of/Pride and Prejudice/Emma, Persuasion etc...../Resided in Southampton/from 1806 to 1809/(sometime in Castle Square)/Erected by the/members and Friends/of the/Southampton Literary/and Philosophical Society/21 Dec 1917.'

As a celebration of continuity and endurance in the face of war, the house saw greater national visibility, and greater visitor numbers,<sup>26</sup> but it would take World War II finally to elevate Chawton to a position where it would exemplify everything that yet another generation of now dead young men had been fighting for. In 1948, T.E.Carpenter, a retired solicitor from London, bought the house from the ruined estate, as the plaque that he subsequently erected states, in memory of his young son killed in action. Thanks to two world wars, seen imaginatively in relation to their

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<sup>24</sup> For a path-breaking discussion of Janeism in inter-war England, see Deirdre Shauna Lynch, 'At Home with Jane Austen' in Deirdre Lynch and William B. Warner eds., *Cultural Institutions of the Novel* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 159-192. More recently on wartime Austen, see Johnson (2012), pp.99-152.

<sup>25</sup> Chawton scrapbook, p.13

<sup>26</sup> In 1926, the tenant wrote to *The Times* complaining that 'People who come to see over this house never realise the time and inconvenience to always have people seeing over the house...' and noted wearily that on one day she opened the door to 'a party of two ladies, another of four gentlemen, and yet another comprising five grown-ups and six children.' Reprinted *Hampshire Observer*, 16 Jan 1926.

Napoleonic precursors, Austen's home had acquired public value as an emblem of the home front.

So far, I have been describing the imaginative acts of travel-writing and subsequent material marking that formed a necessary pre-history to the setting up of the house as a writer's house museum. Taken together, they had described the house and its Hampshire setting both as private homeliness (a peaceful all-female domestic retirement) and national homeliness (a timeless English rural idyll, far from the stresses of the international). But to realise this poem to enduring homeliness, the house needed to revert to the early 1800s, as in Hill's evocation. To do this, it needed objects associated with Austen's life and times to display. Archived at Chawton Cottage, Carpenter's correspondence in the early years details his vigorous programme of acquisition by purchase, donation, and loan of a miscellany of things: a portrait, letters, manuscripts, editions, furniture, and domestic items -- 'the back of a looking-glass said originally to have been in Jane Austen's house', a dinner service that Austen chose and mentioned in her letters, a donkey-cart known as 'Jane's cart', locks of hair, kitchen flag-stones, Mrs Austen's patchwork quilt. Then again, the house needed to be made more of Jane Austen's house through the lengthy and expensive business of evicting the sitting tenants so that the parlour and bedroom could eventually be shown. And Chawton village needed to be re-imagined as Jane Austen's village and the centre of 'Austen-land': thus Carpenter organised the repair of the Austen graves in the churchyard and explored the possibility of erecting a further monument there. Nor did he confine his energies to Chawton, but extended them to developing its hinterland, canvassing the possibility of evicting the font from Steventon Church in favour of an older one contemporary with Austen, and enquiring of Winchester College whether it might be possible to buy the house in which Austen died (it wasn't). And finally, Chawton had to be made to perform itself to itself and others as 'Austen-land'; the opening of the museum was celebrated by speeches at the Village Hall, a ceremonial walk to the cottage; tours around the cottage to see the drawing-room; tours of Chawton House and park; opportunities to view the Austen and Knight tombs in Chawton church, to admire the borders in Chawton Rectory Garden, and to drink tea in the village hall. Variations on this programme were still evident in the 150<sup>th</sup> local celebrations of 1967, and the bicentenary of 1975. Indeed, this way of celebrating village life under the aegis of Austen is still alive and well; in summer 2011 the Festival held in Alton and Chawton offered 'A week of events... including Singing, Drama, Music, Open House Days, Talks, Film, Unusual Plants Fair, Regency Day and Victorian Cricket.'<sup>27</sup>

Thus, through a combination of acts of writing and acts of collection, Chawton Cottage came to act as a repository of 'memories and memorials' -- primarily of an almost lost but just retrievable feminine Englishness. The popular post-war Austen embodied in Chawton served as therapeutic and rehabilitative, supplying a peacefully trivial domesticated femininity which shored up sadly-battered masculine self-definition and national identity. The cottage has undergone redisplay and amplification since that first opening in 1948, most recently just last year, but the contours of Constance Hill's first act of imagination -- a peacefully feminine retreat set in the heart of an eternally English 'Jane Austen Country' -- still remain visible in contemporary souvenir postcards and in modern bloggers' enthusiasm such as that

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<sup>27</sup> [www.janeaustenregencyweek.co.uk/jarw\\_intro/html](http://www.janeaustenregencyweek.co.uk/jarw_intro/html) last accessed 31 June 2011.

cited above by Lizzi and her friend. This ‘Englishness’ was from very early on an expression of transatlantic fantasy, and has if anything become more so, if the prevalence of blogs by foreign female travellers is anything to go by.

So much then, for the imaginative project of locating ‘Jane’ in Hampshire, despite the fact that, as Herbert Moutray Read commented in the early 1900s, ‘With all her devotion to Hampshire Jane was provokingly silent about it.’<sup>28</sup> The pursuit of the author would lead to the mapping of other locations associated with her life – in particular, the houses of family and friends that she visited, and her sojourns in Bath and Lyme Regis. But this pursuit of the author has been amplified by the seeking-out of fictional settings and characters. Until very recently, this has been a rather frustrating endeavour. Early in the twentieth century, for example, Brian Southam cites one writer noting the contemporary (and thoroughly conventional) interest in guessing the identity of the fictional places in the novels, and the fruitlessness of seeking most of Austen’s locations.<sup>29</sup> Tourists have largely sought out the locations described in *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* and have used them to flesh out what biographical detail is available on Austen’s own visit to Lyme Regis and residence in Bath. These locations have proved possible to construct as literary tourist trails because they allow readers simultaneously to access the fictional and the biographical in the way that Hill’s travel-narrative models.

Lyme has been associated with the episode in Austen’s last complete novel *Persuasion* when a tourist trip ends in accident and disaster, ever since Tennyson insisted at mid-century on seeing the very place on the Cobb where Louisa Musgrove ‘fell down, and was taken up senseless’. But Lyme is also usefully imbued with the aura of Austen’s two visits there. Hence the modern tourist to Lyme follows a literary trail partly composed on the basis of biography, viewing places in which Austen may have stayed, or in which she probably stayed.<sup>30</sup> This biographical trace is memorialised by a bust of Austen put up in the early 1970s and an accompanying plaque which notes that Austen ‘lodged in the house called/ ‘Wings’/ which stood on this site...’<sup>31</sup> But the trail also encompasses the fictive, including the hotel which may have been the original for the inn in which Anne and her companions stay, the house which may have been the original for Captain Harville’s house; places opposite what may have been the original for Harville’s house;<sup>32</sup> the cottages called Benwick and Harville Cottages which are pretty enough and old enough to have been the cottages in which Captain Benwick and Captain Harville lived, but weren’t; and of course the Cobb itself, and the steps Louisa ‘probably’ fell down. The two strands combine in the nicely judged inscription on a plaque on Pyne House: ‘This is the most likely/Lodging of Jane Austen, whose/Visits to Lyme in 1803 and 1804/Gave birth to her novel ‘Persuasion’.’

Similarly, in Bath, the Austen tourist has followed in the footsteps of both Austen and two of her heroines, Catherine Morland and Anne Elliott. The historian Thomas Babington Macaulay on his visit ‘to all the spots made classical by Miss Austen’

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<sup>28</sup> D. Herbert Moutray Read, *Highways and Byways in Hampshire* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1908), p.184.

<sup>29</sup> Southam, 98.

<sup>30</sup> Pyne House, complete with plaque in which she may have stayed, the hotel in which ditto.

<sup>31</sup> For a photograph of this bust and plaque in 1971, see Johnson, p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> Marked by the ‘Wings’ plaque and bust.

visited Bath in 1832.<sup>33</sup> His tour was almost certainly short and sweet by comparison to what is now on offer; [www.janeaustentour.com](http://www.janeaustentour.com) provides ‘a map of over 50 places in Bath relating to Jane Austen’s life there and the setting of her Bath novels.’<sup>34</sup> As for Macaulay, the biographical aspect indicated by the early twentieth-century plaque that marks the Austens’ accommodation at 4 Sydney Place is amplified nowadays by the aid of fiction in the ‘Jane Austen Walking Tours’, and the MP3 walking tour which comes complete with a tour route map and advertises itself as providing located podcasts to users ‘chapter by chapter’. A souvenir postcard, ‘Jane Austen in Bath’, combines biographical information about where the Austens stayed and lived, where the Austen parents were married, and where Mr Austen died and was buried, with illustration of the various buildings mentioned in, and extensive quotation from both *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. The post-card mendaciously and self-interestedly remarks that ‘In them the city comes alive as the most real of all the settings of her books. The many streets and buildings mentioned still exist, while the city’s unique character dominates almost every scene.’

This interest in the settings of Austen’s novels has, however, been vastly amplified over the last twenty years by the intervention of films shot ‘on location’. Film’s necessary specificities have transformed Austen’s deliberate generalisation of place, and, through the medium of new genres of travel-writing inspired by seeking out these locations, her fictional places have become available for real to the tourist. There is, for example, the bestselling guidebook, *The Jane Austen TV and Film Location Guide*, which features the places ‘where Jane Austen’s books have been brought to life.’ The online blurb notes that

In taking Jane Austen’s novels from the page to the screen, the settings and locations add to the characterisation of her stories and become stars in their own right. It is intended to act as a guide to a behind the scenes glimpse into some of England’s delightful houses, villages and towns on a journey through the highlights of Jane Austen’s novels and the beautiful English countryside.<sup>35</sup>

A ‘literary screen trail’ provided on-line enables tourists to ‘make your future journey across the UK even more enjoyable by being able to recognise and recount the famous scenes along the way’ ([www.film-locations.co.uk/pages/film-britain.php](http://www.film-locations.co.uk/pages/film-britain.php)), allowing browsers to flick between quotations from the fiction, clips from films, and photographs of the houses in question. A representative tour-guide itinerary promoted by [uniquebritishtours](http://uniquebritishtours.co.uk):

Enjoy visits to Bath, Berry Pomeroy, Saltram House, Lyme Regis, Evershot, Mompesson House, Salisbury, Wilton House, Montacute House, Lacock, Castle Combe, Steventon, Sandling, Canterbury, Godmersham Park, Chilham, Goodnestone, Wingham, Wickhambreaux, Chawton, Winchester, Groombridge plus many more secret locations. We also take a relaxing ‘Picnic on Box Hill’.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Letter, 13 June 1832, cited Brian C. Southam: *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage, vol 2 1870-1940* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> Last accessed 11 February 2013.

<sup>35</sup> [www.janeaustengiftshop.co.uk](http://www.janeaustengiftshop.co.uk) (last accessed 11 February 2013).

<sup>36</sup> [www.uniquebritishtours.co.uk](http://www.uniquebritishtours.co.uk) (last accessed 31 June 2011)

Now where once ‘Pemberley’ was any house that might have been owned by a rich man of taste, it has now been made into Chatsworth House in Derbyshire and may be viewed for a small fee by any latter-day Elizabeth Bennet, who may spot the bust of Matthew McFadyen in the sculpture gallery. Or she might stand and wear out the turf to the reputed despair of the head gardener in the exact spot that the screen Elizabeth did when she saw Colin Firth as Darcy rise wet-shirted from the lake at Lyme Park. In this fashion Austen’s locations have not only been realised but multiplied and duplicated, producing a richer, denser, and more delightfully ambiguous tourist experience. The pleasure of measuring the real against the fictive location has been amplified by the pleasure of measuring the real location against it as it appears in different films, and the oddity of this as an experience has been thematised in the dissonance between locations that are ‘real’ in the sense that Austen may have had them in mind, and locations that are ‘real’ in the sense that film directors have specified them to Austen’s scenes.<sup>37</sup> Thus the Lyme Regis tourist trail I described above also takes in the cottages that starred as Benwick and Harville’s cottages, and the steps down which the actress playing Louisa Musgrove fell – none of which are places that Austen had in mind. The amplification and multiplication of Austen sites produced by the proliferation of film and television adaptations is undeniable. A glance at [www.pemberley.com/janeinfor/ppjalmap.html](http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfor/ppjalmap.html) might make one feel that nowadays there might be rather too many Austen locations for a tourist to get round comfortably.

If Hill’s adventure with her sister seems at first blush to have remarkable continuities with the cosily enthusiastic adventure of the two young women in 2011 with whom I began, perhaps most especially in the sense of Austen as part of an affective transaction between women, the entirely representative account of a trip made by a young Swedish woman who calls herself ‘Aurora’ in September 2010 filed on a blog entitled ‘The Secret Dream World of a Jane Austen Fan’, offers a chance to calibrate not continuities but changes. Aurora has travelled to attend the annual Bath Jane Austen Festival, dedicated to staging Bath as Austen-land. She is well-versed in Austen’s Bath novels and in Austen’s own life in Bath, as her comment on arriving at the Assembly Rooms makes clear:

Then the doors were opened to let us in. It was a special feeling to be arriving there for a ball, seeing as it is a place where so many balls have been held before, a place which Jane and her characters would have known.

But her sight-seeing priorities are driven by an investment in the fiction as mediated by the film adaptations rather than by the interest in Austen’s life and times that characterises Hill’s account. To be more specific, she is interested in the experience of living in the fictions through repopulating the film location and narrative with her own body. Aurora records the ball that she attends in the Assembly rooms on camera in terms of similar stills of the same rooms taken from the BBC version of

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<sup>37</sup> For remarks by a blogger, Kaliopi Pappas, which bear witness to the way that film tourism sets up what Mike Crang describes as ‘complexities of presence and absence, in both temporal and spatial terms, of what is standing for what’, see Crang, p. 125.

*Persuasion*.<sup>38</sup> In the same way, she records at length her experience of watching *Persuasion* while sitting in one of the rooms in which it was shot:

...Now so many of the places you see in it are familiar to me personally. You have the Pump Room, the Assembly Rooms, various other places round Bath, Lyme Regis etc. And then there came the part with the Eliot's house in Bath...*The house we were in!* How excited were we not when we saw the first scene where they are all sitting eating in their dining room! That room was so close by, just one floor beneath us and we had just a short, short while before been shown that very room by the owner of the house (a very nice, gentleman-like man)! The hallway, the stairs; the same we had just walked up ourselves! And *then*; then there was a scene shot in the drawing room, *the very same room we were at that exact moment sitting in!!!!* It was surreal! To see that room on the television screen and then turn your head and look around the room we were in, and see that it was the same place!...It was SO cool!!!

This 'surreal' physical experience of 'being in the same place' as the fictional also informs the two day-trips she took out of Bath. The first was to Lacock, which featured both as Meryton in the BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* and Highbury in the BBC *Emma*. Here Aurora spent her time trying to identify buildings and imagining away the parked cars so as to more readily 'picture the Bennet girls walking along the street, looking into shop windows.' The other day-trip was to Lyme where she sampled the Literary Lyme tour. Here she arranged to have herself photographed as Louisa Musgrove after she has fallen unconscious on the stones of the Cobb. As this flight of fancy suggests, the walk on the Cobb was a powerful experience: she comments that

Being something which has such an important part in the story of *Persuasion* it almost felt like walking on holy ground as we stepped out onto it (ok, ok, I *am* exaggerating...! We were walking where Jane *and* her characters have walked!

Despite this interest in walking where 'Jane' had walked, in walking on 'holy' or classic ground, Aurora does not choose to go to Winchester, Steventon, or Chawton. Her sight-seeing, unlike her nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century precursors, is not primarily biographical. She is part of a generation who can now visit the 'real' locations of the novels, stepping into the place of a favourite character, recording themselves doing so in photographs and video, and releasing this new Austen adaptation through the web. By comparison to 'being' Austen's characters, pursuing Austen herself is altogether less interesting, indeed, risks feeling less 'authentic'. Aurora reports a disappointing end to her trip to Lyme:

After we had finished that we had about one hour left...I...chose to go to this small museum they had there (the Museum of Lyme Regis or something like that). They had mostly fossil things, since that is what Lyme is most famous for to 'normal' people. But they also had this little section on Jane Austen...It wasn't *that* exciting, however, they had some things there that *might* have

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<sup>38</sup> Compare the very similar statements by Lauryl Lane on her visit to the Bath Assembly Rooms, cited by Crang, p. 119.

belonged to the Austens, and a few things that they knew had. But it wasn't very much.

Aurora's blog, taken together with the web-postings of many other less articulate Austenian tourists, suggests that the exhibition of Austen through a life adumbrated by domestic objects is fast being overtaken by a different way of exhibiting Austen, by embodying her characters in the tourist's own person. Nor is she unusual. Jane Austen Fan Trips, for example, promise, enticingly, a trip to the 'timeless world of Jane Austen' where 'you will celebrate one of the most beloved authors of all time and experience life like the characters in your favourite novels.'<sup>39</sup> It is possible to speculate that here a hundred and fifty years of the ideological work of interleaving Austen's life and fiction and mapping them onto Hampshire locations is caught in the very act of vanishing. This has practical consequences, of course, for the curation of Chawton cottage and 'Jane Austen Country' more generally. It is also a generalisable problem for many writers' houses in the face of the erasure of the novelist by their own fictional characters. Is it possible, is it even desirable, in the face of the hyper-realisation of film, to maintain older ways for readers to animate the author's acts of writing and their transactions both with the author and with other readers around imagining those acts of writing? Can the aesthetic that Constance Hill stated in its most elaborate form in 1902 survive alongside the new tourist aesthetics produced by film?

The problem is neatly posed, and perhaps solved by, a publicity still for the 2005 film of *Pride and Prejudice*. Keira Knightley here poses as Elizabeth Bennett, who is depicted seated reading. Austen's endorsement of novel-reading as a practice that convenes a community of readers is quoted alongside on the poster, seeming thereby to take on the voice of Elizabeth Bennett; the statement is 'signed' as it were, by an (entirely inauthentic) silhouette of Austen herself. Thus film and performance here underwrite acts of reading and writing. Chawton Cottage itself has taken up, or been forced to conduct a similar manoeuvre in its recent redisplay. If 'Aurora' should come again to the Bath Festival, she might find it worth her while to visit the recently re-displayed Cottage. The display of the Cottage is still heavily invested in the all-female domestic idyll described by Constance Hill and consumed by generations of women visitors ever since – here still, for example, are the famous quilt, the shawl embroidered by Jane, the locks of hair, the topaz crosses, the donkey-cart, the emphasis on family portraits, and the little writing-table. But now, every room is animated in addition not by the imagined figures of Jane or her sister, mother, or friend, but with more familiar and substantial shapes, the costumes worn by Austen's heroines in various film adaptations. The 'realness' of the fiction, in the shape of film costumes, has been co-opted to realise the 'realness' of the place of the act of writing. As the curator of Chawton Cottage said to me on my last visit, nowadays visitors – like 'Aurora' -- come in search not so much, or not only, of Jane Austen, but to be Elizabeth Bennett. As one blog puts it: 'This was where Austen lived and wrote, where she got her 'material'. The ground was soggy, and I imagined myself as Lizzie Bennett, striding across to Netherfield to visit my ailing sister, Jane, getting mud on my petticoats as I went!'<sup>40</sup> It suggests that Austen is being made over ever more rapidly in the guise of her own characters. The effect is amplified by two recent

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.fantrips.travel/janeaustenfandtrips/> (last accessed 11 February 2013)

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.benisonanneoreilly.com/blog/item/my-jane-austen-pilgrimage> (last accessed 11 February 2013)

filmic exercises in romantic biography, *Becoming Jane* and *Miss Austen Regrets* which position Austen in the Cottage, not as author but as heroine.<sup>41</sup>

It is, however, a temptation probably to be resisted to overstate the change in literary tourist sensibility produced by film. There remain strong continuities. There is the sense of female conspiracy and intensity which so often pervades these accounts from Constance Hill onwards and which is on display at the café over the road from the Cottage, ‘Cassandra’s Cup’. There is an insistence upon what these bloggers often call the ‘surreal’, but which literary critics would be more inclined to identify as the uncanny, an experience of a present physical environment which emphasises the absence of the author’s body, even while it delineates it. There is the effort to install oneself within an Austenian reality, whether as Austen herself, or one of her characters. There remains the sense that in Jane Austen Country, and especially in Chawton, home is shown and can be experienced, home in the specific sense of a lost idyll of feminine housekeeping, and home in the expanded sense of an English national essence, albeit preserved nowadays, it seems, mostly for emphatically foreign consumption.

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<sup>41</sup> See James, p. 142, for a sense of the importance of the Cottage to this formulation of Austen.