

Sanditon and “my Aunt”: Jane Austen and the National Debt

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“Chain Pier, Brighton” (1827), John Constable’s great six-footer in the Tate Gallery, London, and Jane Austen’s *Sanditon* (1817) share a common economic unease. Brighton rises in a diadem-like crescent on the left in Constable’s painting. In the foreground to the left, we see a fisherman mending nets, a beached boat, a glimpse of bathing machines, and on the beach a few tourists aimlessly walking about. In the sea on the right, a fishing boat makes its way towards the shore, a pleasure boat leans before the wind, and in the middle distance, Brighton’s new chain pier thrusts out into the Channel, linking the city to the sea, and leading the eye towards a great sea-going ship at anchor in the distance on the far right. Not only a picture of “the breakers and the sky,” as Constable claimed, “Chain Pier, Brighton” is also a picture of a modern economy: workers, tourists, a thriving town with a boastful symbol of modernity, its new chain pier, and the Empire itself glimpsed in the sea-going vessel at the far right of the pier. Charlotte Heywood sees a similar mix of nature and a modern

economy in Jane Austen's *Sanditon*, "standing at her ample Venetian window, and looking over the miscellaneous foreground of unfinished buildings, waving linen, and tops of houses, to the sea, dancing and sparkling in sunshine and freshness" (*MW* 384). Unexceptional as each view pretends to be, Constable's "Chain Pier, Brighton" and Austen's *Sanditon* each presents startlingly different scales of value in the same frame—sky and sea and a modern economy held together in a fragile and profoundly ambiguous relationship. What if a storm should brew up out there? That is the obvious question, and implicit in both views.

The six-week period in which Jane Austen was at work on *Sanditon* reveals an almost unimaginable gathering of personal and economic stress in the author's life. Burdened with devastating fatigue and fevers, she faced, in addition to her bad health, a series of financial crises within the larger Austen family that threatened the very roof over her head. *Sanditon* was begun, in fact, as an attempt to fend off a financial collapse that almost certainly faced her sister, her mother, and herself.

First, there was a serious lawsuit threatening her rich brother Edward with the loss of two-thirds of his estate. Next, there was the wreck of her sailor brother Charles's ship, the *Phoenix*, in February of 1816, in a storm off Smyrna. But, worst of all, there was the collapse of her brother Henry's bank on March 15th of 1816.¹ Before the bankruptcy, the three Austen women had managed to piece together a modest competence by pooling their incomes in the following form: Mrs. Austen had £210 a-year in dividends, Cassandra had around £35 yearly from a legacy, and Jane had the promising, but highly uncertain sums she could produce from her novels.² The remainder of their income came to them as individual contributions from the brothers: £50 a-year, each, from Frank, Henry, and James, and £100 a-year from Edward, bringing their total income to about £450 a-year, the very modest income, less £50, whose "delights" are so gloatingly enumerated by Fanny Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*. Although none of the three women themselves lost any great amount of money in the failure of Henry's bank, the bankruptcy caused the yearly contributions to their income of two of the brothers (Henry and Frank) to come to an abrupt halt, and the contributions of the other two (James and Edward) to waver as well.³ In addition, Edward's £100 yearly contribution was under double threat—first, because of the huge £20,000 loss that he had suffered in Henry's failure, but also, potentially, through the lawsuit against his estate that was still hanging in the balance. Not only did it seem likely that Edward's yearly contribution might come to an end,

but, if the suit went badly, there was the strong possibility that Chawton Cottage itself would be lost.⁴ The seriousness of the financial crisis for the three Austen women can be glimpsed in a rough 1990s equivalency calculation in dollars, multiplying the Austenian pound by a factor of 100. In this view, the women can be seen as threatened with a drop in their shared income from an already modest \$45,000 a-year to a near poverty-line income of around \$21,000 a-year.

The entire extended Austen family—with the exception of one vocal and significant member—weathered the financial storm of Henry's bankruptcy with courage and an amazing spirit of forgiveness. In her old age Caroline Austen, James's daughter, remembered the "spirit of forbearance and generosity" that the brothers had shown towards Henry.⁵ Their wealthy uncle, Mr. Leigh-Perrot, who also suffered a major loss of £10,000 in the collapse, had shown the same remarkable spirit. Not so Mrs. Leigh-Perrot, always referred to by Jane Austen as "my Aunt." Her angry, accusing voice was to be heard for years to come. In a surviving letter to Jane Austen's eldest brother, James Austen, four years after Henry's disastrous failure, she refers with startling hypocrisy to "sparing" Henry's feelings in some business matter, "(if he does feel)," she adds, "for more than he has occasioned us to lose by his imprudence."⁶

This refusal of Mrs. Leigh-Perrot to rally to the support of Jane Austen's favorite brother would have been felt by Austen, I suspect, as a bitter addition to an already dreadful situation. The Austen women's relationships with the Leigh-Perrots, particularly with Mrs. Leigh-Perrot, had been fraught with anxiety and suppressed resentment for many years. The financially hardpressed Mrs. Austen and her daughters had been engaged in a carefully choreographed waiting game in the hope that Mr. Leigh-Perrot, Mrs. Austen's brother, would help them through their obvious financial straits. "A Legacy is our sovereign good," Jane once wrote Cassandra, only half jokingly (*L* 133). Every visit to or from the Leigh-Perrots, every gift, given or received, is weighed implicitly in this light. After the move to Gay Street, Jane finds herself weary with people, but, as she writes Cassandra, she is careful not to offend the Leigh-Perrots: "My Uncle & Aunt drank tea with us last night, & in spite of my resolution to the contrary, I could not help putting forward to invite them again this Evening. I thought it was of the first consequence to avoid anything that might seem a slight to them. I shall be glad when it is over . . ." (*L* 106). When Mrs. Leigh-Perrot writes the Austen women that Mr. Leigh-Perrot is to present the eldest brother James with an additional £100 a year to his income, Jane undercuts the obligatory tone of

family rejoicing to remark *sotto voce* to Cassandra, "My Expectations for my Mother do not rise with this Event."⁷ The women's long wait for help collapsed with the news that Mr. Leigh-Perrot had left nothing at all in his Will to Mrs. Austen, but everything to Mrs. Leigh-Perrot. Jane Austen's pathetic cry of agony needs no repetition here. The Will confirmed a miserable prospect for Mrs. Austen and her daughters—that their future financial survival was now placed inescapably at the mercy of the capricious and tight-fisted Mrs. Leigh-Perrot. Austen had ceased work on *Sanditon* ten days before the blow fell, but her opinion of Mrs. Leigh-Perrot's character—and power—had been long formed through years of disappointed expectations.

Mrs. Leigh-Perrot is not hard to find in *Sanditon*. She is very much the Lady Denham, "great lady" sort, who, like Lady Denham, "talked & talked only of her own concerns" (*MW* 399), and in whom "now & then, a Littleness will appear" (*MW* 376).⁸ Jane writes Cassandra, in 1808, that even Mrs. Austen had been shocked by a recent letter from Mrs. Leigh-Perrot, just looking "for Inconvenience & Evil": "In spite of all my Mother's long & intimate knowledge of the Writer, she was not up to the expectation of such a Letter as this; the discontentedness of it shocked & surprised her—but *I* see nothing in it out of Nature—tho' a sad nature" (*L* 154). Likewise, Lady Denham, who "knew the value of money," has nothing on Mrs. Leigh-Perrot for tight-fistedness: "My Aunt is in a great hurry to pay me for my Cap, but cannot find in her heart to give me good money," Austen writes Cassandra (*L* 103). Instead, she fobs off the debt onto her husband, who will be pleased to get a ticket for Jane to the Grand Sydney-Garden Breakfast if she wishes to go. Austen is fully aware of the implications of the feint: "Such an offer I shall of course decline; & all the service she will render me therefore, is to put it out of my power to go at all, whatever may occur to make it desirable." Charlotte Heywood's verdict on Lady Denham's meanness is less muted, but hardly more final than Austen's on her aunt: "She is thoroughly mean. I had not expected anything so bad . . . But she is very, very mean.—I can see no Good in her . . ." (*MW* 402). As for Lady Denham's capricious generosity, Mrs. Leigh-Perrot is again first in the race, though Jane Austen could only have known this through a thorough penetration of her aunt's character. In 1818, Mrs. Leigh-Perrot withdrew the £100 a year grant to James Austen, ten years after the initial gift, when she became agitated by a suspicion that James had more income than she had previously thought. She pled "poverty" as the reason for the removal of the stipend, the losses from Henry's bank still rankling. Lady Denham speaks for Mrs.

Leigh-Perrot in this respect: "I am not the Woman to help any body blindfold," she tells Charlotte Heywood (*MW* 399). When James Austen informed his son, James Edward, then a student at Oxford, about this crisis in the family budget, James Edward comforted his father with the same indignant spirit Charlotte Heywood displayed at Lady Denham's "meanness": "I am very sorry and certainly surprised at this last motion of Mrs. L. Perrot, but I have long thought too meanly of her, to be much astonished at any fresh want of feeling or hypocrisy."⁹ The readiness of the invective has the ring of family tradition.

Jane Austen's brother Henry figures in *Sanditon* in two separate guises: first, as Mr. Parker, Lady Denham's co-investor in the resort, and, second, as Sydney Parker, Mr. Parker's handsome, dashing young brother from London.¹⁰ Mr. Parker, the investor, writes Austen, was, "of a sanguine turn of mind, with more Imagination than Judgement" (*MW* 372). "If I may so express myself," she writes of Henry, "his Mind is not a Mind for affliction. He is too Busy, too active, too sanguine" (*L* 215). As for Mr. Parker's enthusiasm for Sanditon, "He could talk of it for ever" (163), Henry's nature draws the same terms as she compares a young nephew to him: "George's enquiries were endless," Austen writes, "and his eagerness in everything reminds me often of his Uncle Henry" (*L* 152 [Austen's emphasis]). And, finally, like Mr. Parker, Henry Austen was famously resilient. His niece Caroline described his spirits after the bankruptcy: "He seemed to have renewed his youth, *if* indeed he could be said ever to have lost it, in the prospect before him. A fresh life was in view—he was eager for work—eager for pupils—was sure very good ones would offer—and to hear him discourse you would have supposed he knew of no employment so pleasant and honourable, as the care and tuition of troublesome young men."¹¹ In the same spirit of hope and comfort, Mr. Parker consoles his wife after their carriage accident at Willingden: "It cd. not have happened, you know, in a better place,—Good out of Evil—. The very thing perhaps to be wished for" (*MW* 364). In Henry's second incarnation as Mr. Parker's younger brother, Sydney Parker recalls the brilliant young man that Henry had been when Austen visited him during his years as a successful London banker. As Mr. Parker says of Sydney, "There is someone in most families privileged by superior abilities or spirits to say anything.—In ours, it is Sidney; who is a very clever Young Man,—and with great powers of pleasing" (171). Jane describes Henry in almost the same terms: "His [letter] to me was most affectionate & kind, as well as entertaining;—there is no merit to him in *that*, he cannot help being amusing" (*L* 102).

I would like to suggest that the Austen family's financial crises of 1816-17 produced the economic ambiguities that we find so unsettling in *Sanditon*: Henry's bankruptcy, the consequent financial losses of Frank, Edward, James and Uncle Leigh-Perrot, the loss of Charles's ship, the lawsuit threatening Edward's estate, and, last but not least, Mrs. Leigh-Perrot's determined hostility to Henry. Jane Austen had already taken the wind of the national economy in *Persuasion* with that novel's insistence on earned incomes as the strength of the nation. But her final step into the new, nineteenth-century money-economy—as opposed to land-economy—takes place on the Terrace at Sanditon.

Contemporary public debate on the economy had become especially active after 1797 when cash payment by the Bank of England was suspended as a wartime emergency and the bank refused to exchange its notes for coin or bullion. Opinions, pro and con, focussed on the consequent expanding national debt, and the country's new dependence on paper money and credit.¹² Henry Thornton, an economist who defended the national debt, argued in *An Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Paper Credit of Great Britain* (1802) that the bank's suspension of payment in coin or bullion was not a problem: it had not caused the economy to crash, nor did it impede the growing prosperity of the country. The secret of paper money, or "paper credit" as Thornton called it, lay in the confidence of the public in the soundness of the nation's affairs.¹³ Thus key to the success of the economy lay in public opinion: the public were asked to believe in the soundness of public credit (or the national debt), something they could neither see nor understand, to have confidence, as it were, in public confidence.¹⁴

Among the opponents of the national debt and the credit economy, T. S. Surr, in his novel, *The Magic of Wealth* (1815), attacks contemporary banking practices in his representation of a resort town that he calls "Flimflamton," a sink of financial corruption and shady deals.¹⁵ Surr's novel may have had an influence on Jane Austen for its seaside setting, but it did not, I think, enroll her as an opponent of the credit economy. Henry Austen had returned to the bosom of his family to lick his wounds after the bankruptcy. His sister had always been proud of his rise in the banking profession, and now, in the hour of his disgrace, it is not likely that she would turn against him, particularly in the face of such undisguised hostility from Mrs. Leigh-Perrot. "The progress of the Bank is a constant source of satisfaction," she had written in 1809 (*L* 164). In 1813, she rejoiced in the news of Henry's promotion to tax Receiver-General for Oxfordshire: "It is a promotion which he thoroughly enjoys;—as well he may;—the

work of his own mind" (L 215). *Sanditon*, written in the midst of Henry's disgrace, thus becomes an opportunity for her exploration of the new money-based economy. Mrs. Leigh-Perrot, with all her dangling of legacies—she was to have a long career of this after Jane Austen's death, changing heirs at least three times—becomes an inspiration for Lady Denham. The brothers, Mr. Parker and Sidney Parker, prompted by the holdfast principles of the Austen family, become, like the Austen brothers, protagonists of the new economy, accepting its risks and trusting in its eventual soundness. The writing of *Sanditon* is, after all, itself a first pledge of Jane Austen's own faith in the economy, her bid to create money from "the work of *her* own mind."

Sanditon begins with two nostalgic images of the old land-based economy: Mr. Heywood's "very pretty Property" (MW 373) and Mr. Parker's "very snug-looking Place" in the valley (MW 379). But the text turns away from them almost immediately. Mr. Heywood's estate seems off the main road, out-of-date, strapped of cash, self-satisfied in its old ways, and, no small objection, much too cavalier about the state of "three old women" living in "as indifferent a double Tenement as any in the Parish" (MW 366). Mr. Parker's old home may well be "an honest old place," but it too belongs to a lost economic past. Poor weak, timid Mrs. Parker, like Lot's wife, watches it disappear "through the back window" of her carriage with regret, but without a shred of hope of ever getting back to it.¹⁶ In *Sanditon* the effects of commercial speculation and a credit economy will run the domestic scene.

Although Mr. Parker is the principal landowner in Sanditon, he presumably has mortgaged his land to finance his investment. Lady Denham, mortgaged or not, has a substantial cash investment in the town as well.¹⁷ These two investors represent two different faces of the "public opinion," the key, as Henry Thornton argued, to the success of a credit economy. Mr. Parker, always the optimist, thinks of the economy as operating "harmoniously for the good of everyone."¹⁸ The growth of Sanditon will, he claims, as a matter of course, "excite the industry of the Poor and diffuse comfort & improvement among them of every sort" (MW 368). Any rise in prices will be met with a corresponding good in the "diffusion of money": "Our Butchers & Bakers & Traders in general cannot get rich without bringing Prosperity to *us*," he says. "If *they* do not gain, our rents must be insecure—and in proportion to their profit must be ours eventually in the increased value of our Houses" (MW 392-93). All these good effects are to happen through the expansion of the economy. Sanditon, the resort town, is in effect a public fiction, like

the national debt itself, that must be “praised & puffed” into “credit” in order to bring people to its terraces to spend their paper money (*MW* 371). In Mr. Parker’s mind, speculation is a generous act of the imagination, directed to the good of the individual and the state. When he exults at seeing the “Blue Shoes, & nankin Boots!” in William Heeley’s windows and cries, “Glorious indeed!—Well, I think I *have* done something in my Day,” he speaks not only for his own interests and the local interest of William Heeley’s affairs, but in the interest of the Empire itself. In such expansive terms, the appearance of the “nankin boots” is, no doubt, “Glorious indeed!” (*MW* 383).

Lady Denham displays the darker side of public opinion. Her economics lean more towards ignorance, plainspoken avarice, and mean-spirited calculation. “Charity begins at home you know” (*MW* 402), she concludes in telling Charlotte Heywood of her scheme to make her nephew and niece, Sir Edward Denham and Miss Denham, pay rental for two weeks’ stay in Sanditon rather than invite them to stay with her. As for any high-toned notions of the benefits of the “diffusion of money,” she views with contempt the very people Mr. Parker seeks to attract to Sanditon: “. . . as far as I can learn, it is not one in an hundred of them that have any real Property,” she says, “Landed or Funded.—An Income perhaps, but no Property. Clergymen may be, or Lawyers from Town, or Half pay officers, or Widows with only a Jointure. And what good can such people do anybody?” (*MW* 401). As an investor, Lady Denham is determinedly ignorant of the economic conditions of the speculation she has committed herself to, a situation that Mr. Parker is uneasily aware of: “[N]ow & then, a Littleness *will* appear,” he admits to Charlotte: “She cannot look forward quite as I would have her—and takes alarm at a trifling present expence, without considering what returns it *will* make her in a year or two” (*MW* 376). In short, she is a dangerous partner to be saddled with in a speculative investment.¹⁹

Lady Denham’s position of power, cobbled together from her rich tradesman father, a prudent marriage to the landowning Mr. Hollis, and a subsequent marriage into the titled gentry, is a poisonous mixture. Park Honan’s account of Mrs. Leigh-Perrot, “my Aunt,” strikes a familiar chord: born in Barbadoes, but married into “birth” with Mr. Leigh-Perrot, Mrs. Leigh-Perrot was remembered particularly as having “a great idea of the claims of family ties, and a keen sense of justice as between herself and others.”²⁰ Lady Denham employs her position of power with gleeful malice, dangling her money and estate before poorer relations, and craftily casting her eyes about for petty ways to save money or gain an extra pence.

Money is power to give and withhold—mainly to withhold. With three family branches in waiting, she has a wide range of torments to inflict: the Hollis branch, whose expectations she defeats through Mr. Hollis's Will that leaves everything to her; the Brereton branch, her maiden family, in London, whom she ignores with calculated satisfaction; and Sir Harry's branch, Sir Edward and Miss Denham, whom she encourages as assiduous toadies and hangers-on. She obliges none of them. She takes Clara Brereton as a companion, not from the daughters of the family that provided her with hospitality on her visit to London, but from an impoverished and distant branch of that family. The Hollises are given wide berth because they have, as Austen writes, "just expectations" of a share of Mr. Hollis's wealth. The two Denhams are fobbed off with irregular and parsimonious hospitality at Sanditon House and a questionable gift to Sir Edward of "a strip of Waste Ground" where he can try his luck in the speculation by building "a tasteful little Cottage *Ornée*," at his own expense (*MW* 377).

In contrast, Mr. Parker demonstrates anxious concern for those people whose livelihoods rely on the success of the Sanditon project—dependents different in kind and origin from the sycophantic relatives dependent on Lady Denham's capricious favors, but pointedly parallel to them as a new type of dependency. Mr. Parker asks his wife to buy her chief supply of vegetables from old Stringer, a farmer he has encouraged to set up for himself in business, rather than from Lady Denham's gardener: "I am afraid he does not do very well—that is, there has not been time enough yet" (*MW* 382). Even so, he cautions Mrs. Parker to keep a nominal supply from old Andrew, Lady Denham's gardener, that he, too, "may not lose his daily Job." He takes Charlotte to visit Mrs. Whitby's library where Charlotte busies herself "in some immediate purchases for the further good of everybody" (*MW* 389), a slightly wry bow to Mr. Parker's theories of the diffusion of money. And, near the end of the fragment, Mr. Parker is seen looking out for the welfare of "poor Mullins's" family and proposing a charitable subscription among the visitors to Sanditon to remedy their situation (*MW* 423).

The moral distinction is found in Coleridge's remarks in support of the credit economy. According to Coleridge, it is the lower faculties of the understanding that inform Lady Denham's calculating commercial spirit, really no more than rationalized avarice. In contrast, Mr. Parker displays the higher faculty of the imagination in his concern for the fates of "old Stringer," the Whitbys, William Heeley, and others dependent on the effects of his speculation. This imaginative faculty, according to Coleridge, belongs to the old,

generous “constitution” of the nation that Lady Denham-style materialism destroys. Jane Austen and Coleridge condemn the materialism of the new age, but they do not attack the principle of public credit itself: “Wretches!” writes Coleridge, “they would without remorse detract the hope that is the subliming and expanding warmth of public credit, destroy the public credit that is the chief vital air of national destiny, convert obstruction into stagnation, and make grass grow in the exchange and market-place . . . !”²¹

Jane Austen’s original title for *Sanditon*, “The Brothers,” I think, suggests that the institution of the family will become the mediation of the destructive, commodifying effects of the expanding economy. Moral corruption appears, for example, in its most shocking guise in Lady Denham’s boast that she has honored her late husband’s last wish in giving his “Gold Watch” to his nephew: “It was no bequest. It was not in the Will,” Lady Denham tells Charlotte Heywood: “He only told me, & *that* but once, that he shd. wish his Nephew to have his Watch; but it need not have been binding, if I had not chose it” (*MW* 400). Poor Sir Harry himself is remembered mainly as an unnecessary doctor’s expense: “Ten fees, one after another . . .” (*MW* 394). The family crumbles before the economy elsewhere as well. The Miss Beauforts with all their carefully budgeted finery, their harp, their telescope, and drawing paper, are held up *not* as examples of outrageous luxury, the usual focus of attacks on paper money, but because, “the object of all was to captivate some Man of much better fortune than their own” (*MW* 421). In the same line of argument, Lady Denham declaims on value of marriage: “Sir Edwd. *must* marry for Money.—He & I often talk that matter over.—. . . he knows he *must* marry for Money.—And Sir Edw: is a very steady young Man in the main, & has got very good notions” (*MW* 400).

In contrast, Austen emphasizes the warm family feelings that govern the Parker family’s relations with one another. Mr. Parker is a loving husband and father. He and his wife are genuinely delighted with the unexpected appearance of his sister, Diana, at Trafalgar House, and insist that she stay with them: “And that she was to belong to *them*, was a thing of course” (*MW* 407), and, if not that, won’t Arthur and the two sisters at least dine with them: “And when shall we see you again? and how can we be of use to you?” (*MW* 410). Sydney Parker, the likely hero of the piece—handsome, rich, twenty-seven or -eight, a good brother and a man who loves children—receives the same welcome: “the manners of the Parkers were always pleasing among themselves,” writes Austen, “—and it was a very friendly meeting between Sydney & his sister in law, who was most kindly taking it for granted that he was on his way to Trafalgar

House." He declines the invitation, but, as we are particularly informed, he leaves the group only after taking "kind notice of little Mary," his young niece (*MW* 425).

Has Mr. Parker got it all wrong? I think not, or not completely. Mr. Parker, Henry Austen, and Jane Austen, all place their trust in the market and a strong national economy. This trust, in terms of public credit and public opinion, can be seen as a kind of "secular faith."²² Henry's bankruptcy was itself precipitated by a local crisis of this "secular faith." When the business of Mr. Gray, Henry's grocer-partner in the bank at Alton, failed, local knowledge of Mr. Gray's situation caused a run on the Alton bank.²³ When that news got out, there was a run on the bank in Petersfield, and then on the London bank, all of them folding under the pressure.

Lady Denham, however, as a figure of negative public opinion, takes hold of the novel dramatically in a way that overshadows Mr. Parker's principled speculation. The enormous economic power that she wields as an undependable investor in the future of Sanditon, together with the treatment she metes out to her family, makes her the most riveting point of reference in the novel. When the time comes that her considerable economic clout will be needed, she no doubt will prove "timid," as Mr. Parker fears, and will be of no help. It seems that Sydney, as one of "The Brothers" of the intended title, is destined to step forth, as the non-landed younger brother, to guide his older brother out of the credit maze into which he seems certain to be plunged, but Sydney is a weak light indeed to disperse the dark shadows cast by Lady Denham.

The unresolvable paradox of risk and trust involved in Mr. Parker's seaside investment lies in the vagaries of public opinion. If Lady Denham's view of Mr. Parker's speculation is analogous to the negative power of "public opinion," or to the lack of confidence that can break a credit economy, Charlotte Heywood's view out the Venetian window of Trafalgar House is a counter view, a positive version of "public opinion." Hers is public opinion that withholds judgment, but that leans strongly towards granting Sanditon its "credit." She is, at the very least, a "practical solipsist," rather, I think, like Jane Austen herself in Henry's case, a person who says, "I know very well that such-and-such is not the case, but all the same. . . ."²⁴ Austen also marks the difference in *Sanditon* between the individual investor and the system itself. That is to say, that though Charlotte Heywood recognizes Mr. Parker's flaws and senses the weakness of the particular project, she also identifies with the spirit of activity that it has created in the environment and in herself: in the "unfinished Buildings, waving Linen, & tops of Houses, to the

Sea, dancing & sparkling in Sunshine & Freshness” (*MW* 384). As George Berkeley wrote at the height of the South Sea Bubble in 1721, “credit” is “creditworthy” only “as it promoteth industry.”²⁵

John Constable’s “Chain Pier, Brighton” (1827) offers the same sort of tenuous and qualified support for the economy. It issues, like Jane Austen’s, from profoundly ambiguous feelings about the dangers of a credit economy. In 1824, Constable had visited Brighton only to complain that “the magnificence of the sea, and its . . . everlasting voice, is drowned in the din & lost in the tumult of stage coaches—gigs—‘flys’ &c—and the beach is only Piccadilly . . . on the sea-side.”²⁶ But in “Chain Pier, Brighton,” the commercial city and its chain pier are *linked* to nature by “the breakers and the sky,” not separated from them. As Jane Austen does in Charlotte Heywood’s more humble mix of unfinished houses, sunlight, sea, and waving linen, Constable in his painting juxtaposes the thrusting energy of a speculative economy to the magnificence of nature, refusing, like Austen in *Sanditon*, to set one against the other in their different scales of value. The possibility of storms to come is hinted both in Constable’s clouds and in Mrs. Parker’s ready memories of the storms that rocked Trafalgar House in the last winter. Nevertheless, Constable and Austen hold back on the obvious chance to point a moral. In effect, they grant a moment of grace for national pride and economic sunshine to pour forth in triumph and without restraint.

† The color image has replaced the original black and white image for the online edition of this essay. – C. Moss, JASNA Web Site Manager

NOTES

¹ For details of Henry’s bankruptcy, see Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen, a Family Record* (London: The British Library, 1989), p. 211; Park Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), pp. 375-78.

² For Austen’s publishing earnings at the time she began *Sanditon*, see Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen, A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 167-68.

³ Le Faye, *Family Record*, pp. 94, 131, 222.

⁴ Richard Austen-Leigh, in *Austen Papers, 1704-1856* (London: privately printed by Spottiswoode, Ballantyne & Co., 1942), p. 264, includes a letter from Mrs. Austen to Mrs. Leigh-Perrot, thanking her for an annuity of £100 a-year, and cataloguing her present income in January, 1820: Edward now contributes £200 a-year, her dividends come to £116, and Henry, Frank, and Charles contribute nothing. James is dead, but she still receives about £40 a-year from some old stock, which she can now give to Mrs. James Austen, now widowed, who needs the money.

⁵ Cited by le Faye, *Family Record*, p. 211.

⁶ Austen-Leigh, *Family Papers*, p. 263.

⁷ *Jane Austen’s Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 158.

⁸ Park Honan (p. 148) suggests her as a possible source for Lady Catherine and Mrs. Norris.

- ⁹ Austen-Leigh, *Family Papers*, 259.
- ¹⁰ Park Honan (p. 390) thinks so, too.
- ¹¹ Cited by Le Faye, *Family Record*, p. 236.
- ¹² Patrick Brantlinger, *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 112. I am much indebted to Brantlinger and to John Vernon, *Money and Fiction: Literary Realism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), for my understanding of early 19th-century economics.
- ¹³ Brantlinger, pp. 105, 112.
- ¹⁴ Brantlinger, p. 103.
- ¹⁵ Brian Southam suggests Surr's novel as a possible source for Austen's fragment in "A Source for Sanditon?" in *The Jane Austen Society: Report for the Year 1970*, p. 122.
- ¹⁶ See Nigel Everett, *The Tory View of Landscape* (New Haven and London: The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, by Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 202-03, for a discussion of the economic and political implications of landscape in the new commercial system.
- ¹⁷ Roger Gard, in *Jane Austen's Novels: the Art of Clarity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 212, reminds us that the leisure industry was well under way in the 18th century, and that investment by landowners and gentry was not at all unusual. However, once the land is mortgaged for investment, it enters a money economy.
- ¹⁸ Brantlinger, p. 124.
- ¹⁹ Lady Denham's cultural-mythological antecedents go back at least a century to the South Sea Bubble where she takes her lineage from Defoe, Swift, and Pope's "Lady Credit," who suffers from unpredictable fits of hysteria and debility. See Brantlinger, pp. 54-64.
- ²⁰ Cited by Park Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life*, p. 146. Honan describes Mrs. Leigh-Perrot as something of a trial to her relations.
- ²¹ Cited by Brantlinger (pp. 131-32) from Coleridge's *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White, vol. 6 of *The Collected Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 168.
- ²² Brantlinger, p. 133.
- ²³ Gray was something less than honest, according to Dr. Clive Caplan (in conversation, October, 4, 1997), who is researching the records of Henry Austen's banking career. Before precipitating the crisis that ruined his partners, Gray secured his own funds with "gifts" to relatives.
- ²⁴ Žižek, Slavoj, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 20-21. Cited by Brantlinger, pp. 4-5.
- ²⁵ Brantlinger, p. 91.
- ²⁶ Cited by Malcolm Cormack, *Constable* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 157; also by Roger Ebbatson, "Sanditon," *Critical Survey*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1992), pp. 50-51.