

## *Jane Austen (1775—1817)*

Jane Austen's novels provide fascinating glimpses of gentry's country seats. Though she invokes Repton's name as that of a typically notorious improver in *Mansfield Park*, she seems to share many of his essential notions about landscape gardens. Her satire of picturesque taste, like his, concentrates upon a 'sense of the probable' and of social exigencies (Plates 101a and 101b). In *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth Bennett's exclamation --- 'What are men to rocks and mountains?' --- might recall Knight or Price; a large part of her education in matters of human importance is conducted at the very Reptonian landscape of Pemberley Woods, the seat of Mr Darcy. The description of her arrival there forms the first extract. Emma, too, learns to appreciate her role in society at Donwell Abbey, which is presented in the second extract. Jane Austen shares Repton's confidence, as he wrote in his *Fragments*, that 'the same principles which direct taste in the polite arts, direct the judgement in morality'. What one of her heroines learns from a landscaped estate is that 'true taste in *landscape gardening* ... is not an accidental effect, operating on the outward senses, but an appeal to the understanding'. In making such a connection between design and social morality, Repton and Jane Austen place themselves firmly in the traditions of the English garden that Pope and Burlington and others inaugurated.

### from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)

ELIZABETH, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance of Pemberley Woods with some perturbation; and when at length they turned in at the lodge, her spirits were in a high flutter.

The park was very large, and contained great variety of ground. They entered it in one of its lowest points, and drove for some time through a beautiful wood, stretching over a wide extent.

Elizabeth's mind was too full for conversation, but she saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; --- and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!

They descended the hill, crossed the bridge, and drove to the door; and, while examining the nearer aspect of the house, all her apprehensions of meeting its owner returned. She dreaded lest the chambermaid had been mistaken. On applying to see the place, they were admitted into the hall; and Elizabeth, as they waited for the housekeeper, had leisure to wonder at her being where she was.

The housekeeper came; a respectable-looking, elderly woman, much less fine, and more civil, than she had any notion of finding her. They followed her into the dining-parlour. It was a large, well-proportioned room, handsomely fitted up. Elizabeth, after slightly surveying it, went to a window to enjoy its prospect. The hill, crowned with wood, from which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks, and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight. As they passed into other rooms, these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen ...

### from *Emma* (1816)

It was so long since Emma had been at the Abbey, that as soon as she was satisfied of her father's comfort, she was glad to leave him, and look around her; eager to refresh and correct her memory with

more particular observation, more exact understanding of a house and grounds which must ever be so interesting to her and all her family.

She felt all the honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future proprietor could fairly warrant, as she viewed the respectable size and style of the building, its suitable, becoming characteristic situation, low and sheltered --- its ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream, of which the Abbey, with all the old neglect of prospect, had scarcely a sight --- and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up. --- The house was larger than Hartfield, and totally unlike it, covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular, with many comfortable and one or two handsome rooms. --- It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was --- and Emma felt an increasing respect for it, as the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding ...

It was hot; and after walking some time over the gardens in a scattered, dispersed way, scarcely any three together, they insensibly followed one another to the delicious shade of a broad short avenue of limes, which stretching beyond the garden at an equal distance from the river, seemed the finish of the pleasure grounds. --- It led to nothing; nothing but a view at the end over a low stone wall with high pillars, which seemed intended, in their erection, to give the appearance of an approach to the house, which never had been there. Disputable, however, as might be the taste of such a termination, it was in itself a charming walk, and the view which closed it extremely pretty. --- The considerable slope, at nearly the foot of which the Abbey stood, gradually acquired a steeper form beyond its grounds; and at half a mile distant was a bank of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well clothed with wood; --- and at the bottom of this bank, favourably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey-Mill Farm, with meadows in front, and the river making a close and handsome curve around it.

It was a sweet view --- sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive.