



The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels

Professor Alistair M. Duckworth


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Alistair Duckworth argues that the controversial "Mansfield Park" is fundamental to an appreciation of Jane Austen's fiction. Viewing this novel as the basis for a thematic unity in her work - a unity residing in her concept of the "estate" and of its proper "improvement" - he provides a fresh and convincing account of the novelist's values and of her artistic response to the contemporary forces that threatened them. For Jane Austen, Duckworth explains, the estate is emblematic of an entire moral and social heritage, and improvement, or the manner in which an individual relates to his estate, has crucial bearing on the state and direction of society. By tracing the theme of the estate and its proper improvement through the major novels, Duckworth demonstrates how committed Jane Austen was to the traditional values of a Christian humanist culture, yet how aware she was of the fragility of a society uninformed by responsible individual behaviour.

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