

DOLLAR, PATRICK G., M.A. "I Cannot Get Out, as the Starling Said-": Estate Improvements, Gender, and Morality in *Mansfield Park*. (2013)  
Directed by Dr. Anne Wallace and Dr. Mary Ellis Gibson. 86 pp.

*Mansfield Park*'s presentation of gender roles and relationships is complex and fraught with potential contradictions. Fanny Price, with her seemingly antiquated notions of estate improvement and romanticized nature, becomes an effectual yet subtle proponent for positive changes in gender relations and dismantling of patriarchy. Through Austen's connection of estate improvement, nature, and gender, the novel attempts to write an alternative to restrictive gender roles embodied by the patriarchal rule of Sir Thomas Bertram at Mansfield. This essay will show how the novel's depiction of estate improvement and landscape recommends more positive gender relations rather than directly advocating for patriarchy's demise. The natural aspects of the estate represent Fanny and her value system, while patriarchal power and its destructive influence on morality and women are linked to the artificial and negative estate improvements favored by the Crawfords.

DOLLAR, PATRICK G., M.A. "The Greatest Improvement the House Ever Had-": Physical Space, Gender, and Class in *Persuasion*. (2013)  
Directed by Dr. Anne Wallace and Dr. Mary Ellis Gibson. 86 pp.

Although many critics and readers charge Jane Austen with a pronounced blindness to contemporary issues, *Persuasion* reflects and foreshadows some of the dramatic changes occurring in England after the Napoleonic wars. In its depictions of place and landscape, *Persuasion* pays particular attention to the rise of the naval class, the re-orientation of the traditional landed aristocracy, and shifting roles for women. In its focus on the domestic, the novel manages to combat the dominant but challenged ideologies of aristocracy and patriarchy. Using its depiction of place and landscape, I argue that *Persuasion* pays particular attention to the rise of the naval class, the re-orientation of the traditional landed aristocracy, and shifting roles for women. *Persuasion* explores the social, cultural, and economic changes occurring in England after the Napoleonic War through its use of landscape. Rather than fleeing from the real world in her treatment of the domestic, Jane Austen instead presents a seemingly domestic portrait as a way to explore issues of class and gender.

“I CANNOT GET OUT, AS THE STARLING SAID–”: ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS,  
GENDER, AND MORALITY IN *MANSFIELD PARK*

AND

“THE GREATEST IMPROVEMENT THE HOUSE EVER HAD–”: PHYSICAL  
SPACE, GENDER, AND CLASS IN *PERSUASION*

by

Patrick G. Dollar

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Committee Chair

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APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by PATRICK G. DOLLAR has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

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“I CANNOT GET OUT, AS THE STARLING SAID—”:  
ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS, GENDER, AND MORALITY IN *MANSFIELD PARK*

*Mansfield Park*'s presentation of gender roles and relationships is complex, fraught with potential contradictions into which, much like its famous “ha-ha,” the reader may stumble. Estate improvement, with all its connection to moral systems, women's education, and nature, provides a useful lens through which to view the novel's depiction of gender roles. The novel makes estate improvement a major concern, weaving together contemporary improvers such as Humphry Repton, the diction of improvement, and scenes dealing directly with proposed improvements. Through the novel's connection of estate improvement, nature, and gender, it attempts to write an alternative to restrictive gender roles embodied by the patriarchal rule of Sir Thomas Bertram at Mansfield. *Mansfield Park* uses associations between immorality and the Crawfords' theory of estate improvement to critique the dominant social order governing the conduct of women. This essay will show how the novel's depiction of estate improvement and landscape recommends what Moira Ferguson calls “a kinder, gentler world in action” rather than meeting patriarchy head on (136). Although modern readers may be unsatisfied with Fanny Price, who is less overtly vivacious and opinionated in comparison to Austen's other heroines, Fanny manages to find her own strength and determination against remarkable odds.

With her seemingly antiquated notions of estate improvement and romanticized nature, Fanny becomes an effective yet subtle proponent for incremental changes in gender relations and dismantling of patriarchy. Although the novel's alternative to patriarchy may not seem radical to twenty-first century readers, it shares many of the tenets of a variety of "feminism" well-known in Austen's time.<sup>1</sup> Fanny and her value system are tied to the traditionally unornamented and picturesque aspects of the estate, while patriarchal power and its destructive influence on morality and women are linked to the artificial and negative estate improvements favored by the Crawfords. Fanny's ideals of estate improvements, her moral values, and her positive improving of her sister Susan present a more positive, less restrictive, and less patriarchal paradigm than Sir Thomas's governance of Mansfield Park.

The novel's concern with the landscape and estate improvement fits easily into a pattern emerging in the eighteenth century. While most modern readers would pay little attention to the seemingly ancillary subject of landscape, landscaping in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was imbued with "political iconography" (Miles 130).<sup>2</sup>

*Mansfield Park* is simply reflecting a growing concern of the eighteenth century cultivated individual – the consideration of landscape as depicted in literature and the

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<sup>1</sup> "This is not to suggest that Austen was in agreement with Wollstonecraft on anything more than these fundamental ideas: (a) that women, being possessed of the same "powers of mind" as men, have the same moral status and the same moral accountability; (b) that girls should be educated in a manner appropriate to this view of the female sex; (c) that a "respectable" marriage is an "equal" marriage, in which man and woman are "partners," and must therefore rest on "friendship and esteem," and (d) that literary works in which any other view is endorsed are objectionable. Modern feminists may find these very tame, but around 1800 they were the essential convictions of rational feminism" (Kirkham 120).

<sup>2</sup> "Like the Gardiners visiting Pemberly in *Pride and Prejudice*, the aspiring as well as the established classes visited the grand country houses and their grounds, which were to be 'read.' Visiting [the landscape gardens at] Stowe was itself a cultural institution, one served by a small library of maps and guidebooks designed to help the visitor to read the political iconography of the gardens and temples" (Miles 130).

arts, as well as nature (Barrell 3-12). Austen is also following in the tradition of other writers who critiqued artificial and excessive improvement on “aesthetic and social grounds” (Duckworth, “Landscape” 281).

Estate improvements encompass both the landscape gardening and design Austen is clearly alluding to with her invocation of Humphry Repton, as well as any architectural or structural improvement to the house itself or surrounding grounds. Following closely with Alistair Duckworth’s understanding of estate improvement shown in his influential article “*Mansfield Park* and Estate Improvements,” this essay will connect the novel’s treatment of improvement with a complex and subtle critique of gender roles. For the purposes of this essay, the term “patriarchy” will include the male-dominated economic and social control of both the estate and family. I will use Barbara Seeber’s idea that the “novel draws structural parallels between patriarchy, imperialism, and the domination of nature” in order “to examine intersecting structures of power” (269).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Moira Ferguson suggests that the “power relations within the community of *Mansfield Park* reenact and refashion plantocratic paradigms...” the individuals at *Mansfield Park* “are locked into hierarchal and abusive patterns of behaviour” (121). Expanding on this basic definition, the male forces in the novel are the arbiters and determiners of what is valuable, deeming certain people and landscapes (women and unimproved landscapes,

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<sup>3</sup> Although Seeber focuses on meat consumption and use of animals/hunting in her essay, her basic principles apply to my argument. The ways in which characters utilize or abuse their environments reflect their ideologies. Importantly, as Seeber suggests, “Fanny voices a critique of the power structures that she observes around her, and her identification with nature reflects her own position within the *Mansfield* household” (Seeber 276). Fanny’s interactions with nature, and her strenuous objections to others’ mistreatment of it through estate improvements, reflect the novel’s overall critique of the patriarchal paradigm underlying the social structure of the novel.

for instance) as not valuable. Until Fanny's subtle rebellion and marriage to Edmund, the women in the novel are unable to break from the patriarchal hierarchy that operates relatively invisibly but powerfully. The men wield their social and economic power to enforce their definitions of worth, forcing both individuals and the landscape to conform to their ideals and attain "worth."

Fanny's opposition to estate improvement and her separation from the characters' dominant ideologies are noticeable early on in the novel as the characters discuss improvements. In the initial introduction of the topic of estate improvement, Mr. Rushworth has just returned from "visiting a friend...[who] recently had his ground laid out by an improver" (Austen 80). Rushworth is fixated on the subject of improvement, stating that Compton was transformed so that he "never saw a place so altered in [his] life" (Austen 80). Like his preening fixation on his "blue dress, and a pink satin cloak" during the theatrical scenes, Rushworth is drawn to the Reptonian or the Crawfords' estate improvement because of its artificiality and materialism (Austen 160). *Mansfield Park* is intimately concerned with "the debates about English nationalism and the appearance and treatment of the landscape," most notably seen in the competing writings of Humphry Repton on the side of improvement and Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight on the side of picturesque theorists (Heydt-Stevenson 262). While Price and Knight called for untamed and natural beauty, Repton and the improvers argue that attempts to force landowners to refrain from landscape improvements violates "an owner's ability to make use of his property" (Heydt-Stevenson 262). To Rushworth, "the approach *now* is one of the finest things in country" (Austen 80). With Rushworth's

stressing of the “*now*,” the novel begins to frame estate improvement as a destruction of the old for something newer, gaudier, and more artificial. Mrs. Norris chides Rushworth for viewing his own Sotherton as “a dismal old prison,” urging him to remember that “Sotherton Court is the noblest old place in the world” (Austen 80). Despite the appearance that Mrs. Norris appreciates the old estate as Fanny does, she quickly goes on to urge Rushworth that “expense need not be any impediment” and that “everything [be] done in the best style, and made as nice as possible” (Austen 81). In urging Rushworth to ignore expense, Mrs. Norris further connects estate improvements with unnecessary ornament, lavish spending, and empty artifice – themes echoed by Sir Thomas at the end of the novel when considering his daughters’ upbringing. Mary and the other characters view estate improvements in a similarly economic and morally bankrupt way. Although Mary is troubled by the nuisance of improvements, she would still “be most thankful to any Mr. Repton who would undertake it, and give me as much beauty as he could for my money” (Austen 84). Clearly upholding Reptonian improvements, Mary also highlights the reliance on money to create beauty. For the majority of the characters, the natural world must be beautified and extensively improved.

The characters’ comments about money and improvements highlight the lack of tradition or guiding moral value in this Reptonian, and later Crawfordian, version of estate improvement – it is only guided by money and the attempt to create the unnatural from something natural. By using subtle parallels between estate improvements and the Bertram sisters’ upbringing, the novel also begins to show the destructiveness of Sir Thomas’s patriarchal control to women and morality. Although the novel critiques Sir

Thomas, it also presents an alternative to his patriarchal control, the weakened patriarchy seen at the end of the novel and spearheaded by Fanny – what Moira Ferguson calls a “kinder, gentler world” (136). While the novel weakens Sir Thomas’s control over Mansfield Park, he is certainly not eliminated and many of the traditional male privileges and powers remain intact. As John Mee argues, both *Persuasion* and “*Mansfield Park*[,] allows for the perpetuation, not the destruction of a land-owning family through an infusion of specifically female virtue from outside” (80).<sup>4</sup> While I agree with Mee’s arguments, I feel that he does not sufficiently explore the positive changes wrought in both novels. While the aristocratic Bertram family is seemingly preserved unscathed, it is fundamentally altered and reformed by Fanny – she changes the dynamic of the family and ultimately weakens Sir Thomas’s self-importance and power over the estate and its inhabitants. With the acceptance of Fanny’s vision for the estate and its improvement, the novel discounts both the Crawfordian version of improvement and its parallel in Sir Thomas’s rigid control of his artificial daughters.

The Crawfords’ estate improvements create the appearance of beauty, manners, and sophistication while hiding and repressing the natural aspects of the estate, strikingly similar to the Bertram sisters’ expensive but ultimately ineffective education that represses their natural spirits and creates immorality. Through Maria and Julia’s

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<sup>4</sup> I find striking parallels between Fanny Price’s reformation of the Bertram family and Anne Elliot’s of her own family. Like several of Austen’s marriage endings, Anne’s marriage to Captain Wentworth combines both conservatism and change. Anne gains greater autonomy and a more egalitarian gender role, but allows for the continuation of the Elliot family. However, I would disagree with Mee that the landed Elliot family is not wholly destroyed. Although not completely eradicated (Sir Walter finds a cramped refuge in Bath), the family has been fundamentally altered and the locus is no longer the vain aristocrats, but the virtuous and more meritocratic Anne and Wentworth.

transgressions, the novel shows that the Bertram sisters' education failed to create true morality or virtue. With these early subtle connections between patriarchy and estate improvement, the novel begins to condemn patriarchy's adherents, particularly Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris. Mrs. Norris is a tool of Sir Thomas, upholding his patriarchal control, and an improver herself. If she "had any thing within the fiftieth part of the size of Sotherton," Mrs. Norris would "be always planting and improving" because she "is excessively fond of it" (Austen 81). The novel takes another subtle jab at Mrs. Norris by highlighting the excesses present in Mrs. Norris's improving spirit. Mrs. Norris goes on to relate the "vast deal" of improving she performed on the parsonage, making "it quite a different place from what it was when we first had it" (Austen 81). Like the Crawfords', Mrs. Norris's improvements transform the nature of the estate into something unrecognizable. Mrs. Norris's alliance with improving, particularly the destructive or repressive form preferred by the Crawfords, is closely linked to her alliance with Sir Thomas's patriarchal values and control. Mrs. Norris explicitly connects Sir Thomas to her past improvements, by wishing that "dear Sir Thomas was here, [so] he could tell...what improvements were made" (Austen 82). Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris are strong allies in their patriarchal control of Mansfield Park, as well as in their ideologies of estate improvement. The novel further connects the excesses of estate improvement with the destructiveness of patriarchy when Sir Thomas regrets Mrs. Norris's role in his daughter's upbringing and "the excess of her praise" in contrast to his own severity (Austen 459). Mrs. Norris is conflated with patriarchy because she is so heavily involved in upholding Sir Thomas's control and beliefs. Unlike Fanny, who eventually rebels

against Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris and several of the other female characters support patriarchy because they have been so heavily tainted by it. Likely enticed by the limited powers Sir Thomas grants her, Mrs. Norris becomes an extension of Sir Thomas's control. Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris, the managing forces at Mansfield Park, discuss improvements in the same manner they discuss the improving or nurturing, or lack thereof, of the women at Mansfield.

Alistair Duckworth documented the novel's link between characters' morality and their views on estate improvement ("*Mansfield Park* and Estate Improvements" 26). However, the particular importance of estate improvement to the female characters has not been fully explored. Among the several female characters in the novel, only Fanny Price maintains her own moral center, resisting the temptations of immorality provided by Henry Crawford and his estate improvements. However, the novel doesn't automatically equate femininity with virtue, wisdom, and restraint. The other female characters, from the Bertram sisters to Mrs. Norris, all engage in, support, or are too damaged by patriarchy to emulate Fanny's positive values. The novel shifts between varying negative examples of women who have been corrupted or affected by patriarchy – from Mrs. Norris's upholding of patriarchal values to Maria's sacrificing of morality and virtue, spurred on by her feelings of imprisonment under her father's rule. The novel sets Fanny Price as the lone virtuous and eventually powerful woman. Despite Edmund's tutoring and Fanny's rather fluid adaptability at Mansfield, the novel presents her as

somehow still more discerning, moral, and impervious to temptation than Edmund and the other characters (Lynch 716).<sup>5</sup>

From the moment Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park, she is treated as an object that must necessarily be improved, a foreign invader who must be molded to fit Sir Thomas's specifications. To Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris, she "is expendable and must be made to fit into the overall 'aesthetic' plan" (Heydt-Stevenson 265). The novel implements "the metaphor of landscape design in the language describing Fanny's literal and psychological placement in the household" (Heydt-Stevenson 265). From the beginning, Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris believe that they "shall probably see much to wish altered in" Fanny and ascribe her with "not incurable faults" (Austen 41). Without even meeting her, the pair identify her as an object that needs improvement – she is cast in the same role as the unimproved landscape that must be altered to repress its poor qualities and bring out its best. Sir Thomas is also adamant that Fanny be contained and isolated from his daughters, as if she a dangerous tropical plant that could infect or destroy the native Bertram daughters. In discussing Fanny's adoption, he goes to great lengths to reassure himself that "there can be nothing to fear for *them*" (Austen 41). He wishes to ensure that he maintains "the distinction...between the girls as they grow up" and "how to preserve in the minds of [his] *daughters* the consciousness of what they are" (Austen 41). Sir Thomas demands the control of the women of Mansfield Park in a way that echoes the

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<sup>5</sup> "Fanny is a paragon of steady principles and integrity – so true to her origins and quintessentially her own sexed self that when she rehearses Edmund's part in *Lovers' Vows* with Mary it is "with looks so truly feminine as to be no very good picture of a man" (MP, 169). Yet Fanny is also, contrariwise, a paragon of tractability, as her accommodation to her transplantation to Mansfield and all her later accommodations suggest" (Lynch 717).

rigid demarcation, order, and improvement imposed on the landscape by improvers like Repton. Throughout the novel, Sir Thomas is aligned against the “landscape of picturesque aesthetics” that allow for women to be associated “with freedom, playfulness, introspection, and connection to others, to their landscape, and to their nation” (Heydt-Stevenson 274). Fanny’s placement in the house is particularly designed to fix “her in a place of subordination and endeavors to keep her both literally and psychologically depressed” (Heydt-Stevenson 265). Mrs. Norris and Sir Thomas banish Fanny to “the little white attic, near the old nurseries” that is “close by the housemaids, who could either of them help to dress her” (Austen 41). Fanny is sharply defined and isolated from the rest of the Bertram family – she becomes more equitable to a servant than to a blood relation. The novel links estate improvements and morality with the improvement or nurturing of individuals, particularly women. As Jill Heydt-Stevenson suggests, Austen’s novels merge “arguments about the construction of a national identity...with arguments about the construction of womanhood and the construction of landscape” (261). The obsessive need to place Fanny, both physically and psychologically, reflects the same ideology governing the estate improvements – there is no room for the freedom, chaos, and naturalness of picturesque aesthetics.

As the characters’ discussion and debate over estate improvement is moved into practice in the tour of Sotherton, the novel again stresses the connection of the estate and estate improvement with economic or material concerns through Maria Bertram’s commentary. Irritated throughout the ride by Julia’s flirtations with Henry Crawford, Maria only begins to feel “elation of heart” when she “tell[s] Miss Crawford that ‘those

woods belonged to Sotherton” or “that ‘she believed that it was now all Mr. Rushworth’s property on each side of the road’” (Austen 107). Revealing the extent to which Sir Thomas’s patriarchy has infected or ruined her capacity for moral judgment, Maria’s understanding of the landscape, nature, and the estate are all based on economics, control, and success. Barbara Seeber posits that Austen, and other female writers of the time, were particularly concerned with nature because they sensed parallels between humanity’s use of nature and the treatment of dominated groups of people, particularly women or Antiguan slaves. Specifically, she argues that Austen links the control of nature with patriarchy (Seeber 269). Maria feels the entrapment and suffocation caused by this oppressive patriarchy, but she has been so affected by it that she cannot find a moral and positive alternative. Paradoxically, Maria fully engages in and supports the control and subversion of the land typified by the Crawfords’ estate improvements but also feels trapped by the gates, locks, and ha-has at Sotherton. She disdains “those cottages [that] are really a disgrace” and is happy to move quickly past the village (Austen 107). After leaving behind the village and church, Maria remarks that “it is not ugly...at this end; there is some fine timber, but the situation of the house is dreadful” (Austen 107). Seeber highlights Maria’s limited view of nature as something to be owned – she only sees the trees as timber or something to be controlled and sold (Seeber 271). Henry Crawford echoes Maria’s treatment of trees when talking with Edmund about improvements at Thornton Lacey, noting the “very pretty meadows...finely sprinkled with timber” (Austen 254). The mutability of nature, its purpose as something to be altered or subjugated by humanity, is a major tenet of the Crawfords’ version of

estate improvement, as well as its patriarchal undertones and parallels. The Crawfords' ideologies necessitate a reduction of nature into mere property, something defined by ownership that can and should be manipulated by mankind. In the Crawfords' improvement, nature is readily manipulated and controlled, mirroring what Fraiman sees as a troubling link to both slavery and oppressive gender relations in the Sir Thomas's treatment of women (811-813). Seeber draws attention to Richard Pickard's assertion that the right to cut down trees is tied to all of the extended powers of landed gentleman, whether it is control of his own landscape or control of the women in his household (Seeber 275). Cutting down trees, or any other form of landscape improvement, is emblematic of the larger oppressive and patriarchal forces at work in the novel.

Maria and Henry's materialistic approach to the trees at Sotherton is directly juxtaposed with Fanny's earlier exclamations over Rushworth's plan to cut down "two or three fine old trees" when she laments, "Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does it not make you think of Cowper? 'Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited'" (Austen 83). Fanny's ideal estate is more traditionally rural and unimproved, lacking the artifice and materialism the Crawfords favor and closely aligned with picturesque aesthetics espoused by Price and Knight. Fanny's connection to unornamented nature and the rural, rather than reinforcing ineffectual and destructive patriarchy, works to recast the traditional religious, social, and moral aspects of the English estate as positive gender relations – ideas more fully expressed in Fanny's commentary in the Sotherton chapel. Fanny appears to be the only character who does not endorse a patriarchal and dominating understanding of nature – even Edmund, with his appreciation of nature and

disdain for improvements, gently rebukes her for her overly romanticized comments. Fanny's great love of nature in its pure and unadulterated forms is illustrated throughout the novel and signals, as Seeber suggests, a connection between the societal positioning and treatment of nature and the positioning and treatment of women. Fanny's powerful link to a natural world under increasing threat of control and alteration by outside forces grows out of her own experiences as a marginal figure or outsider – primarily as a woman, but also as an outsider in the Bertram family at Mansfield Park (Seeber 276). Trees, nature as a whole, and even morality are under attack by these fashionable estate improvements. For Austen, in *Mansfield Park* and other works, trees and nature are important symbols for larger concerns (Duckworth, "Mansfield Park and Estate Improvements" 40).<sup>6</sup> Consequently, Fanny is entirely resistant to the Crawfords' estate improvements, which work to subvert and restrict the natural aspects of the estate, preferring to keep "the place as it is now, in its old state" (Austen 84).

Fanny's version of estate improvement works to preserve both the traditional layout of the estate, as well as the moral and social ties supposedly present in the ideal

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<sup>6</sup> "Trees, of course, have served as an emblem of organic growth throughout English literature. One thinks, for example, of the wych elm in *Howards End* which, in surviving the excavations of the Wilcox men, gives some hope for social continuity. On the other hand, the cutting down of trees has traditionally suggested a complete break with the past, at least from Donne's *Satire If* ("Where are those spread woods which cloth'd heretofore/Those bought lands?") to Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, where the loss of the great tree at Groby signals the end of an order. This is surely why the cutting down of the avenue at Sotherton is so seriously viewed. In Jane Austen's fiction it is remarkable how often the presence of trees betokens value. Pemberley has its "beautiful oaks and Spanish chestnuts" (*Pride and Prejudice*, 267), Donwell Abbey (noticeably "with all [its] old neglect of prospect") has an "abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up" (*Emma*, 358); and there is no "such timber any where in Dorsetshire, as there is now standing in Delaford Hangar" (*Sense and Sensibility*, 375). In *Sense and Sensibility*, we know at the beginning of the novel that the Norland estate is secure because safeguards have been taken against "any charge on the estate, or . . . any sale of its valuable woods" (4). Equally it is a sign of the present owner's corrupted values that, when the old owner dies, he should cut down "the old walnut trees" in order to build a greenhouse" (Duckworth 26).

English country house (Graham 214-218). Like Price and Knight, Fanny's ideas tend more "toward preservation rather than improvement" (Duckworth, "*Mansfield Park* and Estate Improvement" 41). In contrast, the new estate improvement condoned by the majority of the characters divorces the estate from its traditional moral, religious, and economic groundings. The Crawfords' version of estate improvement opens the estate to social degradation and moral decay. The destruction of morality associated with the Crawfords' improvement is most dramatically seen in the discussions on religion during the Sotherton scenes. While passing the church on the trip to Sotherton, Maria pointedly remarks that she is "glad the church is not so close to the great house as often happens in old places" (Austen 107). Maria's distaste for religion and desire for it to be separated from the main house is echoed in the mocking of Sotherton's chapel by Mary Crawford, a definite proponent of modern and vapid estate improvement. In discussing the relatively recent abandonment of regular services in the chapel, Mary observes that "every generation has its improvements," further solidifying the connection between improvement and a growing immorality (Austen 111).<sup>7</sup> Fanny quickly cries, "It is a pity...that the custom should have been discontinued" (Austen 111). While the other characters, like Mary Crawford, see nothing wrong or alarming in the desertion of religious or moral values for modern improvements and artifice, Fanny longs for the past estate and its valued connections to religion, community, and the village.

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<sup>7</sup> As related by Mrs. Rushworth, "the chapel was fitted up as you see it, in James the Second's time. Before that period, as I understand, the pews were only wainscot; and there is some reason to think that the lining and cushions of the pulpit and family-seat were only purple cloth; but this is not certain. It is a handsome chapel, and was formerly used both morning and evening" (Austen 111). Even in discussions of a religious space, the majority of the characters are obsessed with its physical features and the extravagance of its ornamentation. Little time is spent discussing the religious services held there; instead, Mrs. Rushworth chooses to relate the history of its decoration.

After the tour of the interiors of Sotherton, the characters are all too eager to escape to a more natural setting, “as by one impulse, one wish for air and liberty, all walked out” (Austen 114). Maria, oppressed by the heat, wishes to explore “a nice little wood, if one can but get into it” (Austen 115). The Sotherton estate seems full of barriers, gates, and doors that limit the natural world and impose on the characters. Even the inside of the house generates feelings of enclosure and creates a desire for freedom. These restrictions seem to particularly affect Maria as she wistfully muses “what happiness if the door should not be locked” before fatalistically determining, “but of course it is” (Austen 115). Maria, used to her father’s restrictive patriarchal rule, sees its equivalent in the estate improvements limiting the natural world and their progress through it. The novel deftly uses the same diction and feelings in describing Sir Thomas’s realization that “his own severity” led his daughters “to repress their spirits in his presence, so as to make their real disposition unknown to him” (Austen 458-459). When the survey of Sotherton’s needed improvements leads the characters to “that iron gate, that ha-ha” barring the way, the characters readily divide into different moral groups (Austen 123). Maria announces the impediments “give [her] a feeling of restraint and hardship” or that she “cannot get out” (Austen 123). Maria’s quest to complete the tour of Sotherton in order to outline its rigid and unnatural improvements, so closely connected to her sexual desire for Henry Crawford, lead her “with little difficulty [to] pass round the edge of the gate” (Austen 123). Witnessing the sexual overtones of Henry’s assurance that Maria “could allow [herself] to think it not prohibited” to pass through the gate with him, Fanny, “feeling all this to be wrong...could not help making

an effort to prevent it” (Austen 123).<sup>8</sup> Fanny begins to show her function as a moral voice, despite her reluctance to act or speak. The novel works to show that true virtue can only be created by what Ruth Yeazell calls an “internalized boundary” that must be set and monitored by an individual (Yeazell 147). Fanny is the emblem for this type of true morality, particularly later in the novel when following her own feelings against marrying Henry Crawford while under extreme duress from Sir Thomas. The gate, much like the patriarchal authority and severity of Sir Thomas, is a potentially imprisoning and dangerous obstacle that is easily subverted and fails to produce any true morality. The gate itself can be seen as a potential symbol for estate planning and its connection to controlling male authority, something restricting the unornamented picturesque aspects of the estate and the landscape. Maria, growing increasingly “less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed” throughout the novel, comes to think “independence was more needful than ever” and views her marriage as an escape of Sir Thomas’s patriarchal control (Austen 217). The barriers, design, and improvements forced upon the natural landscape at Sotherton parallel Maria’s own feelings of entrapment and suppression. The negative version of estate planning the novel presents mimics the masculine power and control of women that ultimately creates corrupt morals and meaningless artifice.

Sir Thomas’s patriarchal control only teaches his daughters to have the appearance of morality, modesty, and manners when in his presence and under his strict

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<sup>8</sup> For a psychoanalytical interpretation of the gate scene, see Gerald Gould’s “The Gate Scene at Sotherton in *Mansfield Park*.”

control. In his absence, the sisters quickly throw off their false morals and gentility – Maria and Julia both flirt with Henry Crawford and show a pronounced desire for scandalous enjoyments, culminating in the plan to stage *Lovers' Vows*. After Maria's abandonment of her husband for Henry and Julia's elopement with Mr. Yates, Sir Thomas "feel[s] that with all the cost and care of an anxious and expensive education, he had brought up his daughters without their understanding their first duties, or his being acquainted with their character and temper" (Austen 459). The novel shows that Sir Thomas's patriarchy, like the improvements favored by the Crawfords, can only manufacture a positive and pleasing surface appearance. Even Sir Thomas comes to realize the folly of his patriarchal rule by the end of the novel as he approves of Fanny's alternative gender paradigm. In paying attention to surface or cosmetic matters, Sir Thomas's "cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition" (Austen 459) and failed to create positive and ethical women out of his daughters. Just as Henry's estate improvements work to hide the true nature of the estate, Sir Thomas's treatment of his daughters repress their natural personalities and feelings. Even before the end of the novel, the reader is aware of the negative influence Sir Thomas's repression has had on his daughters and on his relationship with them. After Sir Thomas's departure for Antigua, the narrator wryly informs the reader of the Bertram sisters' feelings for their father:

The Miss Bertrams were much to be pitied on the occasion; not for their sorrow, but for their want of it. Their father was no object of love to them, he had never seemed the friend of their pleasures, and his absence was unhappily most welcome. They were relieved by it from all restraint...they felt themselves

immediately at their own disposal and to have every indulgence within their reach. (62)

Although Fanny shares her cousins' relief, "she really grieved because she could not grieve" over Sir Thomas's absence (Austen 62). Resistant to the completely deadening and restraining effects of patriarchy that causes the Bertrams not to feel their father as an "object of love," Fanny is able to do more than rejoice over a reprieve from Sir Thomas's repression – she envisions an ideal shift in gender relations and a more permanent solution to patriarchy (Austen 62). The novel already begins to show the alternative to repressive and stern patriarchy in Fanny's wishes for her uncle's conduct toward her. She feels that "would he only have smiled upon her, and called her "my dear Fanny," while he said it, every former cold frown or cold address might have been forgotten" (Austen 62). Sir Thomas comes to lament the repression of his daughters, as well as his trust of Mrs. Norris. He recognizes that he failed Maria because "his daughter's sentiments had been" unknown to him (Austen 457). Sir Thomas regrets that he was "governed by motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom" (Austen 457). Like Maria and Henry's appraisal of trees simply as timber, or reducing nature to something commercial and economic, Sir Thomas reduced his daughters to a commodity that could be used to improve his wealth and status. His daughters' expensive education and Mrs. Norris's flattery parallel the materialistic and artificial estate improvements favored by the Crawfords. Although Mrs. Norris wields a fair amount of power throughout the novel, Sir Thomas eventually comes to repudiate her and restrict her role at Mansfield Park.

By the end of the novel, Sir Thomas muses that “his opinion of [Mrs. Norris] had been sinking from the day of his return from Antigua,” particularly when she failed to prevent the theatrical production that foreshadowed Maria’s eventual downfall (Austen 461). Sir Thomas goes on to condemn the “excessive indulgence and flattery” Mrs. Norris showered on his daughters (Austen 458). Mrs. Norris largely usurps the patriarchal power of Sir Thomas, although the structural forces governing life at Mansfield Park remain the same. She seizes Sir Thomas’s patriarchal power in his absence, drawing his intense displeasure and disapproval once he returns. Due to her usurpation of his power, Sir Thomas punishes Mrs. Norris at the end of the novel, delegating her to a lesser position, with her opinions no longer valued. Although some may argue that Mrs. Norris’s punishment is a continuation of Sir Thomas’s patriarchal control, her decline is a necessity to allow Fanny to gain greater autonomy and wield more influence at Mansfield Park. As Mrs. Norris loses her borrowed patriarchal power, Fanny gains a new power independent of Sir Thomas. Unlike Mrs. Norris, Fanny’s power does not stem from an existing patriarchal paradigm but instead from her own self will and determination. Similarly, Moira Ferguson argues that Sir Thomas’s repudiation of Mrs. Norris parallels the repudiation of his old patriarchal values and oppressiveness (Ferguson 131). As Mrs. Norris loses the patriarchal power she gained through Sir Thomas, his assurance in his past paradigm of unyielding patriarchal power also corrodes. As Ferguson suggests, Sir Thomas begins to question the validity and usefulness of his severe patriarchal control over Mansfield Park. The end of the novel

shows Sir Thomas embracing a new system that promotes more positive relations in the domestic sphere and in relationships between men and women (Ferguson 131).

Similarly, the Bertram sisters' upbringing is resonant of improvements in horticulture that would also occur within estate improvements. The girls have been pampered, spoiled, and reared in a "hothouse" type of environment, making them morally weak and artificial. The novel describes the Bertram sisters as "well grown and forward of their age" when Fanny first comes to Mansfield Park, making them like hothouse or other "improved flowers" that have been forced to bloom early (Lynch 713). Using Lynch's arguments, the novel is expanding its links between the Bertram sisters' education and estate improvement to include the particularly artificial methods of horticulture becoming popular in the eighteenth century.

Much like the Bertram sisters, Mary Crawford has been negatively affected by male dominance. Mary's lack of true morality and her concern only for appearances, by-products of her childhood under the patriarchal care of Admiral Crawford, are most explicitly shown after Maria and Henry's affair. Edmund is appalled that Mary feels "no horror [and] no modest loathings," seeing the only evil in the affair as a "want of common discretion, of caution" (Austen 452). Mary, herself negatively improved by exposure to the admiral and corrupting London influences, is unable to understand the truly moral import of the situation. The novel links these concerns with appearance quite deftly with the characters' incessant concern with the appearance of the estate, namely those artificial or ornamental aspects produced by the Crawfords' type of estate

improvement. Expanding on Ann Banfield's analysis of the text, through the treatment of estate improvement and landscape, this essay further connects the aesthetic aspects of the estate or setting with different moral values and systems. As Banfield asserts, different landscapes and improvements are clearly associated with different moral values (1). In the novel, a character's reaction to the aesthetic, particularly estate improvement, is an indicator of his or her moral outlook and a reflection of the morality of the character's actions.

Sir Thomas repeatedly treats Fanny as if she were an object or, more aptly, a piece of the landscape of Mansfield Park that he can control and improve. Although his alliance with Mrs. Norris in order to control Fanny in her childhood is significant, his vehement insistence that Fanny should marry Henry Crawford more fully shows his view of Fanny as a non-human. With her refusal to marry Henry, Fanny has "disappointed every expectation [he] had formed" and "proved [herself] of a character the very reverse of what [he] had supposed" (Austen 323). Sir Thomas is astounded when Fanny exhibits signs of agency and autonomy – when she refuses to conform to the rules of improvement or design that Sir Thomas imposes on her. He falsely ascribed a passivity to Fanny because he believed that she was "peculiarly free from willfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women" (Austen 323). Sir Thomas's self-righteous condemnation of Fanny reflects the Reptonian improvers' belief that a landowner has an inherent right to "make use of his property" (Heydt-Stevenson 262). He believes that Fanny should obey his rules and rigid control so that he can receive the greatest benefit

from “his property,” paralleling the belief that improvement would bring out the greatest benefits of the estate. Sir Thomas is “a complex embodiment of bourgeois power, in which economic motivations automatically find self-justifications and self-approbations to produce morality by a constant dialectic and verbal exercise” (Battaglia 30). The novel struggles against Sir Thomas’s tyrannical and economic necessity to wed Fanny to Henry, as well as the overall mercenary attitude with which Sir Thomas rules Mansfield Park. Sir Thomas “resembles Price’s description of the ‘despotic’ improver, who, in attempting to ‘improve’ Fanny by forcing her to marry Henry Crawford, will not let her” exercise her own free will (Heydt-Stevenson 266). Although Sir Thomas seems much more blatantly controlling than the Bennet family in *Pride and Prejudice* or the Elliots in *Persuasion*, all are used to show “the simultaneous freedom and imagined ‘autonomy’ of the heroine, and the historical or social setting which curtails and governs that freedom” (Wiltshire 134). In his demand for Fanny to marry Henry Crawford, Sir Thomas is simply verbalizing the social and economic rules present in many of Austen’s novels that demand the choice of a spouse be “constricted and partly governed by the pressures of the family” (Wiltshire 134). However, Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris are undoubtedly more overtly antagonistic enforcers of control over Fanny, mirroring their views of landscape.

Although I’ve presented Fanny as strongly opposed to the Crawfords’ artificial estate improvements, the novel doesn’t present her as opposed to *all* improvements. In fact, Fanny is quite a strong proponent of certain types of improvement. Like other Austen heroines, Fanny embodies a connection “with the wilder, unornamented,

picturesque landscape” (Heydt-Stevenson 261). The novel “deliberately endorses picturesque aesthetics and satirizes picturesque improvements” (Heydt-Stevenson 262).<sup>9</sup> The debates about landscape and improvement go beyond aesthetic concerns – the debates are concerned with “the question of control” or “of what and who is privileged to remain in the landscape” (Heydt-Stevenson 264). When sitting with Mary Crawford at the Parsonage, Fanny observes some shrubbery and remarks that she is “more struck with its growth and beauty” (Austen 223). Fanny continues, stating that “three years ago, this [area] was nothing but a rough hedgerow along the upper side of the field, never thought of as any thing or capable of becoming any thing” (Austen 223). Now, however, the “rough hedgerow...is converted into a walk, and it would be difficult to say whether most valuable as a convenience or an ornament” (Austen 223). As mentioned previously, Fanny is a unique combination of adaptability and constancy.<sup>10</sup> Her discussions with Mary about the “wonderful operations of time and the changes of the human mind” reveal much of her adaptability, but still fit with her core values of morality and minimal or preserving estate improvement.

The novel, through Fanny, is echoing Edmund Burke’s ideas that some improvements are necessary, and that a complete lack of improvement is negative and produces stagnation (Duckworth, “*Mansfield Park* and Estate Improvement,” 33). Fanny,

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<sup>9</sup> Austen’s own literary style and form reflect the picturesque. “‘Enamoured of Mr. Gilpon at a very early age,’ a passionate reader of ‘charming’ Mrs. Radcliffe’s works, and above all a lover and connoisseur of the theatre, 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...” (Battaglia and Saglia 5).

<sup>1010</sup> For an interesting discussion on how place in *Mansfield Park* is invested with power to create or limit the characters inhabiting them, see F.T. Flahiff’s “Place and Replacement in *Mansfield Park*.”

like Burke, always tempers this openness to limited improvement with the abhorrence of the destructive and artificial improvements espoused by the Crawfords. Duckworth argues that the Bertrams engage in the “cultural atrophy” or lack of improvements that promote stagnation that Burke warns against (“*MP* and Estate Improvement” 34, 44). I disagree with this interpretation, viewing Sir Thomas’s rigid repression, control, and subversion of his daughters’ true natures, which ultimately produces artifice and a mere appearance of “manners,” as much closer to the Crawfords’ superficial and active estate improvements. Fanny becomes a moral improver, both of land at Mansfield parsonage and her own sister Susan, by the end of the novel.

While Fanny grows to become an improver at Mansfield Park, she is still wary of the excessive, ornamental, and artificial improvements typified by the Crawfords. In them, she sees great risk for moral and social degradation. The novel continuously revisits the idea of increasing immorality, highlighting the greater separation of the house and the religious buildings as modern estate planning takes hold. Even Thornton Lacey, a parish house, is subjected to Henry Crawford’s potential estate planning. He pronounces that “there will be work for five summers at least before the place is live-able,” an assessment Edmund quickly rejects (Austen 253). Henry’s extensive improvement plans further underscore the novel’s suggestion that improvements destroy the ideal and moral country estate.

The farm-yard must be cleared away entirely, and planted up to shut out the blacksmith’s shop. The house must be turned to front the east instead of the north – the entrance and principal rooms, I mean, must be on that side, where the view is really very pretty; I am sure it may be done. And *there* must be your approach

– through what is at present the garden. You must make a new garden at what is now the back of the house; which will be giving it the best aspect in the world – sloping to the south-east. The ground seems precisely formed for it...The meadows beyond what *will be* the garden, as well as what now *is*, sweeping round from the lane I stood in to the north-east, that is, to the principal road through the village, must be all laid together of course; very pretty meadows, they are, finely sprinkled with timber. (254)

Henry's plans for Thornton Lacey are an attempt at what Duckworth calls "cultural reorientation" ("*Mansfield Park* and Estate Improvements" 38). His improvements are again working to completely alter or remove traditional aspects of the country estate, such as its connections to religion and the village. Henry's alterations are so shocking and distasteful to Edmund and Fanny because they so radically alter the existing landscape (and its cultural signifiers). Much like Sir Thomas's need for radical control over Fanny when she arrives, Henry's plans for Thornton Lacey mark a need to fundamentally alter and subvert the organic. In a subtle but striking parallel, Sir Thomas wishes to transform Fanny from her old self into the woman he wishes her to be, while Henry wishes to transform Thornton Lacey from its old self into something completely new. Both men feel the vain and self-aggrandizing urge to place their mark on the landscape (or women). Henry and Sir Thomas are assured in their patriarchal power that their opinion of worth is correct, and individuals or landscapes who do not meet their definition of worth must be altered according to their specifications. In altering both landscapes and individuals, however, they sacrifice something older, and more precious – whether it is Fanny's childhood strength and self-worth or the cultural tradition of the English landscape.

As Duckworth argues, Henry's improvements signal moral bankruptcy, a negative relation to cultural tradition, and create an ever-increasing fissure between religion and the estate ("*Mansfield Park and Estate Improvements*" 40-41). Henry's suggestions for Thornton Lacey are emblematic of all that Fanny opposes – it removes the past moral, traditional, and social aspects of the estate in favor of pure cosmetics. Although Fanny's ideology of estate improvements does not forbid change, it certainly forbids the unwarranted and dramatic changes favored by Henry. In addition to removing religion, Henry's improvements, in typically Reptonian manner, would also rely on the "eradication of commons, of signs of commerce, and of laborers' homes" (Heydt-Stevenson 263). He wishes to completely manipulate the estate, even the natural landscape, as he insists that "something must be done with the stream" (Austen 254). Much like Sir Thomas's focus on his daughters' outward appearance, Henry's emphasis on the outward appearance of the estate ignores the more meaningful cultural and economic implications of the landscape. The novel indicts Henry and Sir Thomas for similar reasons – both are unable to see past the surface of both the landscape and individuals, causing them to reduce both to hollow pastiches of their own corrupted and materialistic ideologies. Henry wants to completely transform Thornton Lacey from "the look of a...mere Parsonage House" into a "the residence of a man of education, taste, modern manners, [and] good connections" (Austen 255). Henry views his improvements as preventing the estate from being "much less than it is capable of" (Austen 254).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Henry's insistence that he is elevating the estate to all that "it is capable of" echoes the famous, or infamous, landscape designer 'Capability' Brown, a precursor and influence to Repton: "'I see your park has *great capabilities*,' he would say to a prospective customer...[indicating] that his own attitude to the

Henry, much like his sister, clearly views Edmund's ordination and the clergy as a whole as a step down from his aristocratic heritage.

Henry's estate improvements are meant to elevate both Edmund and Thornton Lacey, giving it "the air of a gentleman's residence" (Austen 254). Henry is attempting to separate the house from its religious function, as well as its positive connections to the village and tenants. The removal of these two traditions largely removes morality from Thornton Lacey, or any other estate, and leaves it open to corruption and decline. Principally all the characters except Fanny and Edmund actively work to remove the estate from the village and the church, traditional "disciplining agents" or moral guides of the English estate and countryside (Shea 205). Edmund, not too infatuated with Mary Crawford at this point, summarily denies Henry's plans, assuring him "that very little of [his] plan for Thornton Lacey will ever be put in practice" (Austen 254). Much like Fanny's own minimal and traditional estate improvements, Edmund is "satisfied with rather less ornament and beauty" (Austen 254). Similar to his sisters, Edmund is temporarily charmed and blinded by the sheer beauty and artifice of the Crawfords. Although he speaks out against their estate improvements, he endorses the scandalous theatricals at Mansfield and is willfully ignorant of Mary's deep-rooted moral bankruptcy. In opposition to Fanny and Edmund's ideologies, Henry's improvement plans for Thornton Lacey signal wealth, male power, pride, and control of nature.

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landscapes he created was much the same as Kent's to his – that he was helping them to realize the order latent in them" (Barrell 48).

Particularly through Henry's plans for Thornton Lacey, the novel strives to reflect the social and cultural consequences of such growing control over the landscape – both in control through improvements and control through the enclosures.<sup>12</sup> Although not directly related to estate improvements, enclosure was another strategy employed by wealthy landowners to manipulate the landscape. Both Henry Crawford and contemporary proponents of enclosure largely ignore the economic and social consequences of changes to landscape. As J.M. Neeson notes, “after enclosure and the foreclosure of mortgages, these [farming] families moved to other parishes (if they could afford a settlement) or they left, indentured, for America” (23). Additionally, many farmers were driven into the city to become laborers in the Industrial Revolution. As an unforeseen side effect, “enclosure depopulated [the countryside] and depopulation led to the social and economic transformation of the village” (Neeson 23). Although the novel does not show us the effects of Henry Crawford's proposed improvements to Thornton Lacey, its evocation of enclosure and its sheer radical disregard for economic and social consequences suggests the effects would be calamitous.

Henry Crawford's desired improvements for Thornton Lacey reflect some of the same qualities of “the aggressive work of enclosing common fields” that was “masked by the illusion of non-capitalist, non-exploitative integration with the natural, an aesthetic

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<sup>12</sup>In *Persuasion*, the walk to Winthrop is typified by its “gradual ascent through large enclosures, where the ploughs at work, and the fresh path made spoke the farmer counteracting the sweets of poetical despondence” (Austen 66). Through its description of landscape, the novel forcefully reminds the readers of landscape's reflection of economic and social realities. The enclosures, as well as the farmer, are gaining prominence in the visual landscape and cultural landscape.<sup>12</sup> Despite the obvious changes occurring in the landscape, characters such as Sir Walter cannot accept the signs that their power is waning.

form of the scientific understanding of nature” (Clark 110).<sup>13</sup> Under the seemingly innocent guise of aesthetic improvements, Henry effectively proposes to alter the economic and social realities of the landscape. The novel “is very sensitive towards the social changes leading to the transformation of the countryside by staging the contemporary debate on landscape and improvement” (Battaglia 23). Although a seeming tangent to the main issue of patriarchal control as seen through estate improvement, the issue of class and economics connected to Henry’s Thornton Lacey improvements shows the novel’s deep concern with working people’s inclusion in (or exclusion from) the landscape.<sup>14</sup> Robert Clark highlights “the surviving documents planning for and accounting for...enclosures,” particularly the lack of “consideration of the consequences of enclosure for the other dwellers of the land” (108). Similar to Clark’s observations of enclosure, Henry’s radical plans for Thornton Lacey reveal a remarkable disregard for its effects, both on the natural ecosystem or landscape as well as the lower class residents of the land.

In later dialogue, the novel subtly shows the destructiveness of Henry’s version of estate planning and its connotations of male domination and ruination of women. Mary urges Edmund to remember “what grand things were produced” at Sotherton by Henry “one hot day in August” (Austen 256). Austen is reminding the reader that all Henry

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<sup>13</sup> Austen was well-acquainted with the type of improvements Henry Crawford proposes. Following Humphrey Repton’s advice, Austen’s relative “Thomas Leigh moved a road, turned the front of the house into the back, merged the grounds of the rectory with the grounds of the house into a continuous flowing landscaped park, and broadened the stream into an artificial lake at the new back of the house to create the requisite view over a landscape unobstructed by views of the people who laboured in it” (Clark 112).

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Price and Right “actually recommended the inclusion of gypsies and beggars in picturesque representations,” unlike Repton who very clearly excluded common people in his landscape designs (Galperin 45)

truly produced at Sotherton was an illicit flirtation and affair with Maria, a precursor to her eventual fall. Fanny immediately recognizes the disturbing irony of Mary's statement, and looks at Henry with "an expression more grave, [and] even reproachful" (Austen 256). Mrs. Norris remains ignorant of the negative consequences of the Crawfords' improvements and morals, and remarks "in high good-humour" that the family "had a charming day there" (Austen 256). Fanny, a seemingly meek character unable to express herself or act through much of the novel, is the only character to fully understand the danger inherent in the Crawfords' ideas of estate planning and begin to actively work against it.

Although the novel certainly aligns the Crawfords, as well as many of the other characters, and their estate improvements with immorality and patriarchy, they are not entirely unsympathetic characters. The novel takes great pains to try to understand the causes behind their loose morals, most often tracking their own upbringing or "improvement." Perhaps an even more negative and warning example than the Bertram sisters, the Crawfords reflect the absolute worst that an oppressive patriarchy can produce while attempting to "improve." The Crawfords, themselves transplants after their parents' deaths, face a similar hothouse upbringing that makes them more immoral than other characters. The Crawfords' estate improvements highlight and symbolically present many of these deeper character flaws – greed, subversion of nature, promiscuity. As shown by attention paid to the Bertrams and the Crawfords' upbringing, the novel is highly concerned with the production, or improvement, of individuals and their moral codes. Estate improvements are symbolically and thematically linked to this

improvement of individuals. The novel strongly suggests that the Crawfords' immorality is a result of Admiral Crawford's negative "improvement" or nurturing of them. With the admiral's first introduction, the novel immediately shows his loose morals and negative influence over the children. At the death of Mrs. Crawford, the admiral brought "his mistress under his own roof" (Austen 69). The novel presents the admiral, perhaps even more so than Sir Thomas, to show the destructiveness of certain types of improvement condoned and supported by patriarchy. Mary attributes Henry's loose dealings with women as symptomatic of his closeness to the admiral and asserts that "the admiral's lessons have quite spoiled" him (Austen 71). Similarly, she has been corrupted by the admiral's presence and the negative influence of the city. One of the most emblematic and vulgar scenes displaying Mary's corruption occurs when she discusses Fanny's brother William and the navy. Mary teasingly admits that time in her uncle's house "acquainted [her] with a circle of admirals" and "of *Rears* and *Vices*, [she] saw enough" (Austen 88). In case the vulgarity in her statement went unnoticed, Mary highlights it by telling Edmund, "Now, do not be suspecting me of a pun" (Austen 88). Mary and Henry – beautiful, cultured, and with moments of true sincerity and kindness – are clearly presented as immoral and negative characters, but are unwitting products of the same negative and artificial sort of improvement they uphold.

Likely owing to her unique marginal perspective, Fanny is able to avoid the decaying and corrupting effects of patriarchy while maintaining her own personality and moral vision. However, Fanny only begins to fully accept her role as a moral guide or improver during her tumultuous stay at Portsmouth. If *Sotherton* and *Mansfield Park* are

seen as overly restrictive, the novel presents Portsmouth as a place of “unruled feeling,” chaos, and dirt (Banfield 13). While Fanny struggles against the confines of both nature and women at Mansfield and Sotherton, she is disgusted and severely weakened by the lack of restraint, decorum, or “proper feeling” at Portsmouth. Fanny’s idea of improvement, whether it is for an estate, morals, or an individual, are fully refined by her trip to Portsmouth. She comes to realize “that though Mansfield Park might have some pains, Portsmouth could have no pleasures” (Austen 394). Her vision of Mansfield Park becomes more lofty the longer she remains with the Prices:

At Mansfield, no sounds of contention, no raised voice, no abrupt bursts, no tread of violence, was ever heard; all proceeded in a regular course of cheerful orderliness; every body had their due importance; every body’s feelings were consulted. If tenderness could be ever supposed wanting, good sense and good breeding supplied its place; and as to the little irritations sometimes introduced by aunt Norris, they were short, they were trifling, they were as a drop of water to the ocean, compared with the ceaseless tumult of her present abode. (Austen 393)

Fanny’s remembrances of Mansfield are laughably idealized, glossing over her years of neglect, mistreatment by Mrs. Norris, and fear of Sir Thomas, (Fraiman 809-811).<sup>15</sup> However, her remembrances present *her* ideal of Mansfield Park and foreshadow the close of the novel, which sees Mansfield in relative harmony and lacking the oppressive patriarchy embodied by Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris. Fanny can tolerate Portsmouth only after she receives “the first solid consolation...for the evils of home...in

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<sup>15</sup> Susan Fraiman highlights many critics’ overlooking of “the extreme irony of Fanny’s idealizing retrospection.” “The Mansfield we have seen has been nothing but contention, jealousy, and insensitivity to others. Fanny herself has been its most frequent victim, though one of Austen’s themes is this heroine’s inability to speak her hurt.... Portsmouth, I agree with Yeazell, is crowded, chaotic, greasy, and alcoholic – awash with stereotypes of the urban poor. But for all this, it only literalizes what at Mansfield is disorder of a more profound and hypocritical kind” (Fraiman 809).

a better knowledge of Susan, and a hope of being of service to her” (Austen 397).

Although initially appearing to only be working with individuals, such as Susan, Fanny improving power eventually grows to encompass Mansfield Park itself. In these initial stirrings of her full improving power at Portsmouth, Fanny begins to articulate and flesh out her own ideal estate and its more egalitarian gender relationships. Using Fanny’s version of estate improvement, the novel is showing a more positive society and culture that doesn’t restrict women as narrowly and produces morally responsible people.

Fanny’s estate planning attempts to keep “the place as it is now, in its old state” (Austen 84). She enjoys the seemingly simpler and less ornamented estates of the past. Although this hearkening to the past and tradition could potentially detract from the novel’s rejection of patriarchy, she works to counteract this reading. Fanny’s estate improvement theory is minimal and traditional, mirroring her own quiet ethical power. The drastic improvements and deliberate repression and subversion of nature in the Crawfords’ estate planning can be seen as the same principle guiding Sir Thomas’s “grievous mismanagement” of his daughters (Austen 459). Unlike the patriarchal control of Sir Thomas, Fanny’s estate planning and Austen’s notion of a more matriarchal society places gentle guidance in morality rather than complete restriction by male forces.

Although Fanny’s theories of estate improvement and its necessary connection to her moral improvements appear to be overly traditional and upholding a patriarchal status quo, the novel clearly codes her actions as powerful and slightly defiant. Fanny’s work with Susan marks a shift in the hierarchy of power in the novel. Fanny, a morally upright woman, is shown to be a strong and effective force for morality, replacing Sir Thomas’s

patriarchal and ineffective education and control of his daughters. Much like Fanny on her arrival at Mansfield Park, Susan exhibits a “natural light of the mind which could...distinguish justly,” but suffers from the lack of a positive moral guide in a setting “of very offensive indulgence and vulgarity” (Austen 397). Fanny recognizes that Susan, suffering under the Portsmouth version of patriarchy, cannot fully learn virtue. So, she assumes the traditionally male power of provider and instructor. Although Fanny is initially disapproving of Susan, “she began to hope...[she] might be rectified” in her more vulgar habits through the dispensation of “occasional hints to Susan” (Austen 398). Much like the reader, Fanny is surprised by her new “office of authority” and finds it difficult “to imagine herself capable of giving or informing anyone” (Austen 398). Stepping into the role of an advisor, closely linked to Edmund’s attempts “to direct her thoughts or fix her principles,” allows Fanny to occupy a space the novel almost exclusively reserved for masculine character like Edmund (Austen 399). The novel cements Fanny’s breaking of some gender barriers or traditional roles as “she became a subscriber” of “a circulating library” (Austen 400). Fanny is “amazed at being anything in *propria persona*,” or with her own independence and power. This turning point in the novel has Fanny gain a significant amount of power and control all the other female characters lack. Revealing an early rendering of Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own,” Fanny gains the power to fully step into this role by gaining disposable wealth. For Fanny, “wealth is luxurious and daring” (Austen 400). The diction used to describe Fanny’s assumption of the improver’s role reflects the subversiveness of her actions and a breach from traditional feminine roles. The particular objects Fanny uses to assume

power and control can be seen as traditionally masculine, further reinforcing her breach of gender roles. Fanny becomes a consumer of books and a teacher, breaking into education and literature that women would often be denied. Fanny's gift to Betsey, "a silver knife," carries masculine connotations, but becomes a positive tool in Fanny's improvement of Susan (Austen 398). The novel significantly places Fanny in a more powerful role through her appropriation of traditionally masculine objects, knowledge, or money. Like her subtle estate improvements and transformation of Mansfield, Fanny's actions at Portsmouth don't confront patriarchy directly, but appropriates aspects of the masculine to serve her own needs and ultimately creating a more unornamented and domestically-centered estate.

Fanny's burgeoning power, or acceptance of the power she's maintained internally throughout the novel, is a significant shift in the novel that foreshadows the ultimate triumph of her moral and improvement ideologies. Edmund's influence on Fanny is undeniable, but her own personality, values, and sense of judgment seem, in large part, to be unique or innate to her. Critics have provided varied and complex possible explanations for Fanny's moral power. Banfield argues that neglect ensured that Fanny remained an outsider at Mansfield Park, fostering a neutral and objective gaze that allows her to both observe others around her (Banfield 18-20). This neglect prevented Fanny from developing feelings of "self-importance that blinds the other characters" and allows her to hone her own moral system (Banfield 19). Fanny's unique perspective and moral code readers her as Shea's "disciplining agent," a more effective and powerful force for morality than Sir Thomas's restrictive patriarchy ever managed (Shea 205).

In her navigations of Sotherton's restrictive grounds, Fanny struggles with what Karen Valihora calls the "mediated views of picturesque aesthetics." Fanny typifies the role of a "picturesque tourist" who is struggling with different perspectives being forced upon her (Valihora 281). Valihora's ideas present an interesting layer to the idea that Fanny is working against patriarchal repression, symbolically linked to estate improvement and its reliance on a forced picturesque perspective. All of these critics isolate Fanny as untouched or removed from the action, disconnected from the other characters to a certain extent. Fanny's isolation and neglect, noticed by these critics, help protect her from the damaging and corrupting forces of patriarchy in the novel. Although Fanny certainly suffers under Sir Thomas's severity, her own strong personal will and ethics remain untouched. Like Valihora's "picturesque tourist," Fanny wrestles with these mediated perspectives provided by the patriarchal Sir Thomas and the immoral Crawfords (Valihora 281). However, Fanny rejects these restrictive perspectives in favor of her own ideal world of positive gender relations that are fully realized and accepted as dominant by the end of the novel.

Fanny and Edmund's marriage is a solidification of the novel's shift to new, more positive, gender relations. Glenda Hudson argues that the cousins' marriage is largely freed from the patriarchal norm of male control and female subservience because of their casting as equals in "spiritual, intellectual, and physical affinities" (Hudson 106). Fanny and Edmund, almost doppelgangers throughout the course of the novel, present a much more egalitarian relationship than that between the controlling Sir Thomas and the indolent Lady Bertram. Fanny's marriage, a possibility for continuation or revival of

patriarchal control at the hands of Henry Crawford, instead works to place her in an even greater position of power and moral influence through her relationship with Edmund. Importantly to the discussion of landscape, “within the still dominant eighteenth-century cultural construction, land economy and the power relations that derive from land emphasize continuity, legitimacy, custom, privilege, and autonomy” (Stewart 13). Women were unable to break through the traditional patriarchal control over land and themselves. In the nineteenth century, “the concept of the self as private property...is not available to women and is, in fact, made possible by the exclusion of women from ownership” (Stewart 15). Although Fanny Price does not inherit or become the mistress of Mansfield Park, her marriage to Edmund (much more equitable than Sir Thomas’s and Lady Bertram’s marriage) gives her increased power and access to the estate. With her marriage into the Bertram family, Fanny’s ideals of estate improvement and morality become the dominant forces at Mansfield. Once ensconced at Mansfield Parsonage, Fanny and Edmund produce a “home of affection and comfort” that is “formed for domestic life, and attached to country pleasures” (Austen 468). Their version of estate planning is as far removed from Henry Crawford’s ornamental and lavish improvements as possible. Once returned to Mansfield, Fanny even manages to turn “the parsonage...which...Fanny had never been able to approach but with some painful sensation of restraint or alarm” into something “thoroughly perfect in her eyes” (Austen 468). The parsonage, even more so than Mansfield Park, is distasteful to Fanny because of its connection with Mrs. Norris and, somewhat counter-intuitively, patriarchal control. Not tempered with any positive force like Edmund, the parsonage evokes feelings of

“restraint or alarm” in Fanny, much like the feelings of restraint Maria felt at Sotherton, because it is emblematic of her repression and abuse by patriarchal forces (Austen 468). Fanny, now fully empowered and willing to act and improve, feels free to transform it into something *she* desires and finds pleasing. Her improvement of the parsonage marks a powerful shift in the novel. Fanny is no longer the one who suffers under others’ dictations, impositions, or desires – rather, she is the one who sets the rules and creates both morals and estate improvements in her preferred image.

Fanny becomes, if not fully the mistress of Mansfield Park, the moral inheritor and protector of the estate (Shea 220). The cousins are blissful in marriage, filled with “so much true merit and true love” that their “happiness...must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be” (Austen 468). The ascendancy of Fanny and Edmund’s ideologies, both in estate planning and morality, is linked to the weakening of the old “ruling order” at Mansfield Park. Sir Thomas realizes the folly of his rigid and severe control of his daughters as well as his trust of Mrs. Norris, a powerful tool of his patriarchal control despite her gender. Fanny has successfully resisted and conquered the symbols of male power and limitation, staying true to her own core beliefs. Her value system, notions of the proper role of women, and theories on estate planning are essentially welcomed by Sir Thomas with “perfect approbation and increased regard” by the end of the novel (Austen 456).

The ascendancy of Fanny’s ideologies of improvement and morality at Mansfield may not seem initially positive, however. Lady Bertram, always controlling of Fanny in

her own way, becomes even less willing to part with her in marriage to Edmund. It is only because “Susan remained to supply her place...[and] became the stationary niece” that Fanny is allowed to assume her proper place at Mansfield (Austen 467). Noticeably, Susan does not suffer through the same trials that plagued Fanny. The absence of the unyielding control of Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris, coupled with Susan’s “more fearless disposition and happier nerves,” makes “every thing easy to her there” (Austen 467). In the Price home, Fanny took it upon herself “to give occasional hints to Susan” and instruct her in “notions of what was due to every body” (Austen 398). Properly improved using Fanny’s methods, Susan is now the rightful successor to Fanny’s original role at Mansfield. Susan’s happiness at Mansfield seems assured, but the narrator reminds the reader in an abruptly short sentence that “Susan could never be spared” (Austen 467). The narrator’s ambiguous tone may cause some readers to fear Susan’s repression and a repetition of Fanny’s neglect and abuse. Even so, the novel makes it fairly certain that Susan will not suffer under the same patriarchal control that Fanny endured. Susan is protected because of Fanny’s quiet work dismantling the male-dominated hierarchy at Mansfield, her rejection of the Crawfords’ estate improvements, and the ascendancy of more egalitarian gender relations at Mansfield Park. The novel presents Sir Thomas’s repudiation of his more restrictive patriarchal control as authentic. Sir Thomas, despite his increasingly self-congratulatory feelings, is stricken with “anguish arising from the conviction of his own errors in the education of his daughters, [which] was never to be entirely done away” (Austen 458). As Ferguson argued, he has rejected his old ways of being and has embraced “the new order that seeks more wholesome relations at home”

(Ferguson 131). The novel presents Sir Thomas as genuinely repentant, and establishes that he will always remember the lessons against the rigid management of Mansfield.

Fanny has largely sublimated the corrupting and destructive male forces that once controlled Mansfield and ensured a more traditional, authentic, and domestically-centered estate. The novel seems to be echoing some notions of the Victorian cult of domesticity, although any uplifting of feminine power in the rather bleak patriarchal world of Mansfield is a positive change (Yeazell 147).<sup>16</sup> Although some readers may see Fanny's marriage into the Bertram family as an upholding of patriarchy, the portrayal of estate improvements makes this reading difficult. The patriarchal control exemplified by the Crawfords' estate improvements and Sir Thomas's treatment of Fanny and his daughters has been subsumed and rejected, even by the patriarch himself. Despite Fanny's triumph, the ending still marks some of Austen's "progressive conservatism" found through "an intelligent reinvigoration of the established landed class" (Clark 119). Due to Fanny's unique moral vision, her adaptability and integrity, and her appreciation of the natural world, Fanny's ideologies and power are able to shine through at the end of the novel. She provides the reinvigorating agency and ideology that will sustain the Bertrams, who were slowly slipping into depravity or decay throughout the novel, and ensure the

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<sup>16</sup> Fanny's role at Mansfield, while progressive in the undercutting of Sir Thomas's patriarchy and her own Cinderella-like transformation, cannot be viewed as a twenty-first century feminist ending. Yeazell offers some interesting commentary on the Victorian qualities of *Mansfield Park*:

"Mansfield Park concentrates not on salvation or final ends, but on place and guarded female consciousness. It lacks a Christian sense of history.

Mansfield Park has been called Jane Austen's 'Victorian' novel, and I would like to suggest that what makes it seem Victorian, paradoxically, is just this archaic strain in its thinking. The domestic religion of the Victorians, the culture's anxious insistence on feminine modesty and even 'loathing,' may be more general instances of Mary Douglas's rule that pollution ideas come to the fore whenever the lines of a social system are especially precarious and threatened" (Yeazell 147).

protection of the estate. Despite the tinges of class conservatism, Fanny's success over the restrictive patriarchal forces in the novel reveals some the novel's radical quality. The hope for the landed class, the only source for this "intelligent reinvigoration" is a woman – the female gender is held up as the force capable of saving the landscape and, largely, English society. The novel "allegorize[s] the transition of the aristocratic family throughout the eighteenth century from a patriarchal to a domestic, 'affectionate' and patrilineal structure" (Tuite 103). I agree with Duckworth's assessment that by the end of the novel, those characters embodying the Reptonian style of improvements are denied access to or expelled from Mansfield Park, while Fanny and Edmund, upholding the anti-Reptonian improvements, "become effective guardians of the estate" (Duckworth, "*Mansfield Park* and Estate Improvements" 26). With the novel's triumphant, although somewhat conservative ending, Fanny claims the right to control both herself and the physical landscape. Through Fanny, the novel has decisively answered the questions surrounding the Repton/Price/Knight debates by placing agency in the hands of Fanny. Sir Thomas's oppressive control of the landscape and the women of Mansfield, as well as the Crawfords' artificial improvements, are summarily denied control over the landscape or the female.

*Mansfield Park* continues to be a challenge to readers and critics, an ambiguous and seemingly conflicted novel whose heroine can appear weak and ineffectual. By examining the entwined roles of gender and estate improvements in the novel, and attempting to work out some of their complexities, the reader can see a much more exciting, vivacious, and defiant heroine in Fanny Price. The novel's attention to estate

improvement and its potential subversion of nature is essential and calculated to draw subtle parallels between the Crawfords' estate improvement and patriarchal control.

Fanny's triumph, albeit a relatively conservative one by modern standards, is a significant one. After witnessing several female characters face moral and personal destruction due to patriarchy and struggling under its oppression herself, Fanny is able to find her voice and establish her own ideal estate.

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“THE GREATEST IMPROVEMENT THE HOUSE EVER HAD—”:  
PHYSICAL SPACE, GENDER, AND CLASS IN *PERSUASION*

Although many critics and readers charge Jane Austen with a pronounced blindness to contemporary issues and realities of her time, *Persuasion* reflects and foreshadows some of the dramatic changes occurring in England after the Napoleonic wars. In its depiction of place and landscape, *Persuasion* pays particular attention to the rise of the naval class, the re-orientation of the traditional landed aristocracy, and shifting roles for women. In the novel’s focus on the domestic, it manages to combat the dominant but challenged ideologies of aristocracy and patriarchy. Although the novel seems to favor these shifts in social structure, it simultaneously weakens their permanence by emphasizing the relative ease of deterritorialization. The landscape in the novel begins to be deterritorialized of its aristocratic heritage and reterritorialized with the more meritocratic values of the naval class, as well as greater gender equality. These changes, however, are far from permanent or complete. Territories or social constructions are never permanently fixed but are in a constant state of de/reterritorialization.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the aristocracy maintain their historical power, wealth, and influence, although their eventual decline and fall is foreshadowed by the

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the constant struggle and cycle of de/reterritorialization can be seen in interpretations of Austen’s work. In “Austen’s England,” Wiltshire argues that readers constantly repoliticize what Austen herself depoliticizes, such as slavery in *Mansfield Park* (130).

novel. While the aristocracy is clearly challenged and displaced in the novel, the historical realities of England after the Napoleonic wars show the aristocracy firmly wielding their economic, political, and social power. As Cannadine notes, “as late as the 1870s, these patricians were still the most wealthy, the most powerful, and the most glamorous people in the country” and remained so until “the hundred years that followed [as] their wealth withered [and] their power faded” (2). While Cannadine’s observations on the aristocracy’s waning power are certainly correct and are foreshadowed by the novel, the remnants of aristocratic power in England never completely disappears. Changing gender relationships, perhaps the least analyzed shift the novel outlines, could arguably be the next major deterritorialization that the novel foreshadows. Instead of Admiral Croft’s reterritorialization of Kellynch Hall, perhaps Anne Elliot or another female figure will reterritorialize the physical and social space after the action of *Persuasion* concludes.

Darryl Jones argues that *Persuasion* “is both a reflection and a product of the social changes wrought by the Napoleonic wars” that are “articulated through the vehicle of property ownership and land-management” (166). The novel “raises issues about the constitution of social organization – the status of the aristocracy versus meritocratic conceptions of rank; the roles of women; ideas of militarism and empire” (Jones 166).<sup>18</sup> Although Jones mentions the novel’s treatment of the role of women, he spends little time elaborating on this point. This essay follows Jones’s arguments, but extends them

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<sup>18</sup> Jones notes that several of Austen’s other works, including *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, and other contemporary novels focus on “these concerns about an unproductive aristocracy and their assumptions of social superiority over relatively meritocratic mercantile and professional classes” (175).

beyond his focus on class and the rise of the navy to include the novel's treatment of gender and its critique of patriarchy. By physical space, I refer to the natural external world, including the man-made constructions such as houses or estate improvements, and, later, the seascape. I will track how the shifts in physical space in the novel, particularly at Kellynch Hall and in Anne's connection to the sea, reflect many of the cultural changes occurring simultaneously in the novel.

From the first opening pages, the novel establishes Sir Walter Elliot as a negative example of aristocratic values and apathy. He spends his time absorbed in trappings of the past, returning repeatedly to "the Baronetage," where "he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one" (Austen 3). Most often, "he could read his own history with an interest which never failed" (Austen 3). The history in the Baronetage includes mention of the "a still-born son" who was "born June 1, 1789" (Austen 3). Jones highlights Austen's inclusion of the still-born son, highlighting the fact that his birth date is "from the Revolutionary year of 1789" and functions as "a quite deliberate symbolic gesture...[as] a harbinger of the death of aristocracy" (169). Following Jones' arguments, the stagnation surrounding Sir Walter and Kellynch Hall foreshadows the aristocratic decline in England and paves the way for a rejuvenation of the country led by the naval classes, embodied by the Crofts who later rent Kellynch Hall. Sir Walter is emblematic of the self-absorbed aristocrat who only sees meaning through him or herself. His infatuation with himself, and the aristocratic values he embodies, are reflected in Kellynch Hall itself. The house is full of mirrors, constantly reflecting images of Sir Walter back to himself, and the focus of one of the Crofts' later

improvements. In her analysis of women's writing during Austen's period, Ann Bermingham argues that "fashion – or at least an over-concern with fashion – is a sign of superficiality and vulgar materialism" (94). I would extend Bermingham's emphasis on women writers' "resisting the prevailing notions of women as nothing more than narcissistic fashion dolls" to include a concern over external appearance in general. The novel not only critiques Sir Walter's and Elizabeth's vanity over their fashion and unchanging beauty, but also the exterior markers of their wealth and power – namely, Kellynch Hall and the landscape surrounding it.<sup>19</sup>

The characters' relationship to landscape, their use of it, can reterritorialize themselves and the dominant social order. Sir Walter and Elizabeth engage in this reterritorializing relationship with landscape, infusing their physical spaces with reflections of themselves and aristocratic values. Much like the Baronetage, Kellynch Hall "offers for Sir Walter a reflection of himself" (Jones 178). For Sir Walter, the world can only be seen through himself and must reflect himself. Similar to Austen's other novels, "architecture, buildings, and their furnishings function clearly as metonyms for moral and social qualities" in *Persuasion* (Hunt 7). The novel firmly establishes Sir Walter as the embodiment of the concepts of the old aristocracy, particularly the hierarchical and patronizing views of lower classes and women.

Sir Walter serves as an emblem of outdated and patriarchal control over women, particularly his daughters. Elizabeth Elliot, with her haughty manner and emphasis on

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<sup>19</sup> For an extended look at the picturesque, fashion, and femininity, see Ann Bermingham's "The Picturesque and ready-to-wear femininity."

the exterior, is the only daughter to receive the complete approval of Sir Walter – likely because she is another mirror in which he can see himself. He is only pleased by that which reflects his own image, values, and personality. In indirect discourse, the novel’s narrator blatantly states Sir Walter’s opinion that “his two other children were of very inferior *value*” (emphasis added, Austen 5). Much like Sir Thomas Bertram, his counterpart in *Mansfield Park*, Sir Walter views his daughters through their economic, social, or surface capital. All three of his daughters, even his beloved Elizabeth, are gauged by their value and cast as objects. To Penny Gay, Sir Walter is “the worst of Austen’s failing father figures” because he “lacks affection for anyone but himself” (64). Since Anne Elliot and her sister Mary lack the proud beauty of Elizabeth, as well as her mimicry of her father’s personality, they are deemed less valuable. After Anne’s sister similarly sees Anne as an object, the narrator muses that “to be claimed as a good, though in an improper style, is at least better than being rejected as no good at all” (Austen 27). Perhaps recalling the artificial landscape improvements prominent in *Mansfield Park*, Mary “acquired a little artificial importance, by becoming Mrs. Charles Musgrove” (Austen 5). Mary, deemed worthless by her father, is only able to gain some semblance of importance through her alliance with a man. Sir Walter’s view of his daughters through material worth reflects the critiqued aristocratic ideologies of a person’s inherent and inherited worth, rather than the meritocratic ideals of the rising naval classes embodied by Admiral Croft and Captain Wentworth.

Prior to the opening of the novel, only “a few years before, Anne Elliot had been a very pretty girl” (Austen 5). Much like the slowly deteriorating estate, Anne has suffered

under her father's control. Thanks to aristocratic values guiding her father's control and Lady Russell's misguided advice, Anne's "bloom had vanished early" and she grows "faded and thin" (Austen 5). Unvalued and isolated in a confining gender role at Kellynch Hall, Anne's health necessarily suffers under her father's control. The novel's characters are intimately tied to the landscape – it affects and reflects their health, mental well-being, and social values. As Thomas Hothem argues, "Austen's characters utilize landscape terminology to measure the physical and emotional distances which separate them" (53). Anne and her love interest, Captain Wentworth, "can assess each other emotionally because, by viewing each other in terms of foregrounds, backgrounds, contrasts, prospects, screens, situations, and stations, they remain cognizant of spatial and temporal removes" (Hothem 53). I would extend Hothem's view of the characters' use of landscape terminology to include their understanding of their social and cultural place as well. Not only do "they remain cognizant of spatial and temporal removes," but the characters also remain aware of their social status as a man or woman or a member of certain class. The novel's use of landscape explores shifting class and gender structures, and it also explores Anne Elliot's personal growth. Anne's story tracks "the awakening and expansion of her character" largely played out in the landscape (Bodenheimer 619).

Mismanagement and an inevitable decline typify the aristocratic Elliots' residence in Kellynch Hall as the novel opens. Sir Walter is "growing distressed for money" and turns to "the *Baronetage*...to drive the heavy bills of his tradespeople, and the unwelcome hints of Mr. Shepherd, his agent, from his thoughts" (Austen 8). Sir Walter refuses to give up the exterior signals of wealth, power, and the aristocracy – "journeys,

London, servants, horses, table” (Austen 11). When Lady Russell proposes some modest economic measures to lift the family from debt, Sir Walter objects that “every comfort of life [would] be knocked off” (Austen 11). He clings to these markers of his outdated and culturally irrelevant status as a powerful aristocrat, failing to recognize the shifts occurring in English society as the traditional landed gentry decline in power and importance (although they certainly do not lose all power). Under the increasing threat from creditors, Mr. Shepherd concludes “that nothing would be done without a change of abode” and quickly convinces Sir Walter to agree to leave Kellynch Hall.

While Sir Walter is easily convinced to leave Kellynch Hall for an extended stay in Bath, he is very troubled by the idea of renting his home to strangers. He must “see [Kellynch] in the hands of others; a trial of fortitude, which stronger heads than Sir Walter’s have found too much” (Austen 13). Showing the significance of leasing the country house, the family treats this as “a profound secret, not to be breathed beyond their own circle” (Austen 11). To be seen vacating Kellynch Hall is an admission of the family’s waning economic and social power. Sir Walter simply can’t beat “the degradation of being known to design letting his house” (Austen 13). Although clinging to his heritage and aristocratic self-worth, Sir Walter indistinctly recognizes the *potential* deterritorialization of both his estate and England as a whole that is speeding up with the return of the naval officers; particularly, de/reterritorialization can occur with the acquisition or rental of aristocratic estates (as in the Crofts) and the subsequent cultural and social power that comes with landownership. Once the rising naval classes enter into and begin to reterritorialize the physical space of England, they begin to gain access into

the political and cultural power necessary to change broader paradigms such as gender relations.

Immediately following the decision to rent Kellynch Hall, the novel notes “that the present juncture is much in [the family’s] favor because “peace will be turning all [England’s] naval officers ashore” (Austen 14). The novel’s positioning of the naval officers as “very responsible tenants,” prime candidates to rent Kellynch Hall is hardly coincidental (Austen 14). As Sir Walter and the aristocratic values he represents are questioned, the naval classes step in to take a more prominent role. Mr. Shepherd observes that the naval officers “will be all wanting a home” and that “many a noble fortune has been made during the war” (Austen 14). Mrs. Clay, the daughter of Mr. Shepherd, also supports renting Kellynch Hall to a naval officer, observing that “they are so neat and careful in their ways” (Austen 15). She attempts to soothe Sir Walter’s anxiety over renting to a different class and smooth over the consequences of the shifting social dynamics by maintaining that all of the Elliots’ possessions will be safe. She asserts that “these valuable pictures...if [Sir Walter] should chose to leave them, would be perfectly safe” and that “everything in and about the house would be taken such excellent care of!” (Austen 15). Even “the gardens and shrubberies would be kept in almost as high order as they are now” (Austen 15). Sir Walter bristles at Mrs. Clay’s assurances, stating that if here “were induced to let [his] house,” he was not positive “as to the privileges to be annexed to it” (Austen 15). Even when vacating Kellynch and fifty miles away in Bath, Sir Walter still imagines that he will exercise complete control over

the physical aspects of his house, as well as the amorphous privileges and status conferred by the house.

Sir Walter is unable to relinquish control completely – by dictating some small restrictions or rules, Sir Walter is able to fool himself that his aristocratic superiority is intact and that no cultural or social shifts can occur. He decides to place “restrictions...on the use of the pleasure-grounds” because he “is not fond of the idea of [his] shrubberies being always approachable” (Austen 17). Sir Walter’s need for control over his estate and the natural world largely mirrors Sir Thomas’s patriarchal control in *Mansfield Park*. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests, “the language of response to nature...reflects a condition of character” (605). Sir Walter and Sir Thomas are negative examples of attitudes toward nature. They attempt to subvert the natural world and control it for their own purposes and self-aggrandizement. With this minor control, Sir Walter wants to ensure that some aspect of the estate is reserved for aristocratic use only, ensuring there is not an equation of his social standing with those of his (potentially) naval tenants. Despite Sir Walter’s grasping attempts to preserve the aristocratic territorialization of Kellynch Hall, he is unable to do so. Once the Elliots rent Kellynch Hall it is inevitable that it will be altered, both physically and culturally – namely, by the Crofts, emblematic of the naval class.

Sir Walter’s stagnation and narcissism are directly juxtaposed to the naval officers in the text, particularly Admiral Croft who rents Kellynch Hall from the Elliots. When the time for the Elliots to vacate Kellynch Hall arrives, “the Crofts [take] possession with

true naval alertness” (Austen 38). After moving into Kellynch Hall, the Crofts make a several changes, all of which seem to improve upon the character of the house and of Uppercross. Admiral Croft tells Anne that she “can slip in from the shrubbery at any time; and there [she] will find” where the family “keep[s] [their] umbrellas hanging up by that door” (Austen 100). He questions her whether she thinks it is “a good place,” before shyly correcting himself and observing that the Elliots kept the umbrellas “in the butler’s room” (Austen 100). Although the novel doesn’t seem to offer a ringing endorsement of this change, the following alterations *do* suggest that the Crofts are improving the physical space. Admiral Croft asserts “that the few alterations [they] have made have been all very much for the better” (Austen 100). They have fixed “the laundry-door, at Uppercross,” which is deemed “a very great improvement” by Admiral Croft and “the greatest improvement the house ever had” by Mr. Shepherd (Austen 100). Christine Berberich argues that the middle class “aimed to emulate upper-class and aristocratic landowners and subsequently join the ranks of the gentry” with the eighteenth and nineteenth century’s industrial revolution. I would argue that Austen’s novel presents a counter-narrative. Although they do seek to inhabit the aristocracy’s country estates, the increasingly powerful naval classes shape these physical spaces to fit their own ideologies. The Crofts do not adopt the ideologies and decorations of the Elliots, but instead refashion them according to their own ideals. Rather than include the self-affirming and reflexive decorations (particularly mirrors) that only highlight an static aristocratic past, the Crofts infuse the house with new improvements that invigorate the house with dynamism and a sense of change.

The most humorous improvement the Crofts make at Kellynch involves the erasure of Sir Walter's vanity. Admiral Croft remarks that he "should think [Sir Walter] must be rather a dressy man for his time of life" because he has "such a number of looking-glasses!" (Austen 100). Admiral Croft promptly sent "away some of the large looking-glasses" favored by Sir Walter because he felt "there was no getting away from one's self" (Austen 100). Unlike Sir Walter, Admiral Croft does not need the landscape or his home to be self-aggrandizing or unceasingly reflective of himself. His removal of the mirrors marks the move away from the aristocratic values of privilege and the estate as a marker of personal wealth and power. Now Kellynch Hall reflects the more meritocratic values of the navy because it does not insist on reflecting its owners claims for superiority and power. With the removal of the mirrors, Kellynch Hall no longer imbues the physical space with its occupants' images or traditional aristocratic ideologies. Instead, Kellynch abandons the trappings of vanity and aristocracy with the aid of the Crofts' improvements. Kellynch is becoming more than a reflection of the past and its occupants – it is being reshaped with the meritocratic ideologies of the naval class and more equitable gender relations. Mrs. Croft seems to be just as powerful as her husband – he even tells Anne that his "wife should have the credit" for the wonderful improvements made to Kellynch Hall in the Elliots' absence (Austen 100). Through its treatment of landscape, the novel aims to restore the infinite possibilities of de- and reterritorialization. While the novel focuses on the reterritorialization of gender and class, it leaves the possibility for an infinite number of potential reterritorializations. While the rise of the naval class is important to the positive reterritorialization of

England, the novel suggests that the simultaneous reterritorialization of women's roles and their increased power is a major catalyst for this change.

The Crofts represent the shifts in English social hierarchy, as well as in gender relationships within the novel. Although both of the Crofts embody the changing social and gender relations in England, Mrs. Croft is singled out, by her husband and the novel's treatment, as the most positive improving force. As Elaine Jordan suggests, the "heroes are prize-winners in the sphere of naval adventure, supporting colonial trade and imperial ambition however little they know the history they are making; and the strong women are supporters too" (39). The novel lifts up both the naval classes and powerful women as the new forces positively altering and reterritorializing England. When first introduced, Mr. Shepherd describes Mrs. Croft as "more conversant with business" than her husband and states that she "asked more questions about the house, terms, and taxes, than the Admiral himself" (Austen 19). Although she is still subordinate to Admiral Croft, the novel presents her as a strong woman who actually exceeds her husband's knowledge and abilities in traditionally masculine areas such as business. To a limited extent, her social standing is also a benefit to her household and husband – she is "not quite unconnected in this country, any more than her husband" (Austen 19). As John Mee argues, Mrs. Croft "directly oversteps the traditional division of private and public into separate spheres on the basis on gender" and eventually "takes the domestic beyond the separate spheres in so far as she turns her husband's ship into a home" (82). Mrs. Croft, and later Anne, reveal "the extent to which this period of crisis [the Napoleonic Wars] allowed women to fashion a public role for themselves via the idea of the home front" (Mee 82). As

William Galperin notes in “On Women and Men,” Austen likely read Thomas Gisborne’s *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*. Interestingly, Gisborne’s conduct book for women cautions against the negative consequences of the mobile life of military officers and their wives. Gisborne’s suggests that “disuse to a settled home...tends to create a fondness for roving, an eagerness for amusement, an inveterate propensity to card-playing” and other sins, including a flighty disposition and fondness for base reading material (354). *Persuasion*’s positive portrayal of Mrs. Croft and Anne, amidst several fixed and landed characters with little moral or intellectual capital, refutes such portrayal of military officers’ wives. Rather than fall into potential moral dangers, Mrs. Croft and Anne draw strength from their roles as officers’ wives, particularly the chance to maintain close contact with their loved one as they travel the world. In expanding beyond the traditional domestic sphere, even blurring the military and domestic, Mrs. Croft becomes a more empowered female role model for others, including Anne, to emulate.

The deterritorialization of England during the times of war and crisis allowed for the twofold reterritorialization embodied by Mrs. Croft and Mrs. Anne Wentworth – with the rise of the naval class, women are able to create new spaces and roles to inhabit free from some of the restrictions of the past. As Jill Heydt-Stevenson suggests, Austen’s novels merge “arguments about the construction of a national identity...with arguments about the construction of womanhood and the construction of landscape” (“Liberty” 261). Austen’s novels examine “the issue of how much control one should exert over a landscape” and are closely linked to “the treatment of and expectations of women”

(Heydt-Stevenson, "Liberty" 264). Further shifting the focus towards the role of women, the narrator extensively describes Mrs. Croft but spends little time describing Admiral Croft. Mrs. Croft's comportment "gave importance to her person" and her "weather-beaten complexion," so deplored by Sir Walter, made her seem wiser than her years (Austen 38). Mrs. Croft is an unabashed, and direct woman – "her manners were open, easy, and decided, like one who had no distrust of herself, and no doubts of what to do" but still free from "coarseness, or any want of good humor" (Austen 38-39). Unlike Sir Walter, Mrs. Croft harbors an inner assurance and positivity, despite her rough exterior. Admiral and Mrs. Croft (as well as Anne and Captain Wentworth later in the novel) are the "prize-winners" in the novel (Jordan 39). Along with Mrs. Croft, Anne eventually "recognize[s] the naval life as a means by which a woman can stay within proper social boundaries and yet push beyond those boundaries into 'geographical pockets of excess' from which women are normally excluded" (Wenner 94).

Although Anne and Mrs. Croft are the most obvious exemplars the novel holds up for the new England, the reterritorialization penetrates into the aristocracy itself, to a certain extent, in the Musgrove family. The Musgroves stand in an intermediate position between the aristocratic and negative Elliot patriarch and the non-aristocratic but more positive Crofts. The Musgroves and the Elliots are intimately connected and "were so continually meeting, so much in the habit of running in and out of each other's house" that the distinctions between their homes and families are often blurred (Austen 29). Despite the family's interconnectedness, the Musgroves stand out sharply against the stagnation of Sir Walter and Elizabeth. The Musgroves' home combines some of the

traditional aristocratic heritage of the Elliots with the progressiveness of the Crofts. Much “like their houses,” the Musgroves “were in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement” (Austen 32).

Blatantly revealing some of the novel’s underlying tactics regarding landscape and its embodiment of ideologies or social realities, the narrator collapses the personas of the Musgroves with the physical space they occupy. Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove “were in the old English style, and the young people in the new” (Austen 32). Utilizing the vernacular of design, the novel highlights the combination of old and new ideologies and temperaments embodied by the Musgroves. The Musgrove’s “Great House” in Uppercross is uniquely combinatory, particularly in its “old-fashioned square parlour, with a small carpet and shining floor” (Austen 32). The Musgrove daughters are reinvigorating or reterritorializing the parlor, despite its old-fashioned design, by:

...gradually giving the proper air of confusion by a grand piano-forte and a harp, flower-stands and little tables placed in every direction. Oh! Could the originals of the portraits against the wainscot, could the gentlemen in brown velvet and the ladies in blue satin have seen what was going on, have been conscious of such an overthrow of all order and neatness! The portraits themselves seemed to be staring in astonishment. (Austen 32)

The novel imagines the portraits as reflections and representations of the aristocracy, aghast at the changes wrought by the younger Musgroves. The Musgrove daughters’ alteration of the traditional and conservative design of the house reveals the major shifts that are occurring in the aristocracy – the shift away from past values and, to a certain extent, the increasing independence and control women wield. Although the

novel presents the changes as dramatic, it reserves judgment on whether these alterations are improvements or not. Unlike the Crofts' improvements at Kellynch, the young Musgrove's improvements do not clearly benefit the house. Showing a touch of what Robert Clark calls her "progressive conservatism," Austen does not whole-heartedly endorse rampant and heedless improvement (119). By subtly highlighting the potential disorder the Musgrove's improvements create, the novel further weakens the viability of aristocratic control over future improvements. Rather, the novel suggests that improvement must come from forces outside of the traditional aristocratic lines of thought – it must come from people like the Crofts or Anne and Wentworth who are willing to balance improvements with a respect for the past.<sup>20</sup>

Although the novel does not present the Musgrove daughters as the beacon for positive change, they seem to wield a fair amount of control and autonomy similar to Mrs. Croft (despite the Musgroves' aristocratic flightiness as compared to Mrs. Croft's business savvy). Unlike Mrs. Croft and, later, Anne Elliott, the Musgrove daughters' autonomy is largely a fiction that will dissipate with their marriages to traditional aristocratic suitors. Although the novel does not go to great lengths to emphasize the age of the elder Musgroves (or Sir Walter), the reader is acutely aware that this older generation will necessarily die and be replaced by the younger generation. While the Musgroves are in a state of alteration, only Mrs. Croft, and Anne Elliot serve as largely positive examples of the face of a new England.

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<sup>20</sup> Fanny Price shows the same mixture of an improving and preserving mindset.

Although the novel shows Anne Elliot as a more positive and powerful image of female autonomy than the Musgroves or her sisters, she is not free from the tinge of aristocratic. She worries that “a beloved home [must be] made over to others” and that “all the precious rooms and furniture, groves, and prospects, beginning to own other eyes and other limbs” (Austen 38). While she sees the economic necessity of renting Kellynch, she shares some of her father’s anxiety over the alterations to the estate. Unlike her father, however, Anne’s fears quickly disappear after she meets the Crofts. Upon meeting Mrs. Croft, Anne “had satisfied herself in the very first half minute, the instant even of introduction, that there was not the smallest symptom of any knowledge or suspicion on Mrs. Croft’s side to give a bias of any sort” (Austen 39). Personal interaction with these “usurping” naval classes shows Anne their positive qualities and removes her resistance to their reterritorialization of Kellynch Hall. Anne comes to feel that “she could not but in conscience feel that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that Kellynch Hall had passed into better hands than its owners’” (Austen 98-99).

When revisiting Kellynch:

Anne had no power of saying to herself, ‘These rooms ought to belong only to us. Oh, how fallen in their destination! How unworthily occupied! An ancient family to be so driven away! Strangers filling their place!’ (Austen 99)

Unlike her father and elder sister, Anne is able to alter herself and her own beliefs as the social and economic realities of England change. She accepts the rising naval classes and, as the novel progresses, attempts to create a new respectable role for the upper classes free from the vanity and stagnation seen in her father. Anne’s anxieties

over the Crofts' use of Kellynch Hall is also mitigated by her past romance with Captain Wentworth, himself a naval officer.

The return of Captain Wentworth both thrills and terrifies Anne as she fights to understand her feelings. The walk to Winthrop is one of the most significant scenes revealing the tension between the separated couple and the role of landscape in Anne's growing vivaciousness and autonomy. Anne works "not to be in the way of anybody" and to draw "pleasure...from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves, and withered hedges" (Austen 65). Like Fanny Price, Anne appreciates the natural landscape more than those around her and "repeat[s] to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn" (Austen 65). Austen's use of picturesque terminology and ideals also reflects the social and economic changes affecting England. In the novel, "the picturesque figures as a kind of landscape, even a fiction, which may be either understood or abused by its speakers" (Bodenheimer 607). Unlike Sir Walter, Anne is able to witness and properly understand the picturesque and the natural world, aiding her in her escape from his restrictive control. As Ann Bermingham suggests, "the Picturesque awakened a large segment of the population to the realisation that aesthetic judgment was not the gift of the privileged few but could be learned by anyone and applied to just about anything" (87). Opening up the aesthetic for everyone, the picturesque "encouraged the middle classes to aestheticise their lives" (Bermingham 87). The novel tracks the rise of the naval classes, their physical inclusion in the landscape of the aristocracy and subsequent deterritorialization. The novel's underpinning terminology of the picturesque itself reflects these equalizing alterations.

Just as other classes are gaining access to new physical spaces in England, they simultaneously gain access to the ideology and rhetoric needed to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of the landscape. The landscape itself, particularly Kellynch Hall, is de- and reterritorialized as its ownership shifts.

Alistair M. Duckworth argues that Anne is especially sensitive “to the external autumnal scene, and to the poetic associations it arouses” during the walk to Winthrop because she is in “her period of loss and separation” (287). Extending this argument, Duckworth suggests that Austen’s invocation of “the picturesque is not merely a frame for viewing scenery...but a means of deepening the novel’s concern with the passage of time” (287). Duckworth does not focus on the social and cultural changes accompanying this passage of time, but I would suggest the novel is equally interested in these changes. Anne’s sensitivity to the picturesque qualities of the autumnal scene (itself a transition between the verdant life of summer and icy barrenness of winter) comes at a time of both personal and cultural loss. While Anne is mourning the loss of Captain Wentworth, the novel is detailing the loss of old aristocratic values and control, although certainly not mourning the loss. Just as Anne is invigorated by the landscape of Lyme, directly juxtaposed to this autumnal scene of decay, the novel subtly suggests that England will be energized by the cultural shifts that are occurring.

Continuing the walk to Winthrop, Anne begins to blend into the landscape “so completely...that she cannot even be seen” (Heydt-Stevenson, “Unbecoming” 65-66). Confronted with the approaching “Captain Wentworth and Louisa in the hedge-row,”

Anne strives to conceal herself in the landscape (Austen 67). She stays stealthily still, protected by “a bush of low rambling holly” (Austen 69). The whole is a metonymy for England, old England. Anne’s collapse into landscape further underscores the novel’s insistence on the connection between landscape and individuals. Anne merges with the landscape, becoming an embodiment of the landscape and its significance in reflecting, and slightly resisting, England’s changing social structures. As in her rejuvenation at Lyme, Anne utilizes the physical spaces around her to move outside of confining parameters, often working toward her ultimate objective, Captain Wentworth. While she does not gain the strength she does at Lyme, during the walk to Winthrop, Anne uses the physical landscape to access roles (in this case, largely, that of a spy) that lend her power previously denied to her. Anne’s connection to the landscape allows her to subvert the image crafted by her family – that of a weak and faded nonentity – and slowly gain enough power to enter the new social world embodied by Mrs. Croft.

The walk to Winthrop is typified by its “gradual ascent through large enclosures, where the ploughs at work, and the fresh path made spoke the farmer counteracting the sweets of poetical despondence” (Austen 66). Through its description of landscape, the novel forcefully reminds the readers of landscape’s reflection of economic and social realities. The enclosures, as well as the farmer, are gaining prominence in the visual landscape and cultural landscape.<sup>21</sup> Despite the obvious changes occurring in the landscape, characters such as Sir Walter cannot accept the signs that their power is

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<sup>21</sup> For an extended look at Austen’s use of enclosure in her novels, as well as the use of enclosures by Austen’s family, see Robert Clark’s “Jane Austen and the Enclosures.”

waning. Sir Walter ignores the long-term repercussions of the changing landscape because his current economic status remains unchanged. Enclosure and the shifting English landscape largely benefited aristocrats when first implemented. Sir Walter belongs to the class that Robert Clark identifies as viewing “the land as a quasi-sacred assurance of the continuity of values and ways of life of deep importance to country” (123). Clark argues that “change...was represented as only acceptable if it could be accommodated to the ideological margins” (123). Although Clark goes on to suggest that Austen had no reason or desire to write about the enclosures, I suggest that Austen addresses the issues of a changing landscape in different ways. Rather than focus on the enclosures, Austen’s novels attempt to reveal the alterations affecting both social constructions (such as gender or class) and the landscape. The mention of hedgerows, innocuous enough, reminds the reader that the party is “proceeding down the ‘backbone’ of the barriers man cultivated to enclose the land and displace the literally picturesque scene into a strictly pictorial one” (Heydt-Stevenson, “Unbecoming” 65).

Perhaps the novel’s most praised landscape is that of Lyme Regis, where Anne experiences great renewal and claims greater agency. The narrator remarks that “a very strange stranger it must be, who does not see charms in the immediate environs of Lyme, to make him wish to know it better” (74). Lyme’s wilder beauty is a sharp contrast to the stagnant and carefully ordered Kellynch Hall under Sir Walter’s control. Like other Austen heroines, Anne embodies a connection “with the wilder, unornamented, picturesque landscape” (Heydt-Stevenson, “Liberty” 261). I would extend Heydt-Stevenson’s landscape to include the seascape as well, particularly since that is where

Anne is rejuvenated and gains independence (with the aid of Captain Wentworth). The novel describes “its high grounds and extensive sweeps of country” and “its sweet, retired bay, backed by dark cliffs” as the perfect place “for sitting in unwearied contemplation” (Austen 74). The liberation of Lyme created by its seeming wildness and lessened human presence, at least compared to other physical spaces in the novel such as Kellynch Hall or Bath, reflects the growing freedom both Anne and Wentworth feel. The novel’s shift to the more open seascape at Lyme highlights the increased freedom for the naval class to achieve a higher class status and women such as Anne to break free from some of their traditional and confining roles.

The physical space of Lyme embodies the more fluid gender and social structures the novel explores. The Cobb’s mixture of “old wonders and new improvements,” reflects the shifting social relations in postwar England. Although Anne “persist[s] in a very determined, though very silent disinclination for Bath,” she enjoys and draws strength from Lyme. As Jill Heydt-Stevenson suggests, “the excursion to Lyme signals [Anne’s] entry into the picture proper, her movement from the background to the foreground” (“Unbecoming” 67). Anne is transformed and reinvigorated by Lyme, counteracting the slow but steady waste she suffered while under her father’s control at Kellynch Hall. At Lyme, Anne “increasingly takes part in conversations, even at times leading them, particularly in dialogues with her new friends in the Navy community (Gay 65). The naval community allows women like Anne the opportunity to claim a voice and articulate their own identity. After her return from Lyme, even her father notes her altered physical appearance, as “he began to compliment her on her improved looks”

(Austen 115). Always aware of physical appearance, Sir Walter notes that Anne was “less thin in her person, in her cheeks” and that “her skin, her complexion, [were] greatly improved” (Austen 115). The shift to Lyme, and its beneficial effects on Anne, underscore the positive changes in social structures and gender relations. Doris Davis argues that “Anne miraculously renews herself at the sea” (34). Freed from the oppressiveness of her father’s country house, Anne is able to flourish and gain some autonomy. Similarly, Lyme’s port economy marks a shift from the stagnation and lack of economic viability seen at Sir Walter’s Kellynch Hall. The landscape of Lyme both reflects and aids deterritorialization. By the end of the novel, Anne relates to “a landscape where neither complete domination nor submission is required of her” (Wenner 102). Lyme embodies and offers a model for the future of England – one with a greater emphasis on naval economies and trade, lessened power of the aristocracy, and greater independence for women.

As the novel progresses, it abandons the typical landscape of the English countryside and estate for both Bath and Lyme. The novel’s insistent shift away from the countryside and estate to the beach at Lyme reveal the novel’s concern with the changes occurring in England. To Davis, “the topography [of Lyme’s seascape] suggests timelessness, [but] it also reflects change, for the surrounding land slips easily into the sea” (37). The novel creates “the sensation...of both the town and landscape plunging uncontrollably into the sea” (Davis 37). Although significant in the shift away from Kellynch Hall, the novel still critiques Bath. Directly contrasted to Lyme, Bath is still a bastion for the older values of the aristocracy, thereby prohibiting Anne from realizing

her full potential. Bath, the spot chosen by Sir Walter and Elizabeth for the family's temporary home, shares many of the aristocratic and narcissistic qualities of Sir Walter's version of Kellynch Hall. The senior Elliot and his daughter conclude "that Bath more than answered their expectations in every respect" and that "their house was undoubtedly the best in Camden Place" (Austen 107). Anne is slightly incredulous "that her father should feel no degradation in his change, should see nothing to regret in the duties and dignity of the resident landowner, [and] should find so much to be vain of in the littlenesses of a town" (Austen 109). Although Anne seems to be expressing stereotypically aristocratic pride and ideologies over the proper role and comportment of a wealthy landowner, she is also condemning her father's aristocratic narcissism. Anne recognizes the shifting social structure which has displaced her family, and is repulsed by her father and sister's refusal to alter their vanity and change with the times.

Despite their change in physical location, Sir Walter and Elizabeth cling to their self-aggrandizing notions and do not attempt to find a circumscribed, but still aristocratically respectable, existence as landowners. Rather than graciously accepting the improvements and rental of Kellynch Hall by the Crofts as Anne does, Sir Walter and Elizabeth refuse to acknowledge an alteration in their lifestyle. Instead, they continue to live a lifestyle of vain opulence in their rather pitiful accommodations in Bath. Sir Walter pursues a reclamation or reinstatement of the past social order and his aristocratic values. He attempts to recapture the past, to ensure his continued power, and inevitably fails and produces nothing positive. Interestingly, the guidebooks of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century "emphasize the city's respectability, religiosity, charity and order...though the

impression is one of dullness, sliding into shabby gentility” (Forsyth 39). Much like Sir Walter, Bath attempted to cling to a past and untrue image of pure gentility and aristocracy. Despite the fact that Bath “became a place of commerce and industry” in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, “the city clung relentlessly to its old image as a genteel spa town” (Forsyth 39-40). Ironically, Sir Walter seeks refuge in a town that is in the process of drastically changing its economic and social structure much like the changes foreshadowed by the Crofts’ rental of Kellynch. Bath becomes an emblem of an increasingly outdated cultural construct, likely replaced by the new social orders embodied by the naval officers like Admiral Croft and Captain Wentworth. Anne and Wentworth pursue the rediscovery and selection of a *new* social system, allowing them to find happiness, love, and new physical and social spaces to occupy. Through the deterritorialization of aristocratic spaces like Kellynch Hall, the naval classes and women produce new social and cultural systems. The de/reterritorialized landscape allows humanity to reach beyond existing modes of thinking or models of the world (such as rigid class or gender relationships). Rather than imposing a limit as Sir Walter would prefer, the new landscape produced throughout the novel provides a passage into these new models and systems. The new landscape is largely embodied by the rented Kellynch Hall – it is improved both physically and culturally. As the Crofts alter Kellynch’s physical space, they simultaneously uphold the ideals of greater gender equality and meritocracy.

While the novel does not indict Mary as harshly as it does Sir Walter and Elizabeth, she is still more infected by their aristocratic values than Anne. After coming to Bath, “she was exactly in a temper to admire everything as she ought, and enter most

readily into all the superiorities of the house, as they were detailed to her” (Austen 173). She offers “no demands on her father or sister, and her consequence was just enough increased by their handsome drawing-rooms” (Austen 173). While Anne feels shame at her father’s unchanged vanity even in the degradation of his dwelling and social stature, Mary offers no resistance to her father and sisters’ preening praise of their rental lodging. Bath, at least a Bath populated with her father and like-minded aristocrats, is trying for Anne. The entrance of Sir Walter and Elizabeth “seemed to give a general chill” to all present and “Anne felt an instant oppression” (Austen 178). At Bath, Anne is reduced to her former roles of silent and discounted daughter. Despite the relatively negative portrayal of Bath, the town also highlights the increasing changes affecting English society. Men and women of all backgrounds and classes intermingle in Bath. As Penny Gay notes, the naval community come together “‘in little knots’ in the Bath Streets – including Mrs. Croft (67). Although there are recognized streets and areas that are marked for the upper classes, the city itself is a mixture of classes. While Sir Walter attempts to preserve the old England that is being deterritorialized in his rented lodgings at Bath, he has little influence outside of this small space. He is literally constrained and limited in his rental property, while all around him the naval classes and women seize greater power and de/reterritorialize England. Although not completely deterritorialized, Sir Walter and the ideologies he represents have been severely limited over the course of the novel.

Anne’s restoration, sparked by the landscape of Lyme, allows her to seize autonomy, gain a greater voice, and ultimately instigate the conversation spurring

Wentworth to proclaim his love for her. In the famous scene during which Anne debates Captain Harville, she explicitly addresses the act of writing and women's roles. Captain Harville suggests that numerous "songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness" (Austen 185). He anticipates Anne's objection that "these were all written by men," to which Anne readily agrees (Austen 185). She asks that there be "no reference to examples in books" because "men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story" and that "the pen has been in their hands" (Austen 185). Anne is now taking charge to correct this, taking up the figurative pen to write her own identity and history. Similarly, she seizes control of her romantic relationship in order to "write" herself in ways previously denied to her and gain the object previously denied to her – Captain Wentworth.

By the novel's close and Anne and Captain Wentworth's marriage, he is now worth "five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and [is] as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him" (Austen 195). Unlike the indebted Elliots, Wentworth "has both substantial savings and substantial credit...enough to maintain a horse and carriage, enough to belong to the upper classes, and enough to move in all social circles" (Galperin 249). Consequently, he is "no longer nobody" and is "esteemed quite worthy to address the daughter of a foolish, spend-thrift baronet" (Austen 195). Even Sir Walter and Elizabeth must grudgingly accept Captain Wentworth and the rising naval class. Although they maintain their aristocratic snobbery and superiority, they must accept his new economic and social power. Replacing past views of a proper Englishman, Captain Wentworth "represent[s] a new kind of masculinity and a new kind of Englishness"

(Harris 91). Significantly, Captain Wentworth actually achieved his fortunes and status through his career in the navy. Wentworth did not rely on personal connections or affluence to purchase his way to a higher status – he has shaped it entirely himself. Wentworth is a sharp contrast to another naval figure in *Mansfield Park*, William Price, Fanny Price’s brother. William received his position and entrance into the navy due to connections established by Henry Crawford. Not only does William need these connections to succeed, but the connections come from morally bankrupt individuals. Although William earns his position after entrance into the navy, the novel still presents connection or affluence as a prerequisite for entry. *Persuasion* removes these remaining barriers, granting Wentworth access to the navy through his own merit. *Persuasion* presents a more meritocratic vision of the navy than *Mansfield Park*, further strengthening its critique of individuals who do not actually earn their fortunes.<sup>22</sup>

In one of its most blatant indictments of Sir Walter, the novel states that Sir Walter “had not had the principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him” and who could not “give his daughter...the share of ten thousand pounds [to] which” she was entitled (Austen 195-196). The novel continues to weaken the aristocracy’s claims for superiority more fully exposing the reterritorialization of England. *Persuasion*, much like “*Mansfield Park*[.] allows for the perpetuation, not the destruction of a land-owning family through an infusion of

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<sup>22</sup> The more meritocratic picture portrayed in *Persuasion* is not meant to suggest that the navy operated in this free and egalitarian manner in reality. J.V. Beckett notes that “purchase [of officer titles] was never officially permitted” in the navy but that roughly “one officer in twenty-seven was aristocratic in the revolutionary and Napoleonic war years, compared to one in fifty in the...regular army” (410). The patronage system was not entirely absent from the navy, but the novel does not suggest significant barriers to Wentworth’s rise on his own talents.

specifically female virtue from outside” (Mee 80). Like several of Austen’s marriage endings, Anne’s marriage to Captain Wentworth combines both conservatism and change. Anne gains greater autonomy and a more egalitarian gender role, but allows for the continuation of the Elliot family. However, I would disagree with Mee that the landed Elliot family is not wholly destroyed. Although not completely eradicated (Sir Walter finds a cramped refuge in Bath), the family has been fundamentally altered and the locus is no longer the vain aristocrats, but the virtuous and more meritocratic Anne and Wentworth.

Despite her aristocratic background, Anne does not rigidly enforce the hierarchies of the past and her father’s aristocracy. Instead, as John Mee argues, she “brings old blood into an alliance with Wentworth’s meritorious exertions on behalf of the nation” (80). Captain Wentworth’s naval career, despite its rising prominence and power in England, does come with some personal risks. The only thing that “could ever make [Anne’s] friends wish that tenderness less” was Captain Wentworth’s profession (Austen 199). Hanging over Anne, “the dread of a future war [was] all that could dim her sunshine” (Austen 199). While “she gloried in being a sailor’s wife,” she is simultaneously anxious over his safety and the potential for war. *Persuasion* makes explicit the implication in *Mansfield Park* that the heroine’s “moral resolution supports the [war] effort on a broader and more fundamental front” (Mee 82). Mee points to the novel’s ending, with “Anne’s role *at home* in supporting” Captain Wentworth, as highlighting “the importance of the domestic virtues to the war effort” (82). Mee extends his argument, suggesting that critics frequently ignore “the [novel’s] suggestion that

‘domestic virtues’ may actually be more important to the war effort than the military endeavours of the navy” (82). As the novel suggests, the naval “profession...is...more distinguished in its domestic virtues than its national importance” (199). Although Austen would not slight the importance of naval victories, the novel suggests that the highest virtue of the naval profession lies not in national defense or victory, but in their domestic lives, particularly the equitable relationships seen in Anne and Wentworth and the Crofts. While I agree with Mee’s basic arguments, the novel leaves Anne with the very likely possibility of traveling the world with Wentworth, similar the Mrs. Croft’s travels with her husband. While the domestic sphere is important, altered, and somewhat more equitable for the naval classes, the novel does not strictly relegate women to a landed physical space. Instead, the novel goes out of its way to liberate women from a fixed physical location – much like their husbands, they gain a certain amount of freedom to move around. The dual reterritorializations surrounding gender and class are dependent on one another. Anne’s domestic role is fundamental to the navy, as Mee suggests, and Anne’s greater autonomy stems from her union with Captain Wentworth. Anne gains greater power and freedom through her connection with Wentworth. Although Anne “needs to connections of a good man and the understanding of society to some degree...[she] pushes her boundaries outward as much as she dares” (Wenner 102). The reterritorializations occur simultaneously because they share similar ideologies and strengthen one another. The dual reterritorializations also aid one another’s permanence and protects against a quick reinstatement of past aristocratic ideologies. The Crofts and

Anne and Wentworth reflect the codependent, yet still singular, relationship that typifies the novel's imagined new England.

Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth's union marks the novel's final suggestion of the reterritorialization of England. Wentworth's union with the aristocratic Elliot family reveals the increasing power and influence of the naval classes, while Anne's relationship with Wentworth shows more equitable and positive relationships between the genders. Throughout *Persuasion*, landscape (and seascape) are used to explore the dual de- and reterritorializations of class and gender. Contrary to popular opinion, Austen's novels exhibit a deep understanding of contemporary issues and events. *Persuasion* explores the social, cultural, and economic changes occurring in England after the Napoleonic War through its use of landscape. Rather than fleeing from the real world in her treatment of the domestic, Jane Austen instead presents a seemingly domestic portrait as a way to explore issues of class and gender.

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