

Deciding whether one is being misled, entertained, or challenged is an integral part of the picturesque experience.

Sidney K. Robinson¹

... a certain irritation or stimulus is necessary to the picturesque...

Uvedale Price²

The first source of amusement to the picturesque traveller, is the *pursuit* of his object—he expectation of new scenes continually opening, and arising to his view. We suppose the country to have been unexplored. Under this circumstance the mind is kept constantly in an agreeable suspence. The love of novelty is the foundation of this pleasure. Every distant horizon promises something new [...] *new objects*, and new combinations of them, are continually adding something to our fund, and enlarging our collection: while the *same kind of object* occurring frequently, is seen under various shapes.

William Gilpin³

... where an object, or a set of objects [...] from their intricacy, their sudden and irregular deviations, their variety of forms, tints, and lights and shadows, are interesting to a cultivated eye, they are simply picturesque.

Uvedale Price⁴

... and as my arrangement did not coincide with their notions of what they thought it ought to have been, they seem to have concluded that I had no plan at all.

Uvedale Price⁵

¹ *Inquiry into the Picturesque*, Chicago and London, The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991, 137.

² *An Essay on the Picturesque, as compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; and on the use of Studying Pictures, for the purpose of improving Real landscape*, London., 1994, I, 125.

³ *Three Essays, on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; on Sketching Landscape: to which is added a poem, on Landscape Painting*, London, Blamire, 1992, II, 47-50.

⁴ *cit.*, I, 90.

⁵ *cit.*, v.

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Picturesque Maps of Austenland

Beatrice Battaglia and Diego Saglia

Austenland is a vast, virtual territory in a state of continuous expansion and reconfiguration. Its constantly redefined terrain is composed of the pictures, views and prospects, drawings and sketches, portraits and “likenesses” accumulated by readers and critics in their explorations of Jane Austen and her works. With its seemingly innocuous transparency, this strange and fascinating country has elicited the widest variety of reactions and responses. Taken as a whole and with their complex intersections, these disparate images give rise to a naturally *various* landscape that is mutable, ‘rough’ and ‘rugged’, full of contrasts of light and shade and inviting paths, capable of provoking both curiosity and irritation, but also invariably urging the explorers to continue in their pursuit of ever different views. In sum, a landscape that is in complete accordance with the expectations of William Gilpin’s picturesque traveller.

Attempts at panoramic overviews of Austenland emerge periodically in critical studies, often with the introductory function of situating new critical insights within a larger frame, as well as locating and justifying the choice of a different critical standpoint. In this volume, however, we do not seek to suggest yet another panoramic overview. There are some outstanding recent ones in circulation already, such as those in the volumes by You-me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Deidre Lynch or Barbara K. Seeber⁶. By contrast, our aim is to try and explain why the category of the picturesque appears the most appropriate to explore the critical landscape of Austen studies in all its multiform, controversial and disputatious features. For controversies and ambiguities in current critical debates are a natural outcome of the fact that the principles of the picturesque are deeply embedded in the narrative strategies and forms of Austen’s texts. Moreover, the idea(s) of the picturesque bring(s) to light a conspicuous, though still inchoate, cultural logic which, with all its intervening developments and shifts, is fundamentally connate with that examined by Frederic Jameson in his works on postmodernism.⁷ This book ultimately seeks to illuminate the reasons for Austen’s enduring relevance and the inexhaustible critical debates about her fiction. In this perspective, the term “picturesque” must not be understood in any conventionally simplified sense. On the contrary, it is here employed in the rigorous eighteenth-century meaning of the word that, with its wide array of historical, scientific and aesthetic connotations, has recently re-emerged in the interdisciplinary debate carried out in such collections of essays as those edited by Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, W. J. T. Mitchell, Simon Pugh, or Denis E. Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, among others⁸.

⁶ See *The Postcolonial Jane Austen*, ed. You-me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, London and New York, Routledge 2000; *Janeites: Austen’s Disciples and Devotees*, ed. Deidre Lynch, Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press 2000; and Barbara K. Seeber’s *General Consent in Jane Austen: A Study in Dialogism*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000.

⁷ See *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London, Verso 1991.

⁸ See *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Uses of Past Environments*, ed. Denis E. Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988; *Reading Landscape: Country – City – Capital*, ed. Simon Pugh, Manchester, Manchester Univ. Press, 1990; *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770*, ed. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994; *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J. T. Mitchell, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1994. In addition, see also the following essential contributions to a re-evaluation of the picturesque: John Barrell, *The Dark Side of Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Paintings, 1730-1840*, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press 1980; Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986; Nigel Everett, *The Tory View of Landscape*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press 1994; Tim

The picturesque is thus more than the mere fashion or aesthetic category investigated, discussed, and ultimately constructed by William Gilpin, Uvedale Price or William Payne Knight. In effect the problem of a fitting definition of the picturesque has been debated by David Punter, for whom “there is a perpetual hovering as to whether the Picturesque is a property of given forms or the description of a transformational psychic process”⁹. By this token, the picturesque may also be construed as a mode of perception, “a life style”¹⁰ or, in fact, *our* own life style¹¹. What recent critical examinations have revealed is that the distinctive traits of the picturesque as highlighted by Gilpin and Price – variety, richness, contrast (of parts, lines or colours), variation in perspective, the effect of light and shade, the love of novelty and the constant pursuit after new objects, new combinations, the mixture of styles and an incessant transgression of boundaries – are the crucial principles that have directed the development of Western visual and verbal (i.e. literary) expressive and perceptive modes for the last two centuries. Put otherwise, Gilpin’s enormous success among late eighteenth-century aesthetic and cultural theorists, as well as a more general audience, owed much to his individuation and exposition of an emergent epistemological structure. And the principles of the picturesque pointed out by Gilpin did not merely affect the figurative or visual domains, but also bore on the discursive arts, from drama to poetry and fiction. For, as Sidney K. Robinson has observed, “Maybe the Picturesque is the natural way of seeing in a time when technology produces increasingly sophisticated pictures that approximate the depth of reality”¹².

A perfect instance of this phenomenon is provided by the work of Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, made *peintre du roi* by the King of France in 1766, and then, after his arrival in London in 1771, a renowned painter and a stage and costume designer for David Garrick and Richard Brinsley Sheridan at Drury Lane Theatre. Loutherbourg was one of the most significant artists of the picturesque, and, with his popular *eidophusikon*, he attempted to stage movement and reproduce it through the presentation of successive “movable canvas” or “moving pictures” together with ingenious and spectacular variations of light and shade accompanied by music¹³. Loutherbourg’s hugely imaginative and extremely influential innovations anticipated later developments such as the panorama, the diorama and, ultimately, the cinema¹⁴. In particular, his innovations were indicative of a general obsession with “vision in motion” and the multi-perspectival apprehension of a mutable scene that also emerged in contemporary prose fiction. And possibly the best evidence of this discursive inscription of the picturesque is provided by the novels of Ann Radcliffe, whom Charles Brockden Brown aptly defined as “the most illustrious of the picturesque writers”¹⁵. In effect Radcliffe’s distinctive atmospheres and celebrated strategies of suspense are evoked through a “cinematograph-picturesque”¹⁶ technique that consists in “systematically flickering paintings before her readers’ eyes” in order to take them (and her

Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth*, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996.

⁹ D. Punter, “The Picturesque and the Sublime”, in *The Politics of the Picturesque*, cit., pp. 220-239.

¹⁰ A. Bermingham, “The Picturesque and ready-to-wear femininity”, in *The Politics of the Picturesque*, cit., p. 88.

¹¹ The idea of the picturesque as a late eighteenth-century “life style” that is also fundamentally our own contemporary “life style” underlies S. Robinson’s acute examinations in *Inquiry into the Picturesque* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1991), to which we are indebted.

¹² S. K. Robinson, *cit.*, p. xii, 143.

¹³ See Martin Meizel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*, Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, p. 170.

¹⁴ See Russell Naughton’s excellent biography of Loutherbourg on http://www.acmi.net.au/AIC/LOUTHERBOURG_BIO.html (online). On Loutherbourg, see also Mathias R. Joppien’s catalogue *Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, RA, 1740-1812*, for the exhibition at Kenwood, 2 June-13 August 1973, London, Greater London Council 1973.

¹⁵ Charles Brockden Brown, “On a Taste for Picturesque”, *Literary Magazine and American Register*, 2, nr 9, June 1804, pp. 163-165.

¹⁶ C. Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View*, London, Frank Cass, 1967, p. 236.

characters) through a swift succession of real and imaginary scenes, as if “from canvas to canvas”. The efficacy of this device relies on yet another of Gilpin’s instructions. Indeed Radcliffe excels in putting into practice the theorist’s suggestion that the artist (or the writer) can enhance the picturesque effect by enabling the spectator (or the reader) to slide into the picture and its atmospheres through an emphasis on the depth, indeterminacy and receding light that compose the picture’s background (or “distance”) and constitute the true essence of its scenes. Thus the effects achieved by Radcliffe’s “word painting” are basically analogous to those of proto-impressionist or pre-impressionist painters such as John Constable and J.W.M. Turner, who learned their picturesque techniques at the school of the well-known landscape painter Richard Wilson, often indicated as Radcliffe’s counterpart in the visual arts¹⁷. And it should not be forgotten – especially by those obstinate supporters of Henry James’s views about the unawareness of Austen’s narrative art¹⁸ – that Constable and Turner were born in the same year as the novelist.

“Enamoured of Gilpin at a very early age”, a passionate reader of “charming” Mrs Radcliffe’s works, and above all a lover and connoisseur of the theatre¹⁹, as with many of her contemporaries Austen naturally employed such picturesque techniques as the variation of changing and contrasting perspectives, adapting them to the field that was most congenial to her own art – the social and psychological dimensions – in a kind of cross-fertilization of the visual and the discursive that forms the basis of her ironic textuality. For the picturesque dramatizes the ambiguity, irony and constantly intimated, potential “plurivocality” of Austen’s texts. In this light, therefore, such distinctively Austenian traits are not only the result of the long and complex history of the reception of her works, but are also already inscribed in her writings as effects of a consciously and strategically employed technique. The picturesque principle offers not only the most adequate approach to the structural dynamics of Austen’s writing, but also the most suitable instruments for an exploration of the fictional and critical landscape of Austenland. Indeed, the picturesque reveals, even as it sustains, the persistent vitality of Austen’s novels; at the same time, through its “moving pictures”, it ensures the reproduction of Austen’s corpus as a “process” and a “dynamic medium” within the inextricable experiences of reading and criticism.²⁰

True to its constitutive picturesque strategy, this collection is organized in two separate, though converging, sections of essays. The first part includes the papers delivered at the International Conference “Jane Austen Oggi e Ieri/Now and Then”, the first to be organized in Italy, held at the University of Bologna on 18 October 2002, with international specialists such as Janet Todd, Gary Kelly and Cora Kaplan, and Italian scholars from the universities of Venice, Rome, Florence, Turin and Parma. At the moment of collecting the essays for publication, we felt that the book ought to represent a wider array of international voices, as well as different generations of Austen scholars. As a result, the initial contributions were enriched by a sizeable number of essays by international scholars that considerably expand the perspectives on Austen’s textual landscapes opened up by the conference. The second section of the volume features shorter pieces by Austen scholars from all over the world, who, although not present at the Bologna Conference, accepted our invitation to express their opinions on Austen’s works and the current state of criticism, and thus create a kind of virtual forum on Austen Studies. These shorter, though no less complex and stimulating contributions summarize the authors’ views on specific aspects, themes or issues in Austen’s

¹⁷ See Margaret Oliphant, *The Literary History of England in the End of the Eighteenth and Beginning of the Nineteenth Century*, 3 vols., London, Macmillan, 1882.

¹⁸ See Barbara K. Seeber’s introduction “‘Directly Opposite Notions’: Critical Disputes”, in *General Consent in Jane Austen*, pp. 3-26.

¹⁹ See the 1818 “Biographical Notice” to *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*; *Northanger Abbey*, book II, chapter XIV; and Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, London, Hambledon 2002, and Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2002.

²⁰ *Landscape and Power*, cit., pp. 1, 2.

output, clarify a scholar's personal approach to Austen, or assess the current situation and future developments of Austen criticism.

Within these two broad sections essays have been grouped together in accordance with the general orientation of their critical approaches. Nonetheless, in keeping with the picturesque search for new and contrasting perspectives, the volume can also be structured in virtually inexhaustible ways dictated by the reader's interests and point(s) of view. *Curiosity* and *irritation* are, after all, two of the indispensable conditions for a picturesque journey, as Gilpin and Price indicated. And, as Sidney K. Robinson has suggested, "Deciding whether one is being misled, entertained, or challenged is an integral part of the picturesque experience".²¹

As a result, it is practically impossible to provide any exhaustive idea of the book's contents, not so much for the great number of essays it contains, but for the principle that is at the basis of the collection, and according to which the perception of different views varies from traveller to traveller, and from itinerary to itinerary. In effect the picturesque journey is always, for the most part, a sentimental journey. Since its underlying principles are openness and dialogism, no single map of the book's critical itinerary may be traced. On the contrary, this collection designs a multiplicity of interwoven trajectories guiding the reader across the numerous perspectives that compose and refract the landscape of Austen's texts. These itineraries effectively straddle the two sections of the book, and give it an open and multilayered structure made up of countless transversal readings.

With its structuring relevance, the picturesque is the most conspicuous of the deeply embedded maps that compose the book, and it is specifically examined in Beatrice Battaglia's and Anne Bermingham's contributions. The former clarifies the complex ways in which the idiom of the picturesque is a fundamental instrument for a reconstruction of the wider cultural phenomena between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and thus addresses the aesthetic, ideological and "contextual" richness of Austen's textuality. Bermingham's essay complements this approach by examining a specific aspect of the material culture of the Romantic picturesque – the vogue for *cottage ornées* – and its relevance for the ideologies at work in Austen's novels. Another conspicuous itinerary across the contributions in this volume concerns the author's axiological and ideological universes. This dimension and its distinctive anti-dogmatism are addressed in the essays by William Galperin, Gary Kelly, Joseph Wiesenfarth, Alistair Duckworth, Barbara Benedict and Susan Fraiman. These essays collectively highlight and contextualize notions of nationalism, style as an aesthetic-political concept, the sense of the present, ideas of manners and civility, or uncertainty; and, in the process, they identify and investigate the fundamental vocabulary of Austen's world. The importance of Regency cultural institutions, social conventions and material culture in Austen's works is addressed by Janet Todd, John Wiltshire, Diego Saglia, Mary Waldron, Anthony Mandal, Juliet McMaster, Rosy Colombo and Mirella Billi. This sizeable cluster of contributions considers the rich reverberations of a world of political and institutional crises, social conventions, literary and artistic fashions and consumerist delights in the novelist's corpus. The interculturalism of Austen's works – their openness to European and extra-European cultural traditions – is dealt with in the essays by Susan Morgan, Ellen Moody and Laura Mooneyham White. Here Austen is seen in the light of the Romantic culture of travel, colonialism and imperial relations, as well as the connections or gaps between the English and Continental traditions of novel-writing. The intricate and contentious links between Austen's novels and their recent film versions, above all Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* (1999), emerge in the contributions of Roger Sales, Rachel Brownstein and Penny Gay. Their studies of the transposition of Austen's fiction into another artistic medium are closely related to the issues of language and translation analyzed in

²¹ *Inquiry into the Picturesque*, cit., pp. xii, 143.

Michael Hayes's and Marinella Rocca Longo's essays. A similar interest is evidenced in Gabriella Ferreccio's analysis of Austen's technique of the narrated monologue in *Mansfield Park* in comparison/contrast with Goethe's *Elective Affinities*.

Other essays indicate further paths or itineraries across Austenland that may be little frequented, unsuspected or even tantalizingly "forbidden". Paula Byrne's contribution, in particular, points out an avenue that, until recently, had been concealed by the ironic parody of *Mansfield Park*, as it highlights Austen's debt towards the theatre and its complex net of intracultural exchanges. Equally fascinating are the perspectives suggested by Paul Poplawski on the "black comedy" of Austen's Juvenilia seen as the carnivalesque "other" of the major novels, and Laura and Robert Lambdin's examination of her light verse, those poems and charades that are encoded expressions of the author's tastes in life and fiction. Another rarely examined landscape is that of Austen's reception in European cultures and the (im)possibility of fecund dialogues between different national traditions of literary criticism: these unjustly ignored aspects can be approached through the variously focused essays of Ann Mellor, Valerie Cossy, Mirella Agorni, Elena di Giovanni, Gabriella Imposti, and Sebnem Toplu. Yet another group of possible transversal readings is composed of those essays which investigate the different ways in which contemporary culture repeatedly adapts and updates Austen and her works. Thus Anna Rosa Scrittore and Daniela Fortezza chart the phenomenon of Austen's rewritings, sequels and prequels in twentieth-century women's writing. Cora Kaplan (??) and Clara Tuite, by contrast, address the theoretical problem of how to deal with Austen through, and in the context of, gender-inflected criticism – feminism in Kaplan's case, and queer theory in Tuite's. In addition, Brian Southam's deeply perceptive essay deals with a specific way of bringing Austen up to date by focusing on the crucial issue of editing Austen's texts, the clash of different editorial practices, and the strong desire to recapture a textual "original" that may prove both philologically accurate and accessible to contemporary audiences. Finally, Austen's response to the challenges of twentieth- and twenty-first-century culture is assessed in Devoney Looser's and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh and Michael Walsh's contributions through an examination of the relationship between Austen's works and new technologies and media.

Giving relevance and substance to the ironic and controversial features of Austen's textuality, this book aims to keep the essential relationship between her output and its readers alive by nourishing it through the number of possible associations, contrasts, debates and exchanges that emerge out of its "plurivocal" critical landscape. The structuring principle of this collection is intended to suit both Austen's textual elusiveness and the openness and lack of dogmatism of the contemporary cultural dimension. The essays in this volume unveil the shimmering variety of the Austen landscape, their focus moving between different points in the vista, as one fades out and another fades in, opening up an ever-changing spectacle of fascinating prospects.