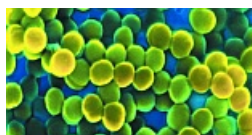




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Placing Jane Austen, displacing England : touring between book, history and nation.

Crang, M. (2003) 'Placing Jane Austen, displacing England : touring between book, history and nation.', in *Jane Austen and Co. : remaking the past in contemporary culture*. New York: SUNY Press, pp. 111-132.

Abstract

In this essay I want to think through the popularity of Austen by linking her work to two sets of places. The first is the imagined geographies produced through the text, or perhaps more accurately through its reading, which speak of a vanished English society. The second is the present geographies of tourists who visit Austen-themed places in contemporary England. The juxtaposition of these imagined cartographies raises three issues that this essay tries to unpack. First, a nostalgic geography of a lost English society which has a specific appeal and specific political implications. Second, the effect of this imagined landscape on the reshaping and marketing of the current landscape as a tourist product. Third, the need to then interpret that tourism as part of a disseminated practice of reading--where the action of reading is to connect disparate worlds from the text to home, to tourism and so forth. To coin a phrase, this essay discusses the worldliness of the text and the textuality of the world. It considers the geo-graphy of reading Austen as literally writing the world. I want though to suggest that doing so reframes both the conception of the world used in tourism and of writing in literary studies. This essay is less concerned with interpreting Austen's works than engaging in what we might call reading at a distance. That is, I am more interested in what others actively make of her writings than in the writings themselves. It is not a matter of assessing how well Austen depicts a place, nor how accurately her fictive places are mapped onto supposed inspirational sites, nor for that matter of how well readers and visitors can recall and understand her work. It is not about the accuracy of any of these representations. Rather, it is about interpreting reading and visiting as doing, as shaping real and imagined landscapes--creating what J. Hillis Miller has called "atopical space" or, as James Donald glosses that, space which is "less the already existing setting for such stories, than the production of space through that taking place, through the act of narration." The production of space in this manner involves two issues: first, it avoids creating an assumed reading, where the interpretations and actions of readers are drawn from immanent patterns in the text; second, it means that judgements about what is "authentic" do not stand above the practices of reading but are part of the currency within them. What it focuses upon is how Austen's work is appropriated and circulated to produce senses of "hereness," which inscribe identities into places. To illustrate this I begin with critiques of Austen-mania as part of a "heritage industry" in the UK, that suggest her work is used to sustain a reactionary and deeply conservative vision of Englishness. I then want to examine literary tourism as a practice by which key texts are mapped onto what becomes or is transformed into a mythical landscape. However, I suggest we move from metaphors of textualised landscapes to ideas of reading practices which open up a pluralised version of the geographies created. I thus try to suggest a disseminated landscape comprising different, multiple places and times of reading, and multiple stories told by the linking between times and places.

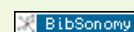
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