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*Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 458.  
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The Sublime Uniting Romanticism and Feminism in Jane Austen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from  
The College of William and Mary

by

Elizabeth Brooke Powell

Accepted for \_\_\_\_\_  
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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Williamsburg, VA

December 12, 2011

In a letter to her nephew in 1816, Jane Austen describes her work as “the little bit (two inches wide) of Ivory” in contrast to her nephew’s “strong, manly, spirited Sketches” (Austen *Letters* 323). Through her characteristic playful wit and irony, Austen reiterates the stereotypical difference between a masculine and feminine writing style while simultaneously downplaying the actual broad and diverse array of issues addressed in her work. Austen’s irony and understatement perhaps then explain partially why, despite the fact that she has always been considered canon-worthy, scholars excluded her from a place within the Romantic circle. Her immediate satire linked her to the Augustan satirists and hid the polysemous nature of her works. Additionally, the scholarly separation between studies of poetry and prose helped limit a Romantic understanding of Austen. The rise in women’s studies in the 1980’s brought other women writers and poets into scholarly consideration of Romanticism, and also new interpretations of Jane Austen. With the advent of a new understanding of Romanticism and the rise in women’s studies, scholars began to examine Austen more closely and consider her role within the Romantic Period and feminism. In my thesis I will explore both of these positions.

Although Austen’s inclusion within the Romantic Period remains debated by critics and scholars, in recent years the conception of the Romantic Period has broadened from the narrow field of the five or six main poets to embrace a theory of Romanticisms, recognizing the vast collection of themes and concerning occurring during the literature of the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the discussion of Austen and the Romantic Period changed from a question of inclusion to a question of the extent and manner of inclusion. Recent

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Lovejoy first coined the term “Romanticisms” in his article “On the Discrimination of Romanticisms” (1924). However, tensions between scholars like Lovejoy, arguing for the futility of “Romantic,” and those like Rene Wellek, arguing for the common themes of Romanticism, remained present for decades following Lovejoy’s article. For example, only in the 1970’s and 1980’s did the boundaries of criticism on British Romanticism break to consider women as “Romantic” writers.

editions of companions to anthologies to British Romanticism note the complexity of the period and instead of futile attempts to mangle the conflicting diversities under one, constricting definition, inform the reader of that impossibility. Scholars now recognize how they previously “constructed notions of a unified Romanticism on the basis” of the works of only five or six poets: the first generation writers Wordsworth, Coleridge, and sometimes Blake, and the second generation Shelley, Byron, and Keats (Stillinger 1). The “constructed” Romanticism only limited the field and ignored the contradictions not only between the main poets but also the contradictions within the individual poets themselves. While the broadening Romanticisms certainly more happily welcome Austen, I will argue that Austen too shares concerns with even the earlier “constructed” Romanticism, by illustrating parallels between Wordsworth’s “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and each of Austen’s six completed novels in turn, along with the unfinished *Sanditon*. After examining how those broader themes of the Romantic Period are manifested in the novels, I will limit my discussion to how Austen exhibits characteristics of Wordsworth’s sublime in her novels. Finally, I will argue that, in a feminist strain, Austen engages with the sublime in her landscapes and in other forms in a subtle attack against the egotistical masculinity of Wordsworth’s sublime and the patriarchal society depicted within her novels and their nineteenth-century readers.

While proposals for a “Romantic” Austen began in the 1970’s, the majority of these proposals depended on an expanded and changed perception of Romanticism or limited the parallel between Austen and Romanticism to one Romantic theme, one Romantic poet, one Austen character, or one Austen novel.<sup>2</sup> In her work *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975),

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<sup>2</sup> In 1929 A.C. Bradley firmly separated Austen from Romanticism in acknowledging that while she certainly appreciates nature in her novels, she lacks the “new modes of feeling” toward nature promoted by the Romantics (Bradley 13). He in fact states that she could “be called anti-

Marilyn Butler heralded the scholarly consideration of an Austen, in every novel, associated with the French Revolution and the ideas surrounding it. After revealing the common plot-devices and language of the political novels produced during the French Revolution, Butler systematically approaches each of Austen's novels to illustrate the "language of partisan writing" present with "subtlety" such that only "alert" readers can "see [Austen's] meaning" (Butler 167). However, I will argue against Butler's alignment of Austen with the Anti-Jacobins and compare Austen's work with the revolutionary ideas in the poetry of the Romantics—of Wordsworth specifically—as opposed to the revolutionary political novels on which Butler relies. Clara Tuite in *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* similarly places Austen in the cultural milieu of Romanticism, exploring how canonically through time critics have distorted Austen. Tuite identifies numerous "constructions" of Austen that similarly match constructions of Romanticism (Tuite 3). By the exchange of these critically constructed views for Austen's and Romanticisms, Tuite "locat[es]" Austen's works "within Romantic cultural traditions" (Tuite 1). However, Tuite focuses only on the Juvenilia, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, *Persuasion*, and *Sanditon* without comparing Austen to the Romantic poets themselves; in my analysis below, I will attempt to locate Romantic tropes across Austen's entire oeuvre.

The connection between Austen and the Romantic poets continues to be explored in critical scholarship: William Deresiewicz, for example, recently published *Jane Austen and the*

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romantic" and that the various title of the Romantic Age "do not suit her in the least" (Bradley 13). However, by the 1970's critics recognized "Romantic" traits within *Persuasion* (on nature in particular: see A. Walton Litz's "*Persuasion: forms of estrangement*" (1975)). In *Bicentennial Essays* Stuart M. Tave's article "Jane Austen and one of her contemporaries" compares Austen and Wordsworth, a comparison repeated with Clifford Siskin and Martin Price ("*Austen: Manners and Morals*" (1986)), although, admittedly, Price does so only at a glance. Others broadened the conception of British Romanticism, such as Robert Kiely with his work *The Romantic Novel in England* (1972), thus making room for Austen and other novelists. The feminism movement similarly changed conceptions of Romanticism, welcoming Austen among other female poets and novelists.

*Romantic Poets* (2004). However, Deresiewicz primarily focuses on how Romantic poets influenced Austen, thus confining his study to “the works available to” Austen during her life: a limited selection of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, and Byron (Deresiewicz 4). Furthermore, since Deresiewicz wishes to explore the “impact” of these four poets on Austen and her work, he heavily relies on a distinct difference between Austen’s first three novels (*Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Pride and Prejudice*) and her last three novels (*Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*) since only the last three were written after the early stirrings of British Romanticism.<sup>3</sup> I, however, wish to determine not the “impact” of the Romantic poets *on* Austen, but rather to identify Austen *with* the Romantic poets, *within* Romanticism.

### **I. Romanticism in William Wordsworth and Jane Austen**

In an attempt to reveal his goals as a poet and to highlight the tenets of his poetry, Wordsworth introduced a “Preface” to the second and third editions of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800, 1802). Although M.H. Abrams defines the Wordsworth of the first “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) as “The Simple Wordsworth,” Wordsworth’s achievement of “permanently” revolutionizing poetry cannot be doubted (Abrams 4, Wolfson 408).<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth’s “Preface,” as a “critical manifesto” and an exposition of “the views with which [his poems] were composed,” thus stands as a general representation of Wordsworth’s poetry (Smith 1,

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<sup>3</sup> For each of Austen’s main novels, I will be referring to the Cambridge University Press editions, parenthetically referred to as *Northanger Abbey* (NA), *Sense and Sensibility* (SS), *Pride and Prejudice* (PP), *Mansfield Park* (MP), *Emma* (E), *Persuasion* (P), and *Sanditon* (S).

<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth’s “Preface” helped revolutionize poetry and pave the way for the second generation of Romantic Poets (Stillinger 8). But Wordsworth reaches far later through time as well, as Marcy L. Tanter states in an Introduction celebrating two hundred years of *Lyrical Ballads*: “It can be argued that *Lyrical Ballads* is the most significant book of poetry published in the last 200 years” (Tanter 1). His success is also not limited to influence in poetic matter: it also includes a reform of language that F.W. Bateson calls “the success of Wordsworth’s devastating Preface” (Bateson 69).

Wordsworth “Preface” 1). In the beginning of his “Preface,” Wordsworth firmly states his intentions:

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of a language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature... (“Preface” 2)

In this “manifesto” Wordsworth attempts to forge a new poetry, a new literary landscape, banishing the “frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse” (“Preface” 3). His “Preface” essentially embodies some of the primary tenets of Romanticism: how the rendering of the “ordinary” with “a certain colouring of imagination” can transform the literary form and reveal a need for both sensibility and rational thought stemming from individual judgment and not fashion. By comparing these primary tenets to their counterparts in Jane Austen, I will argue that Austen belongs within the Romantic Movement.

However, as numerous critics establish, it is important to recognize that while the “Preface” highlights some of the “principal” themes of Wordsworth’s poetry, it is not without its contradictions. Wordsworth’s firm decision to use subjects of “common life,” and language that is “really used by men,” is, ambiguous and disputed. Any actual speech of “rural life” appears rarely in *Lyrical Ballads*. What exactly Wordsworth meant by “the real language of men” remains debated. Evident in the “Preface” are the same contradictions evident in Wordsworth’s poetry between the “Simple Wordsworth” and the “Problematic Wordsworth” identified by Abrams years ago. Similarly, the themes within the “Preface” fail to cover all the themes of Romanticism. In the context of my discussion, it is also important to realize that Austen most

likely did not read Wordsworth's "Preface," but this possibility only affirms that Austen needs to be considered as a "Romantic," since the objectives of her own work match those of Wordsworth.

Austen matches Wordsworth's attempt to reform and revolutionize literature in *Northanger Abbey* (1818, published posthumously). In an Advertisement added most likely in 1816, Austen reminds the reader that "thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes" (*Northanger Abbey* 3).<sup>5</sup> Although her "Advertisement" is considerably shorter than his "Preface," it parallels Wordsworth's introduction: Austen reveals the primary concern of all her novels—"period, places, manners, books and opinions"—just as Wordsworth reveals his. While Wordsworth also included an "Advertisement" in his 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, his "Preface," like Austen's "Advertisement," stands as a retrospective document. Austen felt it necessary to write the "Advertisement" to apologize to the reader since the humor of *Northanger Abbey* so heavily relies on Gothic fiction, such as Ann Radcliffe's novels, more popular in the late eighteenth century than the early nineteenth century. However, that Austen imbedded her works so deeply in a specific time, with so careful a concern of the "period," etc., illustrates Austen's tremendous attention to detail. With her focus on these details, the "incidents and situations from common life," Austen sought to revolutionize the novel as a literary form, just as Wordsworth sought to drastically reform poetry.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Austen first sold *Northanger Abbey* (or *Susan* as it was then titled) to the publisher Benjamin Crosby in 1803; but Crosby never saw fit to publish the novel. Austen bought back the copyright around 1816, after which she added the Advertisement and edited the text.

<sup>6</sup> Jane Spencer, in her essay exploring the development of Austen's narrative technique, recognizes Austen "developed her own examinations of natural, possible, everyday behavior and psychology" (Spencer 185). Additionally, this detail sets Austen apart from those she parodies,



As another way to rescue the novel from the clutches of frivolity and the public disdain, Austen reveals in *Northanger Abbey* positive qualities of novels, qualities matching those expounded by Wordsworth.<sup>7</sup> In one of the only places in all of Austen's novels the narrator ever stands and presents a soliloquy—"supported on a soapbox"—Austen mounts a defense of novels: "work[s] in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties... are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language" (Rogers 1, NA 24).<sup>8</sup> The themes Austen argues a novel displays are the same themes Wordsworth applies to poetry—or at least, *his* poetry. Similarly, her complaints of didactic essays and parodies of Gothic fiction parallel Wordsworth's complaints of the poetry and poetical tools his generation inherited.<sup>9</sup> Most importantly, Austen declares the vindication of novels as assuredly as Wordsworth—she in fact never finds it again necessary to make so explicit a statement of assertion. Not only is Austen "[u]nlike her predecessors" when

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like Anne Radcliffe who "went for immense casts of characters" with "enormous historical canvasses," "elaborate scene-setting," dramatic plots, and historical inaccuracy (Aiken 42-43).

<sup>7</sup> Novels lacked the prestige and respect of poetry: "Novels at the start of the Romantic period were immensely popular but—as far as critics and some of the form's half-ashamed practitioners were concerned—not quite respectable" (Stillinger 20). Especially when Austen first started composing her works, novels were "didactic" and incredibly "partisan" (Butler *War* 3). As Butler cites from J.M.S Tompkins' *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800* (1932), "Between the work of the four great novelists of the mid-eighteenth century and that of Jane Austen and Scott there are no names which posterity has consented to call great" (Butler *War* 7).

<sup>8</sup> I abridged the quotation, extracting "the liveliest effusions of wit and humour" because while humorous moments do exist in *Lyrical Ballads*, these "effusions of wit and humour" play a significantly less crucial and thematic role for Wordsworth than for Austen.

<sup>9</sup> For Wordsworth's complaints, see the previously mentioned quotation, "frantic novels... stories in verse," and the frequent sections in the "Preface" where he dismisses the language, form, subjects, etc. of previous poets. As for Austen, while she evidently parodies the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey*, a few critics argue that Austen in fact transforms the Gothic language and themes into the everyday and the social, human realm (Natasha Duquette's "'Motionless Wonder': Contemplating Gothic Sublimity in *Northanger Abbey*" (2010) and Claudia Johnson's Introduction to the 2003 Oxford World's Classics edition of *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons and Sanditon*). Austen in fact primarily parodies the reader's reactions to the Gothic (Johnson "Introduction" xxi). Her scorn for the didactic essays is an aversion to "the specifically masculine-gendered genre of the anthology" (Tuite 186).

she “pointedly refuses to apologize for novels,” but Austen additionally relies on her own works as examples of why no apology is needed (Johnson *Women* 28). Even Sir Walter Scott recognized Austen’s genius and “originality,” her “talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life... the most wonderful I ever met with” (Scott 1).

Her first successfully published novels, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), begin just such a revolution, from her complex – though seemingly simple – titles to her subtle and intricate characters and plots. The repeated “and” in the title of both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* leads many to suspect a dichotomy, and in the case of *Sense and Sensibility*, the two sisters receive the blunt force of this suspicion. Perhaps because of the novel’s working title when first begun in 1795, *Elinor and Marianne*, the common generalization deems Elinor all “Sense” and Marianne all “Sensibility.” This generalization damages an understanding of the novel, prompting the conclusion that Austen reproaches sensibility and only celebrates pragmatic rationality. However, critics note that, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen refuses to limit herself to a definition of the two themes, and instead spends the novels exploring the tensions between two opposing poles.<sup>10</sup> Austen certainly mocks Marianne’s sensibility, but only because of its excessiveness—a problem I will discuss in depth later—just as she carefully exposes the danger of extremism in her other novels.<sup>11</sup> Marianne’s

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<sup>10</sup> Deresiewicz recognizes that Austen “organiz[es] [the novel] around a struggle” between the issues of sense and sensibility (Deresiewicz 47). Emily Auerbach describes the phenomenon as “muddie[d]... waters” (Auerbach 101). In “Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Palmer: The Path to Female Self-Determination in Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*,” Kathleen Anderson and Jordan Kidd note that this dichotomy exists beyond solely the Dashwood sisters: “[t]he female characters in *Sense and Sensibility* can be divided into several groups, none of which neatly mirrors the novel’s title” (Anderson and Kidd 136).

<sup>11</sup> Hermione Lee briefly discusses the “excessive sensibility” of Marianne in parallel with the “excessive susceptibility” of Catherine, but we certainly see extremities elsewhere in Austen’s novels as well (Lee 84). Johnson, for example, reveals how Lydia’s extreme discord with social norms helps distract the reader from realizing Elizabeth’s own infractions (Johnson *Women* 76).

problem is not so much her sensibility, but her inability to embrace a middle ground. While clearly different from the Lady Susan-type, who pretends to hold emotions that she does not feel, Marianne feels as if she must use “action and situation” to augment her feeling: “Marianne would have thought herself very inexcusable had she been able to sleep at all the first night after parting from Willoughby” (SS 96). This augmentation allows Marianne to self-indulge, a danger similarly seen in Captain Benwick in *Persuasion*. It is this self-indulgence that Austen critiques, not the sensibility and the actions of Marianne that actually embody the Wordsworthian sublime, as I will later discuss.

The relationship between Marianne and the Romantics has already received much attention from scholars. In debates as to whether Marianne embodies that “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (her powerful attachment to Norland: for example: ‘Dear, dear Norland!’ (SS 101)), Austen seems to parody Marianne’s sensibility, and celebrates instead a pragmatic rationality (Wordsworth “Preface” 2). This shallow understanding of Austen is similarly applied to Wordsworth where the fragment “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” becomes the primary definition of Romanticism. However, this fragment fails to encompass Wordsworth’s entire vision. As Butler explains, the quotation about “the spontaneous overflow” needs to be placed within the larger context of that sentence because “in its context that very sentence has Wordsworth... putting rational thought, moral intention and social utility above the subjective, emotional side of the mind, and above the claims of self-expression” (Butler *Romantics* 60). Both feeling and cognitive reflection are needed: the poet possesses “more than usual organic sensibility” but “ha[s] also thought long and deeply”

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In *Mansfield Park*, Austen continues an exploration of Elizabeth’s lively independence in Mary Crawford, introducing a negative image of what is celebrated in *Pride and Prejudice* because of the extremity of Mary’s character. However, again, Austen is not absolute, and in fact presents Mary sympathetically, for reasons to which I will later return.

(“Preface” 2). (The possession of both is tied to how “our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts,” a process I will discuss in depth when analyzing *Persuasion*. This interplay becomes crucial in my discussion of the Wordsworthian sublime in Austen.) Butler perhaps carries the claim too far—Wordsworth unites these themes, not in a hierarchy, but in a fluid interaction in his search for the “permanently surviving, passions of mankind” (Owen 147). In doing so, Wordsworth hopes “that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified” (“Preface” 2).

Similarly critics have, in drawing out fragmented understandings from *Sense and Sensibility*, missed the fluid interactions that characterize Austen’s purpose and achievement. Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* reforms the tired language, overused plots, and stale entreaties of the literature of sensibility, adding depth and ambiguity to the argument while still maintaining “a form of instructive fiction” (Tuite 83). Elinor and Marianne fail consistently to fit under one consuming construct of “Sense” or “Sensibility” because Austen does not strive “to make a tidy moral,” but rather “obliges us to regroup and reassess characters and issues, to broaden our judgments and accept contradiction” (Johnson *Women* 77).<sup>12</sup> Deresiewicz’s view of Elinor as “present mainly to provide contrast and a point of view” to Marianne is therefore defective, limiting the deeper understanding of the “dark and disenchanted” novel that is *Sense and Sensibility* (Deresiewicz 175, Johnson *Women* 49). Elinor as simply “a point of view” ignores the “complexity” of Elinor’s character. June Frazer recognizes, for example, how Elinor blindly and irrationally assumes the lock of hair on Edward’s finger to be her own, a prime example of how Elinor is *not* all “Sense” (Frazer 6). Anderson and Kidd note how Elinor, albeit more subtly

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<sup>12</sup> Although Claudia Johnson writes this specifically about *Pride and Prejudice*, I believe the exposing of contradictions and explorations of ambiguity can be seen in all of Austen’s works.

than Marianne, also “manifest[s] the dangers of a heightened sensibility” (Anderson and Kidd 136). Overall, however, Elinor becomes “the new model of a new kind of female propriety and sensitivity” because she combines a ‘sense’ and ‘feeling’ that is “regulated and regulating” (Tuite 70). With Elinor, Austen makes permanent a discourse of sensibility meant to influence “the understanding of the Reader.” There are “multiple paradoxes of complexity in seeming simplicity” in Austen just as there are in Wordsworth (Thomas 104).<sup>13</sup>

At the end of his “Preface,” Wordsworth pleads with the reader to judge poetry by “decid[ing] by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgment of others” (“Preface” 11). In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Austen similarly affirms the importance of the judgment of an individual over that of society through its heroine Elizabeth Bennet.<sup>14</sup> Even though Elizabeth quickly “suspect[s]” that, despite Mr. Collins’ pronouncements, the much-praised Lady Catherine de Bourgh is in fact “an arrogant, conceited woman,” Elizabeth realizes “she must wait for her own visit there to know the rest,” to judge Lady Catherine’s character for herself (*Pride and Prejudice* 94, 166). When she finally meets Lady Catherine, Sir William can hardly make a bow and does not say a word, while his daughter “frightened almost out of her senses,” sits in distress, “not knowing which way to look” (*PP* 183). Elizabeth, on the other hand, “found herself quite equal to the scene, and could observe the three ladies before her composedly...and from the observation of the day altogether” she found

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<sup>13</sup> In *Wordsworth and the Motions of the Mind*, Gordon Kent Thomas notes these “paradoxes...in seeming simplicity” in Wordsworth’s “Lucy Gray.”

<sup>14</sup> In her article “Placing Jane Austen in the Romantic Period: Self and Solitude in the Works of Austen and the Male Romantic Poets,” Beth Lau explains how “largely isolated” Elizabeth is throughout the novel (Lau 255-267). This isolation is crucial to the awareness of self, a familiar Romantic theme. Lau in fact marks how Darcy’s own isolation resembles that of characters in Wordsworth’s poems, “who dislike cities and social gatherings and prefer the company of nature and a few like-minded intimates” (Lau 255-267). Darcy too “resonates with a Romantic need for self-expression” (Wootton 35). I will return to this theme of self-expression and self-understanding later.

Lady Catherine as “arrogant” and “conceited” as she originally expected (*PP* 183). This scene becomes a major nexus of several key issues in *Pride and Prejudice* and Austen as a whole, including, as I will discuss later, the notion of the social sublime.

Austen does not limit Elizabeth’s confidence and reliance on her own self-judgment to Lady Catherine, and in fact illustrates it in the very beginning of the novel. Even though early in the first ball, Darcy’s distasteful manners “turned the tide of his popularity,” Elizabeth resists judgment until he displays rudeness in front of her, leaving her “with no very cordial feelings towards him” (*PP* 10-1). Unlike Jane, whose sweetness blinds her to malignant characters like Caroline Bingley, Elizabeth’s self-confidence in her own perceptions grounds her so that she may criticize those socially above her—like Lady Catherine, Caroline Bingley and Mr. Darcy—without hesitation. Yet, Elizabeth is not perfect, and at times allows other factors to intrude upon her intuition: most notably her prejudice towards Mr. Darcy and her attraction to Wickham that lead her to misjudge both characters. Elizabeth’s false assumptions of Wickham’s character allow Austen to reveal the danger in a blind acceptance of superficial surfaces. Austen critiques the acceptance of exterior appearances representing truth throughout her novels (Catherine’s slow realization of the discontinuity between Isabella Thorpe’s actions and words in *Northanger Abbey*; Willoughby’s assumption of the romantic qualities adored by Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*; the constant word games in *Emma*, the failure of external communication between Anne and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion*, etc.). The need “to enquire,/To watch and question” becomes central as heroines recognize “[h]ow we mislead each other” (Wordsworth *Prelude* 1850 13.159-160, 13.207).

Although some find Elizabeth’s judgment of Mr. Wickham an example of Austen’s promotion of rationality, the misinterpretation of Wickham’s character actually represents the

need to look beyond the surface. This process of reaching beyond the superficial, this need for a deeper, perceptive analysis, is not solely a rational process. Rather, it additionally requires an understanding and an awareness of the individual self, along with the recognition of the presence of the individual self—with its own motivations, desires, etc.—in other individuals. Elizabeth refused to acknowledge her own prejudices, “prepossession and ignorance,” and thus both her intuition and rationality were led astray, as she realizes when she later reaches a fuller understanding of her self (“Till this moment, I never knew myself”) (*PP* 230).<sup>15</sup> Once Elizabeth knows herself, she is open to knowing the true nature of both Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham. Austen celebrates this growth and development, thereby celebrating the active involvement of individuals.

Throughout his “Preface” Wordsworth calls for the reader’s active participation in reading his poetry, and prizes “feelin[g] genuinely” over “the judgment of others” (“Preface” 11). Reading is thus tied not only with the literal action of reading—reading words on a page—but also the reading of faces, characters, and words. In illustrating Elizabeth’s misreading of character, Austen presents the importance of active reading. Individuals should not be read on a superficial surface level, rather than by only the standards of society (take, for instance, how Elizabeth, looking back on her interactions with Wickham, “could remember no more substantial good than the general approbation of the neighbourhood, and the regard which his social powers had gained him”) (*PP* 228). The danger of this I already established; and this same danger applies when individuals *read* only on the surface, without critical analysis. Austen, like Wordsworth, explores dichotomies and tensions, attempting to provoke the reader to a self-

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<sup>15</sup> Typically of Austen, the “moment” at which Elizabeth realizes she “never knew [her]self” is not so straightforward as Elizabeth’s words portray. I will explain the significance of this line in the third part of my paper.

analysis that leads to better self-understanding. Sarah Wootton describes how “[i]n *Pride and Prejudice* Darcy’s Byronic traits are debated, derided, and, ultimately desired” (Wootton 39). As Claudia Johnson argues in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, Austen repeats this process of “debat[e]” with various themes throughout all of her novels, working to expose tensions in an “exploratory and interrogative” way, “systematically exploring and dismantling the conventions” around her (Johnson xxi, 29). This revolutionary challenge of accepted norms and push for other readers to explore, to create, and to question, along with the reliance on the self, places Jane Austen firmly within the Romantic Movement.

While *Mansfield Park* (1814) receives tremendous critical attention for its allegory between domestic affairs and the general state of England, Austen subtly incorporates the “common life” which figures so critically in Wordsworth’s Preface. This occurs not only in the limited number of characters (and therefore an increased awareness of their daily, “ordinary life”) but also by reference to the larger world surrounding Mansfield Park, the rural, agricultural communities Wordsworth lamented being broken up from the Industrial Revolution. Early in the novel Mary Crawford, all “smiles and liveliness,” informs Edmund and Fanny of the approaching arrival of her harp from London:

‘I was astonished to find what a piece of work was made of it! To want a horse and cart in the country seemed impossible, so I told my maid to speak for one directly; and as I cannot look out of my dressing-closet without seeing one farm yard, nor walk in the shrubbery without passing another, I thought it would be only ask and have... Guess my surprise, when I found that I had been asking the most unreasonable, most impossible thing in the world, had offended all the farmers, all the labourers, all the hay in the parish. As for Dr. Grant’s bailiff, I believe I had better keep out of *his* way; and my brother-in-law himself, who is all kindness in general, looked rather black upon me, when he found what I had been at.’ (*MP* 68)

Edmund, as he usually does, makes allowances and excuses for Mary—“You could not be expected to have thought on the subject before”—but then attempts to explain to her the crucial



need for the carts and especially the horses “in harvest” (*MP* 69). Mary waves the “harvest” aside, effectively illustrating her dismissal of the entire agricultural way of life, voicing “the true London maxim, that every thing is to be got with money” (*MP* 69). Mary further dismisses this rural life when she lists all the men she offended, “all the farmers, all the labourers, all the hay in the parish,” as if listing material possessions. Austen structures this phrase as a parallel, an anaphora, equating the “hay” with the “farmers” and “labourers,” so that Mary condescendingly dismisses these “common” men, like those seen in Wordsworth’s poems like “Simon Lee” and “Michael,” signaling her as unsympathetic to an entire rural world and its people.

Similarly, the “farm yard” she sees is just “another”—one of a multitude simply present without importance. Mary’s entire worldview is materialistic: that “true London maxim” is *her* maxim. And although Austen crafts Mary to invoke our sympathy, we are meant to despise the world that made Mary as much as we are to despise the values she espouses.<sup>16</sup> Mary treats the “horse and cart,” “the farmers,” “the labourers,” “the hay,” and even “the parish” as commercial entities, things to “only ask and have.” Mary breaks up the agricultural community like the “hedge-rows” so vile to Wordsworth and belittles the common folk Wordsworth celebrated; she “smiles” at how “most unreasonable, most impossible” it is to ask a farmer to give up the tools necessary for his living, “just now, in the middle of a very late hay harvest,” in order to bring her

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<sup>16</sup> In this passage alone Austen illustrates Mary’s lively mind and humor in the very tone of her words as she shares this story. Austen does not present Mary as ‘bad’ and Fanny as ‘good’—*Mansfield Park* is far more nuanced than that. However, Austen tries to clearly illustrate how the flaws in Mary’s character result from her upbringing. This upbringing is not limited to the London life, but also regards the cynicism derived from growing up in the admiral’s home. As Emily Auerbach writes in *Searching for Jane Austen*: “[a] lively, charming, accomplished young woman, Mary Crawford could have been truly admirable had she been given a moral education to counter the inescapable corruption of the world around her” (Auerbach 182). Correlation between a high morality and an appreciation of nature appear in Wordsworth, as I will delve into later. Austen’s treatment of Mary, and her ability to depict character through language as well as action, attests to the “psychological depth” of the novel (Wiltshire 65).

harp from London (Wordsworth “Tintern Abbey” ln. 15, 46). Once the harp finally arrives, it too becomes a materialistic object, artfully used to secure Edmund’s affection, despite Mary’s profession of “dearly lov[ing] music [her]self” (*MP* 69). This “London maxim” forms a character who even sees marriage as commerce.

The common language and life Wordsworth so adamantly strives to focus on in his poetry pervades Austen’s next novel, *Emma* (1815), though to different effect. Unlike any of the other novels, the setting in *Emma* is almost a permanent structure: the reader, along with Emma, only escapes the rural town of Highbury once throughout the entire novel, in a passage I will examine in detail later. We become engrossed in Emma’s schemes, and follow her to her dutiful charity visits and to social dinner parties; we endure the endless, empty chatter of Miss Bates and the continual worryings and agitations of Mr. Woodhouse, the intimate details on the proper form of gruel so frustrating to Maria Edgeworth; we become so consumed in Highbury’s little-big world that even we readers feel the weight of “every body” always “looking on,” as if all of England watched (*Emma* 9, 400). As Deresiewicz remarks: “what counts in the other novels as small feels momentous” in *Emma* (Deresiewicz 31). Through free indirect discourse and that strong establishment of community Austen engages the reader as if the reader too was part of Highbury. The elusive “every body” and “they” prove as bewitchingly entrapping as the “no one,” “they say,” and “some” of Wordsworth’s “The Thorn” (IX.90, XI.129, XXI.225).

In *Emma*, Austen creates characters as “sufficiently common” as the speaker in “The Thorn,” experimenting along with Wordsworth with the “real language of men” and its effect on humanity. The narrator’s skill in navigating between the various voices and minds of the characters in *Emma* reveals Austen’s proficiency in the conflation between narrator and speaker, or the Poet and the speaker as Wordsworth describes in the Preface when he states that the Poet

may wish “to bring his feelings near to those of the feelings he describes... to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs” (“Preface” 6). While Austen’s narrator jumps into the minds of the majority of the characters in the novel, the narration remains primarily tied to Emma’s perception so that, as in *Pride and Prejudice* where we see Mr. Darcy as Elizabeth sees him, we read situations as Emma does. After contriving to move Mr. Elton and Harriet in a room alone together via a “broke[n]” shoe lace, Emma enters the room. As Emma enters the narrator states, “The lovers were standing together at one of the windows. It had a most favourable aspect” (*E* 96). Here, in an exemplary piece of Austen’s free indirect discourse, the narrator describes the scene with Emma’s own thoughts: it is *Emma’s* misconceptions and desires that projects the term “lovers” onto the pair, and *her* hope for their union that sees it “a most favourable aspect.” Only later, when Mr. Elton confesses his love for Emma after the Westons’ dinner party, do we reach an awareness of the misconceptions born from miscommunication and misperception, “in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other” (“Preface” 1).

The lack of “complete truth” in “any human disclosure” aids Austen in successfully creating in the reader a disgust for (or, at the very least, an awareness of) insincerity—like the picturesque scene Mary Crawford artfully contrives in *Mansfield Park* mentioned earlier—and an appreciation for genuine “passions and thoughts and feelings” that stem from a deeper morality (*E* 470, “Preface” 8). So very little of what is said in *Emma* is what it seems that the few characters who speak plainly receive the narrator’s, and the reader’s, subtle approbation. The exchange between Mrs. Elton and Mr. Knightley juxtaposes these two positions clearly:

‘That’s quite unnecessary; I see Jane every day:—but as you like. It is to be a morning scheme, you know, Knightley; quite a simple thing. I shall wear a large bonnet, and bring one of my little baskets hanging on my arm. Here,—probably this basket with pink ribbon. Nothing can be more simple, you see. And Jane will have such another.

There is to be no form or parade—a sort of gipsy party.—We are to walk about your gardens, and gather the strawberries ourselves, and sit under trees;—and whatever else you may like to provide, it is to be all out of doors—a table spread in the shade, you know. Every thing as natural and simple as possible. Is not that your idea?’

‘Not quite. My idea of the simple and the natural will be to have the table spread in the dining-room. The nature and the simplicity of gentlemen and ladies, with their servants and furniture, I think is best observed by meals within doors. When you are tired of eating strawberries in the garden, there shall be cold meat in the house.’ (*E* 385-6)

Mrs. Elton, as per usual, could not be any further away from “natural and simple.” Instead of using her imagination to envision the nature in which she will walk, Mrs. Elton only envisions the scene with herself in it, not looking out onto nature but rather looking at herself as the main subject of a picture, artfully arranged among the “gardens” and “trees” to fit a preconceived idea of sensibility and the picturesque that Austen additionally mocks in other novels, such as with Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*. Here, however, Mrs. Elton attempts to contrive a “feeling” via “the action and situation,” as if her “basket with pink ribbon” awards her an elegant mind and character of sweet sensibility. (With Marianne, on the other hand, the “feeling,” “action,” and “situation” were inexplicably tied—and at the end of the novel we see Marianne can finally distinguish the necessity of the “feeling... giv[ing] importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling”; a lesson Mrs. Elton never learns, as we are reminded when she describes Mr. Knightley’s and Emma’s wedding.) Austen celebrates Mr. Knightley in this excerpt for the importance he gives to feeling. Not only does his pragmatic need for the “cold meat” and his straight-forward speech speak purely of his character, but as the narrator later informs us, Mr. Knightley primarily wishes to eat inside out of consideration for Mr. Woodhouse, a thoughtfulness much more respected by Austen than Mrs. Elton’s selfishness (*E* 382-9).

Austen further highlights this aspect of Mrs. Elton’s character by specifically using the word “parade.” Although Mrs. Elton states that there “is to be no form or parade,” the use of “parade”

recalls the narrator's description only a few pages earlier of Mrs. Elton's disappointment of the postponed Box Hill outing: "It was the delay of a great deal of pleasure and parade" (*E* 276). Austen again mocks the artificial airs of Mrs. Elton with the inclusion of "a sort of gipsy party," a description romanticizing a "gipsy party" only a chapter after the attack on Harriet and Miss Bickerton by "a party of gipsies," an event attesting to the foolishness of such a sentiment (*E* 360). Finally, Mrs. Elton's concern with "parade" also functions to define Emma as the opposite. Although at times Emma is confident, vain, and haughty, she embodies the Wordsworthian sublime where nature and landscape move her to have either a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" or a meditative and calmed state of mind, as I will further describe later. Sir Walter Scott's review of *Emma* recognizes how Austen "keep[s] close to common incidents, and to such characters as occupy the ordinary walks of life," and through this "she stands almost alone" in prose (Scott "Criticisms" 1). Mixing a traditionally elevated aesthetic with scenes of ordinary English village life, Austen achieves in *Emma* a revolution of the novel similar to the revolution of poetry at which Wordsworth aimed and described in his Preface.

While *Emma* features well-developed free indirect discourse, it is in *Persuasion* where we see that the "continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts" ("Preface" 2). This cycle of thoughts modifying feelings modifying thoughts reflects how morality is a reflection of both intellect and emotion. A strong morality necessitates the ability to think and judge for oneself, as I explored earlier in my discussion of *Pride and Prejudice*. "[G]enuin[e]," "continued influxes" allow the individual self-growth and the capability of change and adaptability. Although some scholars argue that Anne encounters no change, and it is instead the other characters (namely Wentworth) who must realize their mistakes and

overcome them, Anne too grows as an individual as she recognizes “her own original emotions and motives as valid” (Tarlson 2). The change is gradual, and subtle, as Anne “bloom[s]” with the flowers around her, but is evident from the beginning (*Persuasion* 112). Shortly after we learn that Anne “was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing,” the narrator informs us that Anne

had been solicited, when about two-and twenty, to change her name, by the young man, who not long afterwards found a more willing mind in her younger sister... and however Lady Russell might have asked yet for something more, while Anne was nineteen, she would have rejoiced to see her at twenty-two, so respectably removed from the partialities and injustice of her father’s house, and settled so permanently near herself. But in this case, Anne had left nothing for advice to do... Anne, at seven and twenty, thought very differently from what she had been made to think at nineteen... (*P* 31)

Austen drenches this text, as well the novel, in persuasive language: “solicited,” “change,” “willing,” “advice,” “asked,” “had been made to think,” and “persuaded.” In just this segment we see Anne’s progressing strength: at nineteen Anne “was persuaded,” but by twenty-two Anne “left nothing for advice to do,” and by twenty-seven Anne has grown enough to recognize that “she had been made to think” at nineteen and was strong enough to think “very differently” from then. While Lady Russell wants Anne “settled so permanently,” Anne is in fact quite adaptable, and by the end of the novel becomes a navy wife, not “permanently” settled anywhere at all. Austen in fact suggests the necessity of “change of place,” “novelty,” and “enlargement of society” just previous to this passage (*P* 30-1). The “small limits of the society around” Anne echoes the “small” society entrapping the Dashwood girls, and even the “limits” of the society surrounding Emma and Elizabeth, where few are their equals. In *Persuasion*, Austen calls for “[r]eform, revolution; restoration, return”: the “continued influxes” balancing, moderating, and, most importantly, allowing for an individual to “decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not

by reflection upon what will probably be the judgement [*sic*] of others” (Deresiewicz 153, “Preface” 2, 11).

The narration in *Persuasion* in particular reflects *how* these “continued influxes of feeling” are “modified and directed by our thoughts.” Clara Tuite recognizes this subtle delicacy of the narrative when she promotes *Persuasion*’s “new novelistic lyricism” (Tuite 72). The eloquence of Anne’s thoughts and emotions regulated by each other and consistently regulating each other reveal a character with both feeling and sense, a character who, like Elinor, can serve “as the model of a new kind of female propriety and sensitivity” (Tuite 76). In scenes which become part of Anne’s sublime experience, as I will describe in the third section, after Anne listens to Captain Benwick as he “talked of poetry,” she comforts and advises him with “it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely, and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly” (*P* 108).

Anne, with this level of introspective thought, shares various recommendations from “our best moralists... as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurances” (*P* 109). Anne speaks to Benwick with the knowledge of her own past thoughts—only a chapter previously Anne too attempted to absorb herself in the “strong feelings” of poetry, and what “occurred to her at the moment” most likely stemmed from her own previous feelings and thoughts where she needed to “fortify the mind” and to remind herself “of moral and religious endurance” in the face of her family and her feelings for Wentworth. Anne previously “calculated to rouse and fortify” *her* “mind:” on the lonely walk where Anne “occupied her mind

as much as possible,” she “roused herself” to speak to her companions (*P* 90).<sup>17</sup> Thus not only does Anne attempt to “modif[y] and direc[t]” her feelings with her thoughts, but Anne’s past feelings also become absorbed into her thoughts, thereby informing future thoughts.

Immediately after sharing some “works of our best moralists” with Captain Benwick, Anne

...could not but be amused at the idea of her coming to Lyme, to preach patience and resignation...nor could she help fearing, on more serious reflection, that, like many other great moralists and preachers, she had been eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would bear ill examination. (*P* 109)

Anne’s “serious reflection” echoes Wordsworth’s requirement of “more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply.” This “serious reflection” allows Anne to change her future conduct so that the “fresh-feeling breeze” of the sea is not the only aspect that restored “the bloom and freshness of youth” and “the animation of eye” (*P* 109, 112). That Anne recognizes “strong feelings” in herself and others admits her own “sensibility,” but Austen carefully illustrates that Anne “had also thought long and deeply,” unlike Captain Benwick who indulged himself in the “taste” of poetry and his own “strong feelings” too frequently without the “serious reflection” that allows for growth. It is the “continued influxes of feeling” that “are modified and directed by our thoughts” that allows Anne to “bloom” and be “restored,” to discover “what is really important to men” (“Preface” 2).

“[W]hat is really important to men” is what is permanent, an issue Austen undertakes in her twelve-chaptered fragment *Sanditon* (1925). In what Owen calls the “major theme” of Wordsworth’s Preface, Wordsworth writes that he chooses the common language because it is

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<sup>17</sup> “Her *pleasure* in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn, that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness, that season which has drawn from every poet, worthy of being read, some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling. She occupied her mind as much as possible in such like musings and quotations...” (*P* 90).



“more permanent,” and that he wishes in this language to “trace the primary laws of our nature” (Owen 1, “Preface” 2). Against the “arbitrary and capricious” along with “fickle tastes, and fickle appetites,” Wordsworth searches for the natural, the permanent, the organically real (“Preface” 2). While Marilyn Butler describes *Sanditon* as “so firm in its sense of organic community,” her words are strict and limiting—the “firm” determinedly establishes an opposition so that Butler finds Austen “so hostile to the modern tendency to social fragmentation” (Butler *War* 289). Austen undoubtedly believes in the “organic community,” and as Butler notes, *Sanditon* is a place perverted “from its earlier natural role as fishing village and agricultural community... Its new smart terraces are an artificial engraftment” (Butler *War* 286). The new *Sanditon* is born of “fickle tastes, and fickle appetites,” unlike the Parker family’s old house: the old house Charlotte describes as a “snug-looking place” that “seems to have as many comforts about it as Willingden,” the place of her own raising in the country (*Sanditon* 155-6). It is, as Mr. Parker relates, “an honest old place” (*S* 156). The old house is the house of Mr. Parker’s “forefathers” with “an excellent garden” and “a nice place for the children to run about in” (308). The new house, on the other hand, receives little description, thereby seemingly affirming the “organic community” Butler describes, and which Wordsworth values so highly.

However, Butler assigns Austen into too “firm” a position, and other scholars use this seemingly “firm” position to label *Sanditon* as “Anti-Romantic” and as an example of Austen’s conservatism (Halperin).<sup>18</sup> These scholars sink into a rigid understanding akin to those mistakenly made about *Sense and Sensibility*. The new house, for example, is described as “light” and “elegant,” and while it as of yet lacks shade, the house and its surrounding plantation

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<sup>18</sup> See Marilyn Butler’s arguments in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975), John Halperin’s “Jane Austen’s Anti-Romantic Fragment: Some Notes on *Sanditon*” (1983), and Jane Curry’s “A New Kind of Pastoral: Anti-Development Satire in *Sanditon*” (1999).

are still “very young” (S 159). Its youthful state marks the current transitional state, but with hope for the future as the house and people acquire “shade enough” as time continues (S 157). While there is a “nostalgic” backward look to the old house and the landed patriarchy it represents, in *Sanditon* Austen sets her eyes to the future (Tuite 169). Her plan to title the work *The Brothers* reveals this “exploratory and interrogative” examination of the future (Johnson *Women* xxi). Austen gently mocks Mr. Parker for his enthusiastic schemes and obsession with Sanditon, but she portrays this eldest brother in a far better state than the youngest brother, who reeks of an *ennui* criticized so strongly by Austen’s contemporary, Maria Edgeworth. The middle brother, Sidney Parker, seems to contrast both of these characters, laughing at both his other brothers as well as his sisters. As Mr. and Mrs. Parker pass by the old house with Charlotte, Mrs. Parker says, “There—now the old House is quite left behind—What is it, your Brother Sidney says about it’s being a Hospital?” and Mr. Parker replies, ““Oh! my dear Mary, merely a Joke of his. He pretends to advise me to make a Hospital of it. He pretends to laugh at my Improvements” (S 158). Austen thus presents Sidney as critical and amused by the rest of his family’s hypochondriac-tendencies. We know Sidney actually laughs, not merely “pretends,” and in laughing at his brother’s “Improvements” might seem to offer a contrast to what Butler calls the “urban, rootless, irresponsible, self-indulgent” gentry flocking to Sanditon (Butler *War* 286). At the same time, however, Mr. Parker describes Sidney similarly: “He lives too much in the World to be settled: that is his only fault.—He is here and there and everywhere” (S 158). The brothers thus seem to offer various ways for Austen to explore what happens to the masculine after the loss of the patriarchal estate. And, while *Sanditon*’s fragmentary state leaves the remainder of the plot “impossible to predict,” we see already that *Sanditon* “engages the conflict between real and mobile property which effects social and cultural change and mobility

during the Romantic period” (Todd 8, Johnson *Women* 159).<sup>19</sup> Mobility, we shall see, becomes an important aspect of Austen’s sublime. Austen thus embarks on a journey to discover what in a changing world exactly *is* permanent – both in terms of aesthetic and, ultimately, social conventions – just as Wordsworth sought to find and illustrate the “certain inherent and indestructible qualities” opposing the insincere and the “fickle” (“Preface” 2).

This embarkation counters Butler’s suggestion that Austen limits herself to a pessimistic view of the future. The same mobility that leaves behind the “landed paternal estate” gives rise to the circulating library that offers “female independence, mobility and co-habitation” according to Clara Tuite (Tuite 183). After a visit to the circulating library, Charlotte meets Sir Edward Denham and engages in a discussion on the Romantics that leads Halperin to conclude that how “Sir Edward Denham... speaks of nature as if he were a Romantic poet on temporary leave from a lunatic asylum... gives another clear indication of what Austen thought of sentimental literature and its readers” (Halperin 186-187). Sir Edward praises in Wordsworth in what Halperin claims is Austen’s “attack” and “assault” (Halperin 188). However, Halperin mistakes Austen’s critique, which is not of the literature itself but rather the artificiality of Sir Edward’s “reading” of it (Halperin 187). Austen, like Wordsworth, critiques “fickle tastes, and fickle appetites.” Unlike Charlotte, who has examined her own feelings upon reading Burns, Sir Edward cannot even remember and assign correct lines to the right poets, a contrast crucial to one of my later arguments. Tony Tanner, referring to the opening of *Persuasion*, remarks that

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<sup>19</sup> As Janet Todd indicates, *Sanditon* is only twelve chapters and around twenty thousand words: “By the equivalent stage in *Mansfield Park*—hardly half way through the first of three volumes—the young Bertrams had not yet been prompted by the arrival of Mr. Yates to while away the time of their father’s absence with private theatricals; in *Emma* the confusion about Mr. Elton’s courtship plans had still not been untangled, and neither Jane Fairfax nor Frank Churchill—nor of course Mrs. Elton—had made their various appearances at Highbury. Just as the direction of either of those novels remains open at such an early stage, so the plot of ‘*Sanditon*’ is impossible to predict” (Todd 8).

Austen “alerts us to... the dangers involved in seeking validation and self-justification in book as opposed to life” (Tanner 208). We see similar warnings in so many of Austen’s characters: Captain Benwick, Marianne, Catherine, Mary Bennet, etc. This theme in fact well summarizes much of what Wordsworth and Austen share: a disapproval of the impermanent and false assumption of fashion without independent thought, the need for both “sensibility” and rational thought, and the rendering of the “ordinary”—of “period, places, manners, books and opinions”—into a method of exploring and extrapolating these themes and thereby revolutionizing literature.

## II. The Picturesque and the Sublime in Wordsworth

Despite scholars’ claims, and even his own, that Wordsworth rejected the picturesque as “a strong infection of the age,” he did not reject the picturesque so much as he absorbed and transformed it, in addition to being transformed *by* it (*Prelude* 12.113).<sup>20</sup> The theories of the picturesque started in a less clear and philosophical form with Reverend William Gilpin, but became part of a more formalized aesthetic category with Sir Uvedale Price, Richard Knight and Humphrey Repton. Scholars still struggle to clearly define the picturesque, particularly since these four main proponents in the eighteenth and nineteenth century disagreed over its exact

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<sup>20</sup> In the *Prelude*, Wordsworth scornfully describes the picturesque as “giving way/To a comparison of scene with scene/Bent overmuch on superficial things,/Pampering myself with meager novelties/Of Colour and proportion... sitting thus in judgment” (*Prelude* 12.114-118, 122). Joseph Viscomi wrote “Wordsworth’s Dramatic Antipicturesque: Burke, Gilpin, and ‘Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree’ and ‘Wordsworth, Gilpin and the Vacant Mind’” (2007), in both of which he argues Wordsworth scorns the picturesque. In his “Vying for ‘brilliant landscapes’: Claude mirrors, Wordsworth, and poetic vision” (2008), Markus Poetzsch argues that Wordsworth rejects the “artificial” view of the picturesque, especially since he competes with the Claude mirror (Poetzsch 114). However, John R. Nabholz argues in “Wordsworth’s ‘Guide to the Lakes’ and the Picturesque Tradition” (1964) that Wordsworth in fact clearly is part of and places himself as part of the picturesque tradition. Nicola Trott’s “Wordsworth and the Picturesque: A Strong Infection of the Age” (1987) notes that the picturesque influenced Wordsworth and the Romantics.

nature. Generally, the picturesque holds a liminal position between the sublime and beautiful. Price assigns the picturesque a firm “station between beauty and sublimity,” establishing the picturesque as its own aesthetic category (Price 68). However, even though Gilpin and Knight describe the picturesque as a subset of the beautiful, both acknowledge the necessity of elements in the sublime: “steep,” “grandeur,” “broken grounds,” “rugged,” “rocky,” etc. (Gilpin 2, 16, 21, 22, 51, 113, 115). These sublime descriptors, in contrast with smooth beauty, play a crucial role in creating variety for the eye.

Because the picturesque refers to that “which is agreeable in a picture,” a natural scene becomes judged by the standards of art (Gilpin 2). The viewer must consider the landscape just as he/she considers art: framed. The eye thus becomes limited, losing the normal ability to scan endlessly for immediate sensory experiences. The mental frames of a scene of nature thus require enough contrast to interest, while still being “so correct in composition, as to produce an harmonious whole” (Gilpin 18). By applying artistic principles, such as foreground, colors, etc., to determine what a scene of nature needs to be “so correct in composition,” the viewer mentally frames the scene, thus subjugating imaginative control over nature.

Wordsworth expands upon the visual real of the picturesque to include the imagination as an additional vehicle of sight. Knight in part alludes to this, and Gilpin firmly acknowledged the effects of nature on the imagination, but Wordsworth argues for a duality: not just man constructing nature due to visual feeling, but the viewer entering a constructive discourse with nature. Instead of only the viewer’s imagination framing the scene, Wordsworth calls for the imagination to open a dialogue between the scene and the mind, so that each impresses upon the other. What concerns Wordsworth the most about the picturesque is its capacity of “giving way” to “superficial things,” “pampering,” “meager novelties” and “judgment” (*Prelude* 12.114-118,

122). The tourists who collect the instruments of the picturesque—the guidebooks, the Claude glass, etc.—spend more time immersed in the travel guide and the “appetite” for the picturesque than in nature herself (“Tintern” ln. 81). Wordsworth, however, does not abandon the “colours” and “forms” of nature; he adds to them “a remoter charm,” “thought supplied” and “interest/Unborrowed from the eye” (“Tintern” ln. 82-84). He remains “a lover... of all the mighty world/Of eye and ear, both what they half-create, and what perceive” (“Tintern” ln. 104, 106-108). The tourist that blindly follows cannot “half-create,” as Gilpin advocates, and additionally, with eyes open solely to specific examples of an aesthetic some followers of the picturesque blind themselves to see “what already exists” (Wordsworth Guide 73). The mind must be attentive and active to be able to “perceive,” and it is the ability to “perceive” that Wordsworth finds so crucial. The imagination as a vehicle of sight broadens the frame of the picturesque, opening the door to discourse with nature.

Wordsworth’s expanded picturesque in part unites the ‘sublime’ and the ‘beautiful’, rejecting the strictly defined differences between the two seen in Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Although the categories of the sublime and beautiful existed prior to Burke, previous discussions never so completely and separately distinguished the two. Burke elevated the sublime over the beautiful: terror, or anything inspiring terror, as the source of the sublime heightens the sublime since terror is “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (Burke 49). The beautiful, on the other hand, is a mix of “*social* qualities” and base “passion” that gives “a sense of joy and pleasure” and inspires “with sentiments of tenderness and affection” (Burke 18-19). Burke presents the two as polar opposites even in language indicating the aesthetics: the beautiful is “pleasing,” “diminutive,” “smooth,” and “delicate,” where the sublime is of

“grandeur,” “magnitude,” “power,” “great objects,” and “vastness” (Burke 168-70, 177, 216-7, 242, 262). Burke thus primarily limits his aesthetic discussion to description, focusing more on the objects of the sublime than the role of the subject viewing the sublime.

Immanuel Kant, on the other hand, critiques Burke for giving “a merely empirical exposition of the beautiful and the sublime” (Kant 88). Kant recognizes that objects similar to those mentioned by Burke—those of tremendous power or tremendous infinity—overwhelm us, but the sublime aspect is not inherent in the objects. For Kant, the moment of sublimity occurs not at the moment the infinitude or power overwhelms us, but rather in the moment when the infinitude or power “determines the mind to think the unattainability of nature as a presentation of [reason’s] ideas” (Kant 80). Kant’s two sublimes—the mathematical and the dynamical—refer to whether the size of something (mathematical) or the force of something (dynamical) overwhelms the individual. As Michael Matthis states: “For Kant the limitlessness of the sublime therefore suggests a transition to the moral sphere, to the extent that the subject’s willingness in its own powerlessness, to contemplate (from a safe distance), and find pleasure in, forces that otherwise could threaten its well-being conveys a relation to ideas which imply the moral superiority of human freedom over physical nature” (Matthis 71). Thus Kant transforms Burke’s ideas of the “empirical” sublime, and it is this transformed sublime, the “idealist” sublime, that Coleridge introduced to the Romantics, especially Wordsworth.

Wordsworth’s sublime, like Kant’s, features interplay between the mind and the object, but for Wordsworth, the subject—the Self—is far more crucial. Nature’s most sublime objects, such as “black drizzling crags” (*Prelude* 6.632), the “blasted hawthorn” (*Prelude* 12.301), the “roar of waters,” (*Prelude* 14.59), etc., play on the mind of the viewer to induce the moment of the sublime. While for Kant the moment of the sublime is linked firmly to reason and represents

a failure of the imagination, for Wordsworth, the moment of the sublime is always linked to the poet's imagination. Traditionally, critics define Wordsworth's sublime as a method of reaching communion with a form of "pantheism," a God present throughout and within all of nature (Wlecke 1). The imagination of the poet greets nature so that "consciousness becomes reflexively aware of itself" and leads the poet to a peaceful linking with nature, with everything, so that the limited becomes limitless (Wlecke 8). This limitlessness refers to the "human perception of natural Power" which "is evidence enough that we are at one with the transcendent presence, immanent in that Power" (Voller 128). The exact nature of that transcendence remains under debate, but nevertheless, this desire for transcendence most centrally defines literary critics' conception of Wordsworth's sublime.<sup>21</sup>

However, the moment that "consciousness becomes reflexively aware of itself" does not consistently lead to a uniting transcendence, but rather at times leads more firmly to elevate the Self over the rest.<sup>22</sup> When the poet's Imagination confronts certain sights or traits in nature, the moment creates an "enhanced sense of self," sometimes defined as an "egotistical sublime" (Voller 59, Keats 147).<sup>23</sup> The moment of the sublime procures an alienation that elevates the individual's imagination as a supreme power: as Wordsworth writes in the 1815 "Preface," the

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<sup>21</sup> The language of "pantheism" and oneness, especially in a religious context, is particularly seen more in older twentieth-century criticism. As Lucy Newlyn points out in *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, Wordsworth is constantly negotiating, especially in his early works, "the unique form of pantheism which makes sense of his life" (Newlyn 58).

<sup>22</sup> Whereas Wlecke argues this moment leads only to a united transcendence. He writes that the sublime "refers" not "to a very special form of self-consciousness," but rather "to an activity of the esemplastic power of the imagination during which consciousness becomes reflexively aware of itself as an interfusing, energy dwelling within the phenomena of nature" (Wlecke 8).

<sup>23</sup> Although Keats identifies Wordsworth's sublime as "egotistical," he primarily does so simply for identification purposes, distinguishing his sublime and his type of poetic character from Wordsworth, not necessarily negatively critiquing Wordsworth (Keats 147). Anne Mellor, however, heavily criticizes Wordsworth, along with the other male Romantic poets, for his sublime entailing "isolation, a struggle for domination, exaltation, and the absorption of the other into the transcendent self" (Mellor *Romanticism* 101).



imagination is “proceeding from, and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers” (1815 “Preface” 5). This sublime is not one that unites the Self and nature, or absorbs the Self in nature, but one that isolates the Self from nature in that the Self—the Imagination of the Self—is what is limitless. It is not a unity that brings peace, but a moment of reflexivity asserting the Power of the Imagination of the individual poet: “an obscure sense/Of possible sublimity, whereto/With growing faculties she doth aspire,/With faculties still growing, feeling still/That whatsoever point they gain, they yet/Have something to pursue” (*Prelude* 2.316-322). This sublime is one of imaginative and “visionary power” (*Prelude* 2.311). This sublime is thus also transcendent in that it moves beyond the physical, material existence, but it lacks the unifying pantheism described previously.<sup>24</sup>

### III. A FEMALE SUBLIME?

A seemingly infinite number of books and articles attempt to explain the variances of Wordsworth’s sublime and to argue a vast array of explanations; in relation to Austen, the exact interpretation of Wordsworth’s sublime is less important than the *results* of that sublime. The sublime experience elicits insight. The ability to undergo this experience requires a mind with “organic sensibility” that “[thinks] long and deeply;” this mind presupposes both Wordsworth’s sublime and his picturesque (“Preface” 2). Recalling the earlier description of Wordsworth’s picturesque as one including imagination as a vehicle of sight, little difference between the sublime and the picturesque may seem to exist. The picturesque, however, occurs in the application of the internal, imaginative world to understand or see differently the external; the sublime occurs when the application of the external leads to an understanding or insight

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<sup>24</sup> However, some scholarship links the imagination to the religious transcendence. See particularly chapter four of *Romanticism and Transcendence: Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Romantic Imagination* (Barth 2003).

concerning the internal Self. Both moments occur in Austen, leading to the misconception of these moments as solely picturesque, by virtue of being imaginative. Although most critics focus solely on the picturesque, Austen uses both the picturesque and the sublime in her works.

Austen, like Wordsworth, reacts to the Burkean sublime of the eighteenth century. The limited number of scenes describing the landscape seems to exclude Austen from the Wordsworthian sublime that revolves so centrally around nature. However, in the few natural descriptions that do exist, Austen creates the sublime experience that, like Wordsworth's, is "egotistical" in that the external landscape produces an insight in the heroine about her inner Self.

*Pride and Prejudice* features an example of the traditional Burkean sublime, touched with a hint of satire. The Gardiners inform Elizabeth Bennet of a planned trip to tour the Lake District:

No scheme could have been more agreeable to Elizabeth, and her acceptance of the invitation was most ready and grateful. 'My dear, dear aunt,' she rapturously cried, 'what delight! what felicity! You give me fresh life and vigour. Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are men to rocks and mountains? Oh! what hours of transport we shall spend!' (*PP* 174)

Here we see a prime example of the ambiguity between the picturesque and the sublime.

Although, as A. Walton Litz examines, this passage "neatly embodie[s]" the "young Austen[']s" attitude towards the picturesque, the passage also references the sublime (Litz *Picturesque* 15).

The "Lakes" recall not only Gilpin and the picturesque, but also the location of some of the most sublime landscape available in England. The Lake District additionally evokes the poets of 'the Lake School': Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey.<sup>25</sup> The prospect of visiting this home of the sublime gives Elizabeth "delight," "felicity," and "fresh life and vigour." Elizabeth reveals a familiarity with the sublime in her recognition of being "transport[ed]" by "rocks and

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<sup>25</sup> Francis Jeffrey reviews Wordsworth in 1807, recognizing "his new school of poetry" and the "certain brotherhood of poets, who have haunted for some years about the Lakes of Cumberland" (Jeffrey 1).

mountains” over “men.” The passage additionally shows the power of Elizabeth’s imagination as she imagines not only the sights she and the Gardiners will see, but also how those sights will make her feel at the moment and by the time she returns.

But, where Austen employs a more Burkean sublime in this passage, she also undercuts it through Elizabeth’s satirical excessiveness. The touch of humor belied by the exclamation points and Elizabeth’s word choice—“Adieu,” “spleen,” “transports,” and “effusions,”—slightly mock the Burkean sublime. In doing so, Elizabeth in part also mocks herself, choosing nature over men, exceeding her earlier glib comment: “[s]tupid men are the only ones worth knowing, after all” (*PP* 174). The change from the dismissal of all non-“[s]tupid men” to a dismissal of *all* men confirms the truth of Elizabeth’s “disappointment” observed by her aunt earlier, although Elizabeth still refuses to explicitly express and admit that disappointment.

Significantly, Elizabeth Bennet never actually travels to the Lake District. While the Peak District Elizabeth and the Gardiners do visit also features sublime landscapes, the fact that Elizabeth fails to reach the Lake District is more notable. Here Austen introduces another path to the sublime: one circumventing the traditional methods seen in the Lake Poets. Instead of the Lakes, Elizabeth Bennet travels to, and experiences the sublime, at Pemberley. As numerous critics explore elsewhere, the picturesque landscape of Pemberley, with “the eye [being] instantly caught,” the “abruptness,” the “natural importance... swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance” that is “neither formal, nor falsely adorned” perfectly describes the true character of Darcy (*PP* 271).<sup>26</sup> However, as much attention as Elizabeth pays to the “large,

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<sup>26</sup> Alistair Duckworth notes in *The Improvement of the Estate* (1971) the connections between character and estate (along with societal implications). In *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen*, Barbara Britton Wenner recognizes that “every feature of the estate represents Darcy’s character” (Britton Wenner 57). Britton Wenner includes Roger Sales’ argument that Elizabeth responds to “the estate as the expression of Darcy” rather than with any concern of

handsome, stone building” and the landscape, “where natural beauty [was] so little counteracted by an awkward taste,” she remains more of a picturesque tourist until her abstract musings are interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Darcy himself (*PP* 278). That “Elizabeth was delighted” and that “she looked on the whole scene... as far as she could trace it, with delight” echoes the exclamation of “what delight!” produced earlier in Elizabeth’s exercise of her imagination facing the prospect of the sublime (*PP* 271, 174). Just as Elizabeth failed to admit her earlier imaginative exercise as a product of social disappointment, failing therefore to admit her own feelings, here again Elizabeth actively refuses to examine herself: she interrupts both imaginative actions upon her arrival of Pemberley, as she *sees* Darcy’s character, but avoids connecting this insight to herself.<sup>27</sup>

However, when Mr. Darcy arrives “suddenly” on the scene, the “gentle sensation[s]” within “Elizabeth’s mind” become “instantly” “so abrupt” they are “impossible to overcome” (*PP* 277-8). As the narrator relates, Elizabeth is “[a]mazed” (*PP* 278). The moments in which Mr. Darcy stands before her are “some of the most uncomfortable of her life” (*PP* 278). Elizabeth is “overpowered” (*PP* 279). The language of this scene reveals the sublimity of the moment: and finally Elizabeth allows herself to be “wholly engrossed by her own feelings” (*PP*

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“ownership,” as her line “and at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!” might suggest (Britton Wenner 57, *PP* 271). Nikolaus Pevsner interestingly indicates how both Pemberley and Donwell Abbey reflect “sense applied to sensibility” (Pevsner 422). Wootton, while noting the obvious use of Pemberley to indicate Darcy’s character, intriguingly also notes the importance of the progression required “to reclaim Darcy’s character for both Elizabeth and the reader” (Wootton 37).

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth’s earlier imaginative exercise—the sublime “What are men to rocks and mountains?” passage—follows a discussion with her aunt about Wickham and the wealthy Miss King. Frustrated, Elizabeth finally states that “stupid men are the only ones worth knowing,” and her aunt knowingly warns Elizabeth of the emotions behind such a pronouncement: “Take care, Lizzy; that speech savours strongly of disappointment” (*PP* 174). Elizabeth instead mocks herself, as I already stated, so that the sublime “What are men to rocks and mountains?” stems from the social disappointment in “Wickham’s desertion” (*PP* 173).

279). Eyes blind to the physical landscape surrounding her, the eyes turn completely inward on the internal I.<sup>28</sup> Instead of “fix[ing] his eyes upon herself,” Elizabeth “fixe[s]” her eyes, and more significantly, “[h]er thoughts,” on Mr. Darcy and herself (*PP* 277). Previously Elizabeth recognized the aspects of his character in the landscape, and even briefly thought “favourabl[y]” on “his character” as she gazed on his portrait, but she always managed to avoid a confrontation with herself by maintaining “a proper air of indifference” (*PP* 277, 267).<sup>29</sup> The sublime induced by Mr. Darcy’s presence interrupts the picturesque at Pemberley, just as the sublime moment of recognition produced by Mr. Darcy’s letter interrupts the planned trip to the Lake District.<sup>30</sup> By linking the sublime language with an insight into the self, Austen reveals a sublime akin to Wordsworth’s, while simultaneously transforming that sublime through its application to the social.

The Box Hill episode in *Emma* represents another metaphorical reproduction of Wordsworth’s sublime. Austen first introduces the connection between Box Hill and the sublime when Emma attempts to convince Frank Churchill to travel with the rest of the party to Box Hill:

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<sup>28</sup> “They had now entered a beautiful walk by the side of the water, and every step was bringing forward a nobler fall of ground, or a finer reach of the woods to which they were approaching; *but it was some time before Elizabeth was sensible of any of it*; and, though she answered mechanically to the repeated appeals of her uncle and aunt, *and seemed to direct her eyes to such objects as they pointed out, she distinguished no part of the scene*” (*PP* 279, my emphasis).

<sup>29</sup> “Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character, and, as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression” (277).

<sup>30</sup> The sublime experience at Pemberley more immediately interrupts, or succeeds, the picturesque. However, I believe Austen prepares for this interruption in the general framework of the novel. First she introduces the sublime and the picturesque when the Gardiners propose a visit to the Lake District. Immediately after this, Elizabeth travels to visit Charlotte and Mr. Collins. Towards the end of her visit, Mr. Darcy hands Elizabeth the letter where she realizes, “Till this moment, I never knew myself” (*PP* 230). Shortly thereafter, Elizabeth returns to Longbourn with deeper vision: she analyzes her parents’ marriage. In the same chapter, Elizabeth learns “they were obliged to give up the Lakes” and “was excessively disappointed; she had set her heart on seeing the Lakes” (*PP* 263-4).

“We are going to Box Hill to-morrow;—you will join us. It is not Swisserland (*sic*), but it will be something for a young man so much in want of a change” (*E* 396-7). Although not an Alpine mountain, Box Hill stands outside of Highbury, outside of the comfortable world Emma knows intimately, placing Emma in a position of discomfort and isolation, where Emma is metaphorically outside of herself. The syntax reflects this position: Emma’s thoughts are broken, filled with the multiple em dashes which Austen uses to suggest fragmentation, sudden and quick thought processes, and agitation. The language of the scene reflects the sublime moment within the mind, as opposed to an actual sublime landscape: Emma feels “agitated,” “extraordinary,” “alone,” “unattended,” “sunk,” “overcome,” “vexed beyond what could have been expressed,” “mortified,” and “exposed” (*E* 409).

The uncomfortable position outside of the familiar allows the “moral climax” of *Emma* to occur, thus aligning Emma’s moral journey on Box Hill with the actual, physical journey. She ascends the hill with high expectations, but also increasing irritation and desire for solitude. Box Hill overlooks Highbury, presenting both a physical and metaphorical perspective overlooking her life; from the top, Box Hill grants a literal, earthly prospect, but more importantly, also grants a view of herself: her own vulnerability and shortcomings. From this perspective outside of herself, Emma can begin her descent from her own lofty perch of vanity and self-absorption. As Adam Potkay relates, as Emma returns to Highbury her realization increases. The descent from Box Hill marked the beginning where “Emma has attained that blindness to the external world that is the necessary prelude to insight, and to rejoining the world with deeper imaginative vision” (Potkay 4). As the party descends from the hill, Emma feels “most forcibly struck. The truth of this representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart” (*E* 409). Kay Young writes that Emma’s mind is “transform[ed]... to a mind that sees something that is so beyond

pleasing that the mind must work hard to understand it and then imagine what to do to be at ease again” (Young 48). Although Young applies this to the garden scene with Mr. Knightley at the end of *Emma*, the same transformation occurs, perhaps more crucially, on Box Hill. As Emma “reflected more,” as she agitatedly contemplated Mr. Knightley’s remonstrations and her own poor conduct, “she seemed but to feel it more” (*E* 409). In order to put her mind “at ease again,” Emma must “become a living soul,” “passing even into [her] purer mind/With tranquil restoration”: Emma seeks “[un]interrupted” solace in “pensive meditations, as she walked home” from Miss Bates’s in a visit attempting to mend the insulting behavior on Box Hill (*E* 419, “Tintern” ln. 30-31, 47).

Emma “exposed herself” on Box Hill, and more importantly, becomes aware of her self-exposure. This act of exposure again brings in the sublime. When discussing Switzerland, Frank Churchill equates “expos[ing] [him]self” with the production of “sketches,” a “tour” book, and/or a “poem” (*E* 396). The repeated use of the verb “expose” indicates the link between imaginative production and the sublime, so that Emma’s exposure mirrors the self-examination, imaginative process and rational process necessary to produce “sketches” or a “poem.” Thus, until Emma feels “shame” she cannot “subject[t] her imagination” and become aware of her self and reflect on her self (Young 50).<sup>31</sup> It is similar to what Weiskel addresses in Kant as the “collapse” of imagination necessary for reason to increase and expand itself (Weiskel 22). The exposure opens Emma to the moral growth and understanding Wordsworth advocates.

The Lyme Regis episode in *Persuasion* provides Anne Elliot with her own moment of sublime insight. As the party is “walking down to the sea,” they see the “cliffs stretching out to

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<sup>31</sup> Young reiterates this point when she quotes from *Persuasion*: “Anne is ‘ashamed of herself’ for ‘being so nervous’ but needs ‘a long application of solitude and reflection to recover her’ (*Persuasion* 81).” Much more could be said on the connection between shame and the sublime.

the east of town,” and they descend down towards the shore, the narrator describes the “high sweeps of country,” the “bay, backed by dark cliffs,” “fragments of low rocks,” and the “green chasms between romantic rocks” (*P* 102-3).<sup>32</sup> Although Austen at first separates this description from Anne’s consciousness, the return to Anne’s mind following the description reveals the sublime landscape’s effect on Anne. Like the “[t]houghts of more deep seclusion” felt by Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” after “behold[ing] these steep and lofty cliffs,” Anne beholds the scene and her mind retreats into isolation: she cannot believe Captain Benwick to have “a more sorrowing heart” than she (*P* 104-5). It is only her future that completely lacks hope, suggesting that “the grandeur of the country” suits her own “state of mind” even more than Captain Benwick’s (*P* 104). Additionally, in true Wordsworthian mode, the reader sees only Anne respond to the sublime landscape unaffectedly. The party “found themselves on the sea shore, and lingering only, as all must linger and gaze on a first return to the sea, who ever deserve to look on it at all, proceeded towards the Cobb” (*P* 103). While the rest of the party “linger[s] and gaze[s]” “only” as one *must*, Anne genuinely engages with the landscape. Her “gaze” is not one of imperative fashion, but of one who legitimately “deserve[s]” to see.

Anne “deserve[s]” to see, or perhaps more appropriately, Anne is *able* to be moved by the sublime because of her “elegance of mind and sweetness of character” that establishes her as a person of “real understanding” (*P* 6). Instead of chasing in nature “an appetite: a feeling and a love/That had no need of a remoter charm,/By thought supplied,” as Captain Benwick does,

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<sup>32</sup> This passage receives scholarly attention for its other links to Wordsworth and the Romantics as well. Karl Kroeber and William Deresiewicz recognize the passages ties to Wordsworth’s conception of loss and time: “Anne learns that time is not a road one traverses, leaving the past behind in the distance, it is a sea on which one precariously floats” (Deresiewicz 135). However, scholars also oppose this link to the Romantics. Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues that this scene, along with the frequently examined walk to Winthrop earlier in *Persuasion* (*P* Ch. 9), “show[s] tensions which marks the limits of Jane Austen’s absorption of romantic diction and feeling” (Bodenheimer 620).



Anne can reflect on the emotions and the thoughts the sublime produces (“Tintern” lines 81-83). The sublime produces in Anne a feeling of “lowness” that moves her to “struggle” to reach a deeper awareness of herself (*P* 105). This wrestling, by “thought supplied,” is evident when, once indoors, Anne recognizes that Captain Benwick’s excessive indulgence in “strong feelings” without any attempt “to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts” is only a “coarser pleasur[e]” (*P* 109, “Tintern” ln. 74). The “struggle” this first sublime landscape produces in Anne enables her to recognize her own hypocrisy: with an eye moved inwards, Anne is able to recognize upon “serious reflection” a truth within herself and within humanity (*P* 109).

This inward eye then allows for a second sublime, one more restorative and positive than abstract and dark. Austen illustrates Anne’s increasing awareness of herself by magnifying the immediate presence of Anne’s consciousness in the second sublime scene. Where in the first episode, the landscape is described from a “stranger’s eye,” in the second scene Austen directly narrates Anne’s response to the landscape: she “praised the morning,” “gloried in the sea,” and “delight[ed]” in “all the grandeur which so flat a shore admitted” (*P* 102, 110). This sublime regenerates and “restore[s]” Anne, producing “the animation of eye” so that even Captain Wentworth “see[s] something like Anne Elliot again” (*P* 112). The first sublime alerts Anne to her current, repressed state; the second liberates Anne with her true, full nature. Anne then can look out on her “present view” and see “Lord Byron’s ‘dark blue seas’” without becoming hopeless and impotent, absorbed into a negative sublime (*P* 116-7). Instead, the sublime moves Anne and strengthens her mind so that her character becomes lifted from its gross body, her “thoughts as boundless” and “sou[l] as free” as described in Byron’s *Corsair* (242). Austen underscores this elasticity and quickness of mind with Louisa’s fall: where everyone else is

ineffectual and “immoveable,” Anne “attend[s] with all the strength and zeal, and thought” of her true nature (*P* 119).<sup>33</sup>

Austen further emphasizes the power of the imagination in the sublime, both in reading it and in creating it. When the doctor informs everyone that “he did not regard” Louisa’s head injury “as a desperate case,” Austen employs one of her typical narrating devices: “and the ecstasy of such a reprieve, the rejoicing, deep and silent, after a few fervent ejaculations of gratitude to Heaven had been offered, may be conceived” (*P* 121). Immediately following this, Anne does “conceive”: not of her own ecstasy, but of Wentworth’s:

The tone, the look, with which ‘Thank God!’ was uttered by Captain Wentworth, Anne was sure could never be forgotten by her; nor the sight of him afterwards, as he sat near a table, leaning over it with folded arms, and face concealed, as if overpowered by the various feelings of his soul, and trying by prayer and reflection to calm them. (*P* 121)

The “as if” reveals that this imagery is Anne’s conjecture, her own imagination’s imaginings of Captain Wentworth’s emotions projected onto him. This in part reveals the creative power of Anne’s imagination: the complex mixture of the real sight of Captain Wentworth “near a table, leaning over it with folded arms, and face concealed”; the emotions Anne imagines he feels; the projection of those emotions “as if” actual and real within Wentworth; and the resulting imprint into Anne’s memory that “could never be forgotten by her.” This passage reveals another

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<sup>33</sup> In “Transfiguring the Romantic Sublime in *Persuasion*” (1996), Lorrie Clark argues that the scene of Louisa’s fall in fact illustrates Austen’s objections to the sublime. David C. MacWilliams argues against Clark in his essay, “‘Hurrying into the Shrubbery’: The Sublime, Transcendence and the Garden Scene in *Emma*,” published in *Persuasions* (2001) and featured in Bloom’s *Literary Themes The Sublime* (2010). Kay Young similarly acknowledges the garden scene in *Emma* as the moment where Emma’s imagination changes. For the Box Hill scene, George Levine argues that Emma “achieves the freedom of renouncing the recklessness of her imagination and the satisfactions of self for the constraints of the Knightleyan social ideal” (Levine 13). Emma, however, never loses the “satisfactions of self,” and I would in fact argue that the “recklessness” of Emma’s imagination stems not from needing to be “constrain[ed],” but rather that Emma needs something more to apply her imagination to: with “no equals” and no profession available to her assertive personality and vivid imagination, Emma is isolated and bored, therefore immersing herself in social perspectives and prospects (*E* 75).

example of how Austen's Wordsworthian sublime stems from a social setting; but it also adds a gendered element, since Austen, or Anne, applies Anne's imagination to the male figure of Wentworth.

As discussed above in the examples from *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*, Austen presents a sublime analogous to Wordsworth's in her novels; but Austen additionally introduces a discourse on gender by extending the traditional location of the sublime in nature to the social realm. A consideration of a female sublime requires an application to the social sphere since social interactions constituted such a large portion of women's lives in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Virtually all of the sublime induced by the landscape or set within the landscape in Austen's texts stem from a social context, creating a female sublime countering that of the masculine sublime seen in Wordsworth. The female experience of a sublime, especially produced by the feminine, social sphere, challenges the masculine-dominated traditional sublime. However, as will become apparent later, Austen refuses to settle for such a simple, binary schema.

The treatment of the sublime by women writers remains primarily an unexplored territory. Most critical interpretations from the few scholars who venture to explore this terrain fall into at least one of the following categories: the avoidance of the sublime, the refutation of the sublime, or the creation of a separate female sublime. Mary Shelley famously assaults her male contemporaries' assumption of control over and penetration of a female nature and illustrates the destructive paths of the egotistical sublime.<sup>34</sup> A few scholars note a similar

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<sup>34</sup> Mary Shelley most notably receives credit for this attack in her work *Frankenstein* (1818). For example, in his article "Mary Shelley's Sublime Bodies: *Frankenstein*, *Matilda*, *The Last Man*" (2006), Steve Vine argues that Shelley subverts the idea that the "proper domain of woman is the beautiful, not the sublime; the strenuous transcendences of the latter are reserved for the

attempt to subvert the masculine in the journals of Dorothy Wordsworth.<sup>35</sup> Anne K. Mellor, one of the only critics to repeatedly stress a separate, distinct female sublime, argues that female writers offer a sublime that “enables the women who experience it to effect a mental escape from the oppressions of a tyrannical social order” and that “Romantic women writers specifically condemned Burke’s and Wordsworth’s presentations of the sublime as a moment of masculine empowerment over female nature” (Mellor *Romanticism* 95, 105). Although different from Austen’s, Mellor’s female sublime offers a stepping stone between the traditional male sublime and the integrated, balanced sublime we will come to associate with Austen.

Mellor makes a stark contrast between the male and female sublime: she also further divides the female into two sublimes, only one of which directly relates to Austen. Mellor argues that Radcliffe, the prime exemplar of the sublime relating to Austen, uses the Gothic sublime to illustrate the tyrannical dangers of patriarchy. In order to give females “a mental escape” from this tyranny, Radcliffe creates a positive sublime that “both inspires and sustains love by giving each individual a conviction of personal value and significance” (Mellor 95). Mellor’s second female sublime fails to apply immediately to Austen since it refers explicitly to Scottish and Irish female novelists, like Sydney Owenson and Helen Maria Williams. Despite different manner, theoretically, both of Mellor’s female sublimes provide an “alternative definition of the sublime as an experience that produces an intensified emotional and moral participation in a human community” (Mellor 105). Mellor classifies this definition as “alternative” by dismissing the use of Wordsworth’s and other male Romantic poets’ sublime by any female writers, and by granting the Romantic sublime a reduced and simplistic

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male” (Vine 141). Vine identifies Shelley’s sublime as “a sublime of the unrepresentable,” considering it as a negative sublime (Vine 153).

<sup>35</sup> Aiden Day indicates this in a chapter on the Female and the Sublime in his broad overview of the Romantic Period, *Romanticism*.

understanding. Through this, Mellor depicts two separate and completely distinct sublimes, restricted and utterly defined by gender.

Austen, unlike Radcliffe, portrays a female absorption into the traditionally masculine sublime. Where Anne can mentally project the sublime onto the masculine body, it is, of course, Elizabeth who enacts this physically within a social situation. As discussed previously, Elizabeth “found herself quite equal” to meeting Lady Catherine. But, Austen presents Sir William as the exact opposite of “bold” Elizabeth. Sir William, “so completely awed by the grandeur... had but just courage enough to make a very low bow, and take his seat without saying a word” (*PP* 183). The language of the masculine sublime, here applied to Sir William, renders him impotent. In contrast, when applying the masculine to the female Austen establishes a female figure embodying the sublime-inducing object—the “grandeur” of Lady Catherine and her home, armed with the power to awe—and a female figure standing as the sublime-spectator—Elizabeth, who “could observe,” as opposed to the others who stood “not knowing which way to look” (*PP* 183). This scene exhibits a subversion of the masculine in application to the social, where the male becomes threatened and incapacitated by a female who exhibits all of the traditional masculine attributes of the sublime.

While it is tempting to say Austen creates a gendered dichotomy, her ultimate goal, contrary to Burke, Radcliffe, and Mellor, is to create a balanced sublime of equal parts masculine and feminine. As I’ve already argued, Austen in fact participates in the masculine sublime. Even Radcliffe’s sublime directly reflects Burke’s, both in diction and straightforward presentation. However, as illustrated in the scene with Lady Catherine, Austen defies this convention: while Austen uses Burkean language of the sublime, her implementation is subtle, and not applied to the landscape as it is in Radcliffe. Instead, as mentioned, Austen applies the

powerful, masculine language of the sublime to the social sphere: here, the female figure of Lady Catherine. Certainly this undermines the same “oppressions” of a patriarchal, “tyrannical social order.” Lady Catherine robs Sir William of his voice and even a physical presence: he becomes “very low.” The creation of a threatening and powerful female character, however, represents only one facet of Austen’s argument. In order to form her balanced sublime, Austen also exposes the flaws in the traditional masculine paradigm by revealing a hollow Romanticism.

Austen explores positive and negative female uses of this convention in order to launch her addition of a non-binary sublime. She in part questions the male monopoly of power by linking male hypocrisy with Romanticism and the sublime, forging a hollow, or empty, Romanticism. Austen’s male characters identifying with the Romantic aesthetic do so disingenuously and excessively. Austen clearly reveals this in the unfinished *Sanditon* with Sir Edward. In an explicit discussion of the sublime, Austen describes how:

He began, in a tone of great Taste and Feeling, to talk of the Sea and the Sea shore—and ran with Energy through all the usual Phrases employed in praise of their Sublimity, and descriptive of the *undescribable* Emotions they excite in the Mind of Sensibility.—The terrific Grandeur of the Ocean in a Storm, its glassy surface in a calm, its Gulls and its Samphire, and the deep fathoms of its Abysses, its quick vicissitudes, its direful Deceptions, its Mariners tempting it in Sunshine and overwhelmed by the sudden Tempest... (S 174)

Sir Edward invokes images and descriptions of the sea’s “Sublimity” that Charlotte quickly identifies as “rather commonplace” (S 174). His affectation continues as he consecutively misattributes lines to various poets. Austen communicates his energy and enthusiasm with the repeated em dashes, fragmenting his thoughts; the over-used exclamation points; the questions left unanswered, meant to be rhetorical since, of course, Sir Edward cannot imagine any other answer beyond that which he feels; his quick dismissal of Charlotte’s criticism, in chase of further trite ejaculations; and his repeated contradictions. Austen contrasts this hypocrisy—Sir

Edward's "bewilderment" and "number of... Quotations"—with Charlotte's well-remembered familiarity and genuine engagement with the poets and their works (*S* 174).

Austen frequently parallels this opposition through a specific employment of italicization. Austen and the narrator italicize words of both Charlotte and Sir Edward, but where this emphasis genuinely stresses what Charlotte finds crucial, the use of italics with Sir Edward only underscores his hypocrisy. In the above passage, Austen clearly mocks Sir Edward for attempting to make "the *undescribable* Emotions" describable: the italics reveals that while Sir Edward may identify the emotions as "undescribable," the attempt to even identify them undermines his chosen adjective. After Sir Edward states, "If ever there was a Man who *felt*, it was Burns," Charlotte explains, "as soon as she had time to speak," that while she finds "great delight" in "several of Burns' Poems," she cannot derive complete "enjoyment of his Lines" because she doubts "the *Truth* of his Feelings" and his "*sincerity*" (*S* 176). Charlotte firmly states, "He felt, he wrote and he forgot," since the relations of his life fail to match the words and sentiments espoused in his poetry (*S* 176). Austen counters the italicized "*felt*" in Sir Edward's statement with the "felt" in Charlotte's, revealing a preference for works true to the author, and of true emotion, not words of "impassioned feelings" little based in "prosaic" reality (*S* 176).

Austen continues to question the male monopoly of power when Sir Edward creates a gulf between the rationality and emotions of women and men: "nor can you, loveliest Miss Heywood (speaking with an air of deep sentiment)—nor can any Woman be a fair Judge of what a Man may be propelled to say, write or do, by the sovereign impulses of illimitable Ardour" (*S* 182). The utter tyrannical power with which this gives men—the "sovereign" and "illimitable"—is "much Nonsense" and "un-intelligible" to Charlotte, and indeed, to Austen. Sir Edward excludes women from understanding, appreciating, or judging the overwhelming

passions as supposedly sublime and powerful as the sea. But Austen, by revealing Sir Edward's lack of "Truth," "sincerity," genuine feeling, and "clear Brain," undercuts this vein of thinking (*S* 175-6). Sir Edward's "deep sentiment" echoes Marianne's "romantic vocabulary" that confines her to "pre-existing categories" instead of permitting her to speak genuinely and "freely" (Thomsen 134).

In the address of the male monopoly present in her male characters, Austen also recognizes that same monopoly's existence in male authors. While Sir Edward condescendingly excludes Charlotte from understanding the male and the masculine realm, Austen simultaneously reveals that Sir Edward "cannot do justice to the attributes of Woman" (*S* 175). This critique extends past Sir Edward to also apply to the male literary tradition. Not only is "Woman" described poorly and not given due "justice," but "Woman" additionally becomes consumed by the male author: Burns' "Soul was the Altar in which lovely Woman sat enshrined, his Spirit truly breathed the immortal Incense [sic] which is her Due" (*S* 175). And yet, while "Woman sat enshrined," Sir Edward also affirms Scott's misogynist lines as women's "Due," even though they reflect an opposite perspective of women: "O woman! In our hours of ease/Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,/And variable as the shade/By the light, quivering aspen made;/When pain and anguish wring the brow,/A ministering angel thou!" (Scott *Marmion* lines 902-907). Austen enjoyed Scott's poetry and work, but she criticizes the sublime ego produced "from the soul of high toned Genius" since this masculine ego presumes to be "unequaled, unrivalled" "more melting, more fraught with the deep Sublime," the "true soul," aware of the "extreme of our Sensations," "flash of feeling," and "Passion" unknown to women and "the grovellings of a common mind" (*S* 175-6).



Austen's observation extends from the poets themselves to other literary men who, like Gilpin, assume a high and lofty tone, and also to readers like Sir Edward and Captain Benwick that idolize these men "of high toned Genius." In this aspect of the male literary tradition, man becomes an almost God-like figure. Burns' embodiment of the female through divine language represents this: "Woman sat enshrined" in *his* "Soul," and "his Spirit truly breathed the Immortal Incence" just as God prompts creation in Genesis. The female becomes absorbed in this inflated conception of a solely male "Genius." This echoes Burke's male-female dichotomy, but more importantly, in doing so, erases the chance of a female introduction and reception into the sublime while also disregarding the female voice.<sup>36</sup>

Austen thus reveals that this is the current result of the political, masculine sublime, in order to argue that this result is not necessary. To counter the masculine conception of an importance, genius, and power of the mind limited to the male sphere, Austen promotes a female resistance that undermines the masculine sublime by illustrating a refusal to respond to the traditional Burkean language and scenes. After Catherine Moreland "bore with the effusions of [John Thorpe's] endless conceit" and "the extreme weariness of his company" that "continued unceasingly to increase," she made the "bold surmise" "to resist such high authority, and to distrust his powers" (NA 47). Mr. Thorpe's "effusions" first significantly contrast the "liveliest effusions of wit and humour" in novels, as the narrator states in chapter five (NA 24). Mr.

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<sup>36</sup> The lack of female voice is a theme Austen repeats throughout her works. In *Persuasion*, for example, Anne tells Captain Harville, "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands" (P 255). Austen explores the contrast between the "pen(s)" of men in women in the fifth chapter of *Northanger Abbey*: "And while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens,--there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them" (NA 23).

Thorpe receives a description reminiscent of what would be expected of the sublime—a “high authority” and “powers,” “endless,” “continu[ing] unceasingly,” and “extreme”—but the “authority” of this self-absorbed masculinity is subverted. “[T]o resist” and “to distrust” become the “bold” thing to do, encouraging Catherine, and females, to be “in the habit of judging for [themselves]” (NA 47). Earlier in this essay, I already explained how Austen, like Wordsworth, advocates a trust in the judgment of the self, but here we see how this promotion is connected with the separation of the masculine and the feminine.

Austen’s goal in inverting the conventional positions of power matches her purpose in sometimes depicting an imaginative female power stronger than a male’s: Austen seeks not to elevate the feminine over the masculine, but rather to illustrate the possibility of equality between genders and to provide insight into the unexplored female mind. Although Henry Tilney conceitedly assumes Catherine holds no “wisdom” until she fully embraces his own, Catherine actually displays a more advanced critical reasoning and imaginative power than Tilney. Where Catherine takes what she’s learned from her reading and applies it to other situations, Tilney can read only the literal:

Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you... Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (NA 162)

After this admonishment, Catherine remains distraught at the “liberty which her imagination had dared to take” (NA 162-163). Henry only recommends Catherine “[c]onsult [her] own understanding,” “[her] own sense of the probable,” and “[her] own observation” if *hers* match *his*. Tilney’s efforts on Beechen Cliff to prescribe the “fixed language” of the picturesque against Catherine’s own “notions” match his efforts throughout *Northanger Abbey* (NA 80). As

the narrator sardonically states on Beechen Cliff, “Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. To come with a well-informed mind, is to come with an ability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman especially...” (NA 81). Henry Tilney continues to pursue Catherine because she satisfies his own vanity: “believing that heart to be his own which he had been directed to gain” he would not stop from asking her hand in marriage (NA 207).

In addition to revealing a lack of genuine feeling and thought in males uncritically and excessively accepting this ideology, the hollow Romanticism Austen depicts reflects an aesthetic, a society, and a literary tradition deriding and excluding women. The passionate, reckless abandonment presents an extreme danger to women, because society refuses to grant women the same options as men. This explains why Austen focuses all of her novels on the period in the heroine’s life immediately prior to marriage: because this period is at the time in which society grants women the most agency. As Henry Tilney points out to Catherine, “man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal” (NA 54). The male recognition of this strictly limited power simultaneously enacts and enforces its very limitedness. The relegation of women’s power to only a response to men’s parallels the constraint on women’s power in the aesthetic of the sublime, where women can only respond in terms enforcing the masculine dominance over the feminine.

Austen at times empowers women against this limitedness through resistance; yet she still recognizes that the limited power allowed to women leaves them in a distinctly vulnerable position. A poor marriage choice on the female’s part, the application of the hollow Romanticism on the male’s part, or the absorption of the hollow Romanticism within female characters, present a danger with near fatal results to women. Austen reveals this multiple times

in *Sense and Sensibility*. Colonel Brandon recognizes the male's role in the first female ruin depicted in the novel: "with a husband to prove inconstancy" and "her first seducer" both affirm Brandon's blaming of male figures for Eliza's divorce, shameful pregnancy, and death in squalor (SS 234). Eliza's daughter, Eliza, also becomes a victim of male hypocrisy and patriarchy, revealing the detrimental, never-ending cycle. Willoughby seduces Eliza, impregnates her, and then refuses to marry her, leaving Eliza in a "wretched and hopeless situation" (SS 238). Although some critics identify Austen as a conservative, anti-Jacobin novelist, Austen in fact subverts the typical conservative plot, as Johnson reveals.<sup>37</sup> As Johnson perceptively says, "By the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, Eliza lives on, in obscurity to be sure, but also as an enduring testimony to betrayal" (Johnson *Women* 69). Eliza provides a "testimony" of the dangers males embracing the hypocritical Romanticism of excess creates for women.

Continuing this theme of women as victims of male emotional excess, Eliza additionally serves as an example of what *could* have happened to Marianne. Willoughby too seduces Marianne, and encourages her conventional embrace of an extreme sensibility that is as dangerous to her as the hollow Romanticism is to them both. Willoughby's past transgression interrupts his plans to marry Marianne, since his benefactor "doubt[s] the morality of [his] conduct"—an accurate doubt—and leaves him penniless (SS 366). As Willoughby relates to Elinor after Marianne nearly dies, "My affection for Marianne, my thorough conviction of her attachment to me—it was all insufficient to outweigh that dread of poverty, or get the better of those false ideas of the necessity of riches, which I was naturally inclined to feel, and expensive society had increased" (SS 366). Although Willoughby professes to find the cottage, and its inhabitants, "faultless," Willoughby throws Marianne aside as "insufficient" to "the necessity of

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<sup>37</sup> Marilyn Butler, on the other hand, argues the exact opposite in *Jane Austen and the Wars of Ideas*.

riches” (SS 366). After already impregnating and betraying one vulnerable woman, Willoughby abandons another, nearly causing her death.

Despite Willoughby’s disposal of Marianne, Austen provides her with a happy ending, which, as Johnson again points out, is unusual. Not only could Austen “easily have killed Eliza off in the interests of tidiness,” but she could also have stuck with the conventional plot of sensibility and let Marianne die of her illness, rather than “yan[k]” her “back” from “the brink of death... into a second and happy attachment which flies in the face of cultural ideals about women’s sentimentally self-monitored loyalty to the men who first love them” (Johnson *Women* 69). In the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen depicts Marianne limited in the language and world-view of a static “sensibility” and picturesque (as I described earlier) similar to the hollow Romanticism seen in Sir Edward, Willoughby, and other male characters. Austen reveals this stagnation by illustrating a preoccupation with autumn. Since her free indirect discourse remains incompletely developed in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen relies on conversation to impart Marianne’s thoughts: the autumn obsession then manifests in Marianne’s conversation with Edward and Elinor, where she relays the “transporting sensation[s]” and “feelings...inspired” by autumn (SS 67). The limited access to Marianne’s mind reinforces the limitations of Marianne’s “romantic vocabulary” that prohibits her from speaking “freely” and confines her to “pre-existing categories” (Thomsen 134). Marianne only breaks free from this linguistic and mental restraint in the very end of the novel.

For Austen, such hollow Romanticism, when absorbed by the female, forges a female fragility, indicated through a fixation on autumn and the poetical lines describing it. Both Fanny and Anne exhibit this tendency, tendency, like Marianne, to fall into quotation and repeat poetical lines, relying on the “romantic vocabulary” Sir Edward similarly employs. The

vocabulary—the poetry—itself receives no critique from Austen: only the vulnerability produced from the stagnation resulting from the preservation of “loyalty to the men” who they “first love” (Johnson *Women* 69). Unlike men, who have the power of choice, women can only wait to be asked and wait to accept—or to enact their only form of power and refuse, as Elizabeth Bennet employs twice in *Pride and Prejudice*. As Anne explains to Captain Benwick, excess must be tempered. Austen requires this limitation especially in women because of the danger a lack of limits presents: the excess embraced by these women only endangers themselves.

In *Persuasion*, for example, Anne escapes the consuming, stationary perspective through Captain Wentworth’s return to her life. Anne, or the narrator, foreshadows her growth out of “[t]he sweet scenes of autumn” (P 91). At first Anne sees only, and receives “*pleasure*” only from “the last smiles” and “the tawny leaves and withered hedges,” the landscape all an “apt analogy,” “symboliz[ing] her declining beauty and regret over her rejection of Wentworth” (P 90-1, Anderson 4). Anne attempts to “occup[y] her mind as much as possible in... musings and quotations,” by “repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn, that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness” (P 71). Anne revels in this “apt analogy of the declining year,” so much so that any “tender sonnet” describing “declining happiness, and the images of youth and hope, and spring, all gone together” are considered a “bless[ing]” to her “memory” (P 91). Anne attempts to “fall into quotation” along the walk—and she remains in danger of only “declining.”

Had the story taken another turn, Captain Wentworth would never have returned, leaving Anne to “declin[e]” for the rest of her life, much like the ruined Eliza in *Sense and Sensibility*. However, Austen does not dismiss autumn: she, of course, admits autumn is natural and pleasant; but only as long as it is *followed* by spring: Anne “roused herself” after “some tender

sonnet... blessed her memory” (*P* 91). Following this “rous[ing],” either the narrator or Anne sees “the ploughs at work, and the fresh-made path spoke the farmer, counteracting the sweets of poetical despondence, and meaning to have spring again” (*P* 91). Anne “roused” parallels the “meaning to have spring again.” Anne’s ability to refrain from sinking permanently into “declin[e]” allows her to reach full “bloom” again: and it is the sublime that grants her that bloom, as I detailed earlier. As Anne explains to Captain Harville,

We certainly do not forget you, as soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions. (*P* 253)

Austen repeats this image in all of her novels: the women who “live at home, quiet, confined.” As I relayed earlier, Tilney affirms the “only” power society grants to women. Even so, women at times negate this power in attempt to escape their “confine[s]”: Maria, for example, only marries Mr. Rushworth to “escape” the “restraint which her father imposed” at Mansfield Park, seeking “liberty” and “[i]ndependence” (*MP* 236).

The only “privilege,” then, that Anne “claim[s] for [her] own sex” is exactly what she states: “not a very enviable one, you need not covet it” (*P* 256). Women, “loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone,” are in a dangerous, vulnerable position as a result, and that they do even have such a “privilege” is a result of their lack of “exertion,” “profession, pursuits, business,” and “occupation.” In another form of *Persuasion*, had Captain Wentworth never returned, or indeed, had Captain Wentworth not even been in the same room as Anne during this pivotal scene, Anne would have spent the novel “declining” into an even deeper isolation and position of nothingness than we see in the beginning of the novel. Austen accentuates this by

introducing Anne so slowly in the beginning of *Persuasion*.<sup>38</sup> Austen additionally emphasizes this in the beginning when she suggests the necessity of “change of place,” “novelty,” and “enlargement of society,” as I described previously, recommending women break through the “small limits of the society.”

The “small limits of the society around” heroines occur when society too firmly separates the feminine and masculine spheres, as illustrated in *Emma*. While Emma’s excessive imagination receives criticism from Mr. Knightley, and while the narrator—and even Emma—acknowledges the numerous negative situations created by her powerful imagination, Austen still celebrates it. The narrator states in the beginning of the novel, “The real evils, indeed, of Emma’s situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments” (*E* 3-4). This revelation by the narrator, however, echoes the well-known, multi-layered statement opening *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen reveals as *Emma* continues, similarly to the undermining revelation seen as *Pride and Prejudice* progresses, that the limited society of Highbury that “afforded [Emma] no equals” presents the *real evil* and *real danger* to Emma (*E* 5). Without even the mind’s engagement through reading, as seen with Fanny or Elizabeth for example, Emma dislikes to read. Without any other “occupation,” and with such a powerful mind, Emma is left bored. The meddling application of her imagination stems not from an innate characteristic of women, but rather the boredom a limited society produces in women. A polar

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<sup>38</sup> The narrator, at first, persists in abstaining from Anne’s consciousness. Austen only slowly ties the narrator’s perspective most intimately with Anne’s: in the beginning, Anne is almost as much a “nobody” to the reader as she is to her father or her sister. With no insight into Anne’s mind, “her word ha[s] no weight” just as it “had no weight” with her father and sister: “her convenience was always to give way;--she was only Anne” (*P* 6). Austen depicts Anne as society sees her; Austen depicts woman as society sees her.



separation between feminine and masculine spheres leads to inappropriate or ineffectual uses of the sublime, the imagination, and the mind.

Burke's, Radcliffe's, Mellor's and the Romantics' varying degrees of polarization then present a danger to both sexes, especially when political associations exist with the sublime (which Burke introduced). Austen illustrates the dangers of the language of the sublime being tied to the political: the patriarchal masculinity. This tie creates the physical weakness of Fanny's character. As Johnson explains, "Turn-of-the-century female conduct books copiously demonstrate that the extreme physical delicacy...in Fanny is the most conventionally feminine thing about her...a quality exclusively recommended to daughters of good families" (Johnson *Women* 95). However, what Johnson fails to indicate, Austen emphasizes: the descriptions of Fanny's lack of bodily strength parallel descriptions of the aesthetic category of the beautiful. As Edmund Burke explains, "An air of robustness and strength is very prejudicial to beauty. An appearance of *delicacy*, and even of fragility, is almost essential to it" (Burke 218). The narrator describes Fanny from the very beginning as "timid and shy," with a "frame and temper delicate... like Fanny's" (*MP* 13, 453). The two thus mirror each other and mutually reinforce each other: Fanny's physical weakness is a manifestation of her own weakness, helplessness, and devotion to the patriarchal figures in her life: Fanny Price "is betrayed by the same ethos she dutifully embraces" (Johnson *Women* 96). The only reason Fanny fails to fully embody Burke's description of the aesthetic beautiful is because of her mind: Fanny's ability to appreciate and see the sublime facilitates the tensions in Fanny's desires and felt obligations identified by the reader.

Fanny's "mental superiority," however, is part of why the conclusion of *Mansfield Park* leaves the reader upset, uncomfortable, and unsatisfied. Austen finishes the novel exactly like a

novel perpetuating dutiful conduct (370). Each character receives an absolute: the “evil” characters receive “punishment,” and remain outside of the supposed domestic bliss of Mansfield Park, while the moral characters receive the perfect, neatly-tied together ending (*MP* 539, 542). Edmund transfers his love from Mary to Fanny “exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier” (*MP* 544). *Mansfield Park* thus closes with Fanny, silent, absorbed and busy constructing a skewed world view where she can believe everything to be “thoroughly perfect in her eyes,” while Susan “remain[s] to supply [Fanny’s place],” hauntingly determining a perpetual continuance of the cycle (*MP* 548).

The political and gender associations bound in Burke’s categorizations of the beautiful and the sublime reflect the societal expectation of women: delicate, timid, and weak. Radcliffe’s female heroines fit this mold. For example, they *all* repeatedly faint when shocked. Mary Wollstonecraft specifically scorns this societal expectation and obsession with women’s physical bodies, outward appearances, and superficial talents, and blames it on the desires of men. Besides imposing physical limitations and expectations on women, bodily, “[t]he predominantly masculine, patriarchal, controlling position of the landscape basically excluded women as spectators,” leaving women to be framed (Britton Wenner 27). In objectifying women based on the physical, men enclose women within a landscape: as Henry Tilney tells Catherine, “he is to purvey, she is to smile” (*NA* 58). This power to “purvey,” limited to men, then excludes women from Wordsworth’s picturesque, which allows the imagination to “purvey” as another method of sight.

Austen releases women from the confines of the frame by celebrating their physical energy, allowing women to literally *move* through the landscape. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet walks three miles alone to Netherfield Park, “crossing field after

field at a quick place, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity” (*PP* 36). Elizabeth’s “activity” is a literal assertion of her independence and energy. Austen similarly depicts Catherine in her youth “running about the country” (*NA* 7). The Dashwood sisters frequently walk among the downs surrounding their cottage, “gaily ascend[ing] the downs, rejoicing in their own penetration of every glimpse of blue sky” and exploring “the most distance parts” of the land around them (*SS* 49, 346). The ability to indulge in “solitary walks” represents a freedom of societal boundaries that is enacted literally over the landscape in Austen’s novels. The elevation of physical energy in women also breaks women free from the objectified frame by countering Burke’s description of the beautiful. Where Fanny’s physical weakness is conventional, and perfectly mirrors Burke’s beautiful, Mary Crawford’s physical strength attracts Edmund’s, and the reader’s, attention: Austen highlights this contrast in the horseback riding scene in *Mansfield Park*. The narrator describes Mary “[a]ctive and fearless,” “strongly made,” and “seem[ingly] formed for a horsewoman” (*MP* 78). Besides “surpassing her sex in general by her early progress” and physical strength, Mary also took “pure genuine pleasure of the exercise” (*MP* 78). The groom highlights the disparity between Mary and Fanny when he tells Fanny as she rides that Mary was “[v]ery different from you, miss” (*MP* 81).

Despite the contrasts she offers, Austen never presents a completely perfect female or male character; as she writes in a letter to her niece, “pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked” (*Letters* 336). The various attempts to either elevate or undermine a female or masculine sublime or sphere that I describe above reflect Austen’s efforts to create a non-binary sublime. As Peter Graham writes, “Mobility is... in a way, a form of constancy: the kind of constancy that’s possible when human nature is seen as dynamic rather than transcendent and universally acknowledged. Mobility involves staying true to one’s self by keeping faith with

one's ever-changing nature" (Graham 869). Austen's sublime is "dynamic," and it is this "[m]obility" that is "transcendent" and "universally" true. Unlike Mellor's argument for a distinctly separate female sublime, Austen attempts to reconcile the two gendered sublimes and correct the imbalance between them.

The scene where Anne imaginatively projects the sublime onto Captain Wentworth reveals an example of Austen's reconciliatory efforts. The passage explains the sublime moments frequently left untold at length in Austen's narrative. Captain Wentworth is depicted here in contemplation. The OED defines contemplation as "[t]he action of beholding, or looking at with attention and thoughts," as "[t]he action of contemplating or mentally viewing," and as "[c]ontinued thinking, meditation, musing".<sup>39</sup> The act of contemplation, as detailed in the scene above, includes the individual "overpowered by the various feelings of [the] soul" and the resulting "prayer and reflection" relied on "to calm" the "overpower[ing]... feelings." This moment is then indicative of the sublime: the interior mind "overpowered," and the struggle "to calm" by "reflection" in "mentally viewing." Scenes of contemplation and reflection occur abound in Austen's novels, but she typically limits them to mere blips: the one sentence I described earlier, after Emma visits Miss Bates's house after Box Hill, is a prime example. Additionally, we see Elizabeth's "love of solitary walks," that allow her space for "reflection," "dwelling" on "recollections" (*PP* 204). Marianne, of course, frequently walks among the hills in contemplation. Even Catherine, who rarely lets her thoughts disturb her, has "reflections... striking at that instant on her mind with peculiar force" (*NA* 168). Although Austen usually limits these moments to a sentence or two, she limits them as understatements, not because they lack importance. As Claudia Johnson notes, Austen similarly employs the same tool in *Emma*:

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<sup>39</sup> OED online, "Contemplation (n.)" (September 2011).

Emma's best actions are of the sort which she, unlike Mrs. Elton, disdains to trumpet. A few strokes of the pen, for example, show that in her attentions to the poor and afflicted of her parish, Emma is intelligent, generous, compassionate, and—whatever she is in her studies—steady. (Johnson *Women* 128)

Austen similarly “disdains to trumpet” the numerous sublime moments in her novels, using only “[a] few strokes of the pen” to reveal them.

The narrator's description of Lyme Regis to a hypothetical stranger in *Persuasion* also illustrates a liminal space for a non-gendered sublime. Austen elicits a sublime reminiscent of Wordsworth, but tempers the power-imagery of that sublime and relies on the understated “contemplation.” The narrator leaves the party and the specific scenes of Lyme Regis itself behind, and declares 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” (*P* 102-3). Thus assuming the reader to be no “very strange stranger,” the narrator ventures to let the reader “know it better” by continuing onto descriptions of “[t]he scenes in its neighbourhood” (*P* 103). Here Austen offers a perspective “for sitting in unwearied contemplation” that ignores the more traditional inducers of the sublime—the “dark cliffs,” “fragments of low rock,” “extensive sweeps of country,” and “high grounds” (*P* 103). The hypothetical visitor instead sits with his or her back to the “dark cliffs” and *on* and above the “fragments,” resting on “the happiest spot for watching the flow of the tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation” (*P* 103).

The response to the seashore presents another example of this sublime of mobility in *Mansfield Park*. Henry Crawford and Fanny Price—characters of seemingly two different dispositions, worlds, motivations and natures—unite in Portsmouth:

The loveliness of the day, and of the view, he felt like herself. They often stopt with the same sentiment and taste, leaning against the wall, some minutes, to look and admire; and considering he was not Edmund, Fanny could not but allow that he was sufficiently open to the charms of nature, and very well able to express his admiration. (*MP* 475)

Although Fanny remains slightly stagnant in her love and hope for Edmund, she “could not but allow” some worth in Henry Crawford. Austen never presents the reveries on Henry as she would for Edmund, but she reveals here that Fanny and Henry share “the same sentiment and taste,” and “look and admire” the same scene. Even more crucially, they share the same feelings: “he felt like herself.”

Austen in part similarly alludes to this at the end of *Persuasion*: “She gloried in being a sailor’s wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than its national importance” (*P* 275). The “gloried” in this last sentence of the novel is the only time the word appears besides in the sublime moment at the seashore in Lyme Regis where Anne “gloried in the sea” (*P* 110). The usage is thus similar, linking the sublime to its second appearance. The word “profession” simultaneously refers to Captain Wentworth’s naval profession, along with Anne’s “profession” as “a sailor’s wife.” The two being referred to as “profession[s]” complementing each other in “domestic virtues” and “national importance” mirrors the female use of the sublime complementing the masculine use of the sublime. Austen thus opens the sublime to women. Fanny receiving a “profession” of “glor[y],” of both “national importance” and “domestic virtues,” grants a place to women in the sphere that Austen illustrates has for too long rejected and secluded women. Austen creates a mobile fluidity where the male and female can unite equally, without gendered and politically charged terms: “the beautiful line of dark cliffs” described earlier in *Persuasion* represents this mobility, surrounded by the fluid and liminal sea.

#### **IV. Conclusion: A Romantic Austen**

Within her “little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory,” Jane Austen creates a space for herself, uniting themes of Romanticism and feminism without being consumed by either movement.

Fully appreciating the Romantic themes as they appear in Austen allows readers to understand her texts as more than simple novels of manners or morality. Austen sought to revolutionize the novel: by expounding within her own works the value of novels and by using her own novels as justification themselves, Austen accomplished what she strove to achieve. The desire to transform the novel parallels Austen's desire to transform the feminine; similarly, the methods she uses to revolutionize the novel parallel those used to revolutionize the conception of the female. While her work stylistically contrasts her nephew's, and the male-dominated literary tradition's, "strong, manly, spirited Sketches," Austen offers not only an equal appreciation of both styles—in her elevation of the female figure, the female mind, and the female novelist—but also a space where the strict borders between the two can dissolve and become as fluid as the sea.

As I illustrate in the similarities between Wordsworth's "Preface" and Austen's works, Austen advocates a reliance on the thought, judgment, and perceptive power of the individual, rejecting insincerity and impermanent fashions and creating permanence in dynamic mobility. Refusing to limit the powers of individuality and rational thought to men, Austen provides psychological insight into the minds of women, revealing rational and imaginative abilities equal to and sometimes surpassing that of men. In providing psychological insight, Austen echoes Mary Wollstonecraft by additionally revealing the negative and debilitating effects on women formed by so exclusive a patriarchy. Although Austen generally provides a happy ending for her heroines, the sometimes fake contrivance of these endings indicates, to repeat Claudia Johnson's phrase, the "dark and disenchanting" possibility of them ever occurring in reality. The readers, like Austen, want a happy ending for the characters who embody sound morality, the capability

of critical thought, and good feeling; but as long as the dominant patriarchy produces women like Lucy Steele and Louisa Musgrove, these traits may disappear from women altogether.

To prevent this disappearance, Austen indicates how feeling and thought, sensibility and rationality, are necessary in both genders: both interplay with the other, influencing each other, and also, together, inform morality. Austen creates female characters that illustrate how the “continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts,” revealing how the interplay between sensibility and rationality occurs in women as well as men. Austen also creates female characters with strong, imaginative powers, which becomes important in her transformation of the sublime. Austen transforms the sublime as Wordsworth transforms the picturesque: at times she criticizes the sublime aesthetic preceding her, the excessive insincerity it can produce, a hollow romanticism over individual judgment and perception. Austen additionally welcomes the female imagination as another vehicle of the sublime, just as Wordsworth added the imagination as another vehicle of sight to the picturesque. Austen creates space for the female mind, and also expands the application of the sublime, arguing against a limited application of the aesthetic: the sublime applied to the social and the domestic illustrates Austen’s transformation of the sublime. This non-binary sublime gives the female novelist power, and forges a mobility within the literary tradition that includes female authors like Austen, with all of their “Ivory.”



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