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THE NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN, LYDIA MARIA CHILD, AND  
CATHARINE MARIA SEDGWICK**

Faten Hafez

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**REPRESENTATIONS OF NATURE AND ECOLOGICAL COLLAPSE IN THE  
NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN, LYDIA MARIA CHILD, AND CATHARINE  
MARIA SEDGWICK**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

of

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

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## ABSTRACT

### REPRESENTATIONS OF NATURE AND ECOLOGICAL COLLAPSE IN THE NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN, LYDIA MARIA CHILD, AND CATHARINE MARIA SEDGWICK

Faten M. Hafez

Did Jane Austen precede Charles Dickens in pointing out air pollution in the big cities? Did she predate Elizabeth Gaskell in delineating the odd blending of rural and industrial towns? And did she surpass Mary Elizabeth Braddon in acknowledging the unusual cultivation of fruits in hothouses? Indeed, Austen antedated Victorian novelists in predicting early signs of environmental manipulation and identifying the attitudes and practices that led to the ecological collapse of early nineteenth century England. In *Emma*, Isabella's health blooms in the fresh air of Highbury as opposed to London's "bad air;" an indication of air pollution wreaking havoc on the health of city dwellers. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny laments the deforestation of an entire avenue of trees at Sotherton estate; a manifestation of humans' greatest impact on nature. In *Northanger Abbey*, Isabella Thorpe faces the daily aggravation of Bath's metropolis chaos; an attestation to urbanization gradually absorbing rural towns. Meanwhile, Catherine disapproves General Tilney's hothouse enclosure, which is a testament to the awkward hybridization of plants' species. These incidents are the key indicators of an environmental breakdown that Austen notices during and perhaps before the time she published her novels. Therefore, this dissertation will reconceptualize her response to nature and place her novels at the forefront of ecocriticism.

Further, this ecological discussion will cross the ocean and extend its argument to Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Maria Sedgwick: two American authors who are Austen's contemporaries. Child's *Hobomok* and Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* are equally involved in revealing the harmful practices that affect the American wilderness. Their observations

present nature as often exploited by England's imperial ambitions. Thus, building on Lawrence Buell's definition of literary texts as "acts of environmental imagination" that make "the world [feels] more or less precious, endangered, or disposable" (*Writing for an Endangered World* 3), this dissertation will discuss their key novels—Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*, Sedgwick's *A New England Tale*, and Child's *Hobomok*—as acts of environmental imagination that perceive nature as a realm of unsurpassed beauty yet, often threatened and endangered.

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I am deeply indebted to Dr. Steven Mentz, who thoroughly examined my topic and helped me situate this dissertation in the center of environmentalism. His notes and observations helped me apply modern ecological thought and add a different ecological perspective to the natural world of the Romantic novel.

I also want to express profound appreciation to Dr. Granville Ganter, whose insightful observation empowered my research in the targeted area of American colonial and environmental history. His knowledge helped me develop the challenging part of this dissertation and made it stand out as a study with a prominent inquiry.

Finally, my family deserves special acknowledgment: Omar, Dina, and Mona took extreme pride in my graduate studies and reminded me every day that compassion is the essence of life, and that it starts with love for the environment. Most of all, I thank my husband, Adel Ibrahim, who believed in me and pushed me forward with love, patience, kindness, and a great deal of encouragement.

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## Introduction

Although the creative and critical arts may seem remote from the arena of scientific investigation and public policy, clearly they are exercising, however unconsciously, an influence upon the emerging culture of environmental concern, just as they have played a part in shaping as well as merely expressing every other aspect of human culture

—Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*

Jane Austen is often thought of as a novelist of manners and aesthetics, an observer of the human and social world, and a proponent of values and moral sense. Her ideal society is one developed within the rooms of elegant country houses and her novels are bound up with beautiful nature, poised culture, and ideal ruralism. But Austen, “the fine painter of life,” as Henry James calls her, is acutely aware of the rapid changes that are taking over England’s landscape.<sup>1</sup> The sturdy oak trees are falling, the hedgrows are injured, and the air is no longer pure. She captures these changes and weaves them into her novels proving herself as an author of not just sublim nature in an imaginary world but of an injured nature in the physical world. What she betrays and what she chronicles is the manipulation of nature in a changing time. Therefore, the goal of my dissertation is to show a different side of Austen, a side that registers more of the landscape and physical world than we have traditionally thought about. I follow the lead of Sir Walter Scott, who wrote a review of *Emma* by way of praising Austen’s literary skills, and I argue that her environmental awareness, and not just her perception of social manners, is what displays her skill in, “the art of

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<sup>1</sup> In the preface of his novel *The Princess Casamassima*, Henry James an American author and one of the earliest founders of literary realism, compiled a list of authors and defined them as “most of the fine painters of life” (np). The list included “Shakespeare, Cervantes and Balzac, Fielding, Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, George Meredith, George Eliot, Austen” (np)



copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes from an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him” (np).<sup>2</sup> The moments where Austen turns an ironic glare at the injured oak trees are the moments where she registers “what is daily taking place” in her world: a world standing on the brink of modernity where the great antiquity of ruralism is blotted out by industrialization and urbanization.

We have been inclined to read Austen’s novels as romantic narratives rife with intense veneration of nature. But I argue that she preceded Charles Dickens in pointing out air pollution in the big cities and headed Elizabeth Gaskell in delineating the odd blending of rural towns and industrial towns. She also predated Mary Elizabeth Braddon in acknowledging the unusual growing of fruits in hothouses.<sup>3</sup> Austen led the way in documenting early signs of environmental manipulation and even predicted and warned against a future of serious ecological consequences. I aim to place her novels in a framework where they are rarely placed. I consider her observations of nature as modes of environmental response that delineates humans’ harmful relation with nature and a stance attentive, most pointedly, to the impact of the economic and political systems on England’s landscape. This prevailing notion gains momentum when I bring eco-criticism to bear on her representations of nature and her inception of something about to collapse. The onset of this collapse is observed in the hidden folds of her narratives. To name a few, in *Emma*

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<sup>2</sup> This review of Jane Austen's *Emma* appeared in the October 1815 issue of the *Quarterly Review*, a literary periodical founded by John Murray. The review was written by the Scottish novelist Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852). Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848). Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *The Doctor’s Wife* (1865).

(1815), the health of Isabella Knightley blooms in the fresh air of Highbury as opposed to London's "bad air" (82), a consequence we perceive as air pollution wreaking havoc on the health of city dwellers. In *Northanger Abbey* (1817), Isabella Thorpe faces the daily aggravation of Bath's metropolis chaos, an urban sprawl we perceive as urbanization gradually absorbing rural towns. Also, Catherine Morland disapproves General Tilney's hothouses, a process we criticize for the loss of the original species of plants, and in *Mansfield Park* (1814), Fanny Price laments the cutting of an entire avenue of trees at Sotherton; an act of deforestation we consider as the greatest manifestation of human impact on nature. These are key indicators of a breakdown that Austen sensed during and perhaps before the time she published her novels and, as noted in the top epigraph, Austen is placing a great influence "upon the emerging culture of environmental concern" (Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 3).

Kevin Hutchings believes that romantic novels are fertile grounds for ecocriticism because they tend to appreciate the natural world and respect its right to develop ecologically, and I would argue that Austen celebrates nature in ways that invite an inquiry about the environment and, in turn, the scrutiny of ecocriticism. He argues, "because Romantic literature often appears to value the non-human world most highly, celebrating nature as a beneficent antidote to the crass world of getting and spending, and lamenting its perceived destruction at the hands of technological industrialism and capitalist consumerism, Romanticism has provided much fertile ground for ecocritical theory and practices" (172-73). Austen bends the convention of romantic narrative when she celebrates nature while exposing its vulnerability and reveres nature's sublimity while lamenting its susceptibility. The bad air of London, the urban chaos of Bath, and the

hothouse enclosures are nature destroyed at the hand of “technological industrialism,” and Austen is keen in attempting to account for the attitudes and practices that contribute to the ecological collapse of nature.

Therefore, much of this dissertation will be devoted to evaluating the changing circumstances of such things as forests, air, soil, rivers, wilderness, and other elements of nature. I will evaluate the environmental consequences of state improvement, picturesque landscape gardening, urbanization and the disappearance of rural towns, as well as the capitalistic economy of industrialization. I will consider how these activities affect, with the aid of modernization and cultural advancement, all aspects of life. I rely on Austen’s observation of a forever unfolding ecological breakdown to demonstrate the persistent instrumentalization of the natural world. The strength of this study is drawn from Jonathan Bate’s belief in Austen’s sense of culture—located in “English verdure, English culture, English comfort” (*E* 292) as it is ingrained in “a landscape and a mode of agriculture” and in her views of “ideal England as one in which social relations and the aesthetic sense...are a function of environmental belonging” while “she is also acutely aware of change” (7).

In this sense, applying ecocriticism to Austen’s novels becomes indispensable, especially when we consider her depiction of nature as never void of ecological thoughts and that what motivated these thoughts was a sense of urgency associated with her need to investigate environmental problems. The green tropes that she used to critique the advancement of industrialization as it restructures identity, culture, and economy are not just a metaphorical projection of the offences against nature but environmental realities of destructive nature. I am confident that by reconceptualizing Austen’s green tropes and sense of urgency as representations of actual occurrences I will be able to change her place

in the literary history, where she has had a long-standing reputation for being a pioneer of early feminism. Certainly, by placing her novel in an ecocritical framework, we can firmly place her in the field of environmentalism as an author with a significant share in environmental discourses.

Additionally, this dissertation will extend its discussion across the ocean and incorporate two American female authors as Austen's contemporaries who also have an important share in environmental discourses. Catharine Maria Sedgwick and Lydia Maria Child are equally involved in pointing out the attitudes and the practices that manipulate the American wilderness. Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* (1822) and Child's *Hobomok* (1824) registered early stages of environmental degradation. Their observations challenge the conventional notion of nature as untrammled or unspoiled. They present it as an entity always challenged by cultural, economic, and political forces. In the most beautiful woods, deforestation looms on the horizon, in the most tranquil countryside, urbanization broods in sight, and in the most abundant lands, imperial acquisition stands impending. In Sedgwick's *A New England Tale*, Jane Elton notices a hill that was once a bed of a river but later receded and left intervals of meadows and in Child's *Hobomok* Mary Conan points out the Indian children sharing in the work of loading an English vessel with the rich goods of their own land.

When investigating Sedgwick's and Child's environmentalism the strength of my argument will be drawn from William Cronon's exploration of the settlers' stance, which I envision as Child's and Sedgwick's stance as well:

Their very survival required that they manipulate the environment, and so it is from their writings that a sense of ecological relations begins to emerge. Settlers had first to survive and prosper before they could sell commodities

across the sea and that meant understanding the land they lived in. By the time they did this, however, the land was already changing in response to that new understanding, creating a landscape different from the one that had been there before. (21-22)

I will argue that they were aware of the settlers' failure to understand the importance of protecting the land before commodifying its resources. I will contend that for that reason Sedgwick's nature-inspired awe picks up an anthropogenic tone as she questions the changes that have taken over the American wilderness, and Child's unrivalled-nature reverence garners a melancholic tone as she witnesses England's imperial violence penetrating nature's wholesome being. We do not need to go farther than Jane's observation of the "appeal on nature [...] unheeded and unnoticed by the rash of young men" (Sedgwick 147), and Mary's moon-like vision shaken by "the decay of human passions, hopes, and prejudices" (Child 43) to view their novels as romantic narratives celebrating nature as an antidote to a world of acquisition and imperialism.

As settlers themselves struggling with the notion of a beloved homeland overconsuming their new, also beloved, homeland, I will argue that Sedgwick's and Child's sense of nationalism struggles with considerable tension. Their uncertain feelings towards England's political integrity causes their sense of nationalism to be negatively developed as part of their conceptualization of nature. Throughout their novels they render portrayals of forests, lands, and people constantly haunted by England's imperial violence, and since the role of land and nature fails to develop a good national culture, their ecological nationalism is as torn as the way they reflect on it. As I will discuss, the portrayal of nature sitting against a backdrop of an environmentally abusive government will be the odd dichotomy that sits daringly against the backdrop of their national pride. I will also

argue that if these issues are any indication, ecocriticism can bear well on delineating Child's and Sedgwick's novelistic approaches as aptly reflective of problems of national pride, imperial consumption, and land acquisition.

Ecocriticism is a way to shift the lens through which critics are accustomed to interpreting Sedgwick's, Child's and Austen's depictions of nature. My goal is to conceptualize their novels with an ecological hindsight and present them as fictional artifacts highly reflective of the changes that occurred to their world. My choice of Austen, Child, and Sedgwick is based on distinct and rather palpable shared factors: the time period—the early decades of the nineteenth century—in which they published their novels, and the anthropogenic actions—England's industrial, economic, and political power—that shaped the ecology of their worlds. These two common denominators create a shared transatlantic multicultural experience that I refer to as an Anglo-American female author experience. The value of this experience lies in its ability to disclose how the anthropogenic motivation of a single nation can cross the ocean and destroy more than its own environment. As I will discuss, Austen used terms like “bad air,” “foul air,” “falling trees,” “timber,” “dust,” and “chaos” to reflect on London's pollution, Bath's urban chaos, and the gentry's manipulation of nature. When Sedgwick and Child speak of the destruction brought to the forest by axes and of land frequently bought and sold, they reflected on England's imperial acquisition of their resources. These authors spoke the same language, relayed comparable observations, and experienced similar problems. Therefore, based on Lawrence Buell's definition of literary texts as “acts of environmental imagination” that make “the world feel[] more or less precious, endangered, or disposable” (*Writing for an Endangered World* 3), I will discuss the ecological collapse recorded in their novels as acts

of environmental imagination related to these authors' views of their environments as "endangered," while giving special attention to the social and cultural context of their production.

In addressing the ecological underpinnings in Austen's novels, it is important to explore her varied approaches to nature and the cultural and political background that altered her environment. I will discuss the subjugation of nature as one of the major ecological underpinnings perceptible in her discontent with projects of improvement, picturesque landscape gardening, and greenhouse enclosures. I will examine air pollution as an ecological substructure discernable in her depictions of the polluted air of industrial cities like London, Portsmouth, and Bath. Similarly, I will investigate the lack of unity in the landscape of properties owned by wealthy gentry as another ecological layer detectable in her portrayal of the fragmented landscape of the grand estates.

Austen's advocacy for the natural world encapsulates the main topic of Chapter One, which discusses the subjugation of nature when it is compromised by the environmental preferences of the upper class. These preferences capture the complex ways anthropocentrism is entrenched in her society. Projects of improvement, greenhouse enclosures, and picturesque landscape gardening are executed to flatter the ego of the upper class but also cause terrible ecological consequences. The irony depicted in the gate scene in *Mansfield Park* reveals the anthropogenic actions that Austen holds in contempt in all her novels. A party of visitors, including Fanny Price, are taking a tour around Sotherton estate, and after "a considerable flight of steps," they find themselves in the wilderness. When Austen describes this wilderness, she acknowledges a cutting down of some excellent trees but at the same time celebrates what remains of its natural beauty,

“Wilderness which was a planted wood of about two acres, and though chiefly of larch and laurel, and beech cut down, and though laid out with too much regularity, was darkness and shade, and natural beauty, compared with the bowling-green and terrace.” (65). The two acres of “larch,” “laurel,” and “beech trees” have been easily removed so the wilderness around Sotherton is more tamed. This is the sort of improvement that is introduced in her novels, and each project is presented with an apparent discontent. The alarm with which her heroines receive the news about landscape improvement demonstrates the catastrophic effect of deforestation as it transforms the land to a non-forest use.

Although trees provide an emblem of organic growth in Austen’s novels, they are the first organism to be sacrificed for a project of improvement.<sup>4</sup> This is made clear in Thornton Lacey, Compton Park, and Sotherton of *Mansfield Park*, in Norland of *Sense and Sensibility*, and in Northanger Abbey of *Northanger Abbey*. In fact, the trees that enrich the natural surroundings of the grand estate chronicle not just the history of family legacies but also the history of the natural wilderness, while the estate itself stands as a symbol of a cultural inheritance. The seven hundred acres of pristine forest that enrich the Sotherton estate are as old as its history. Edmund Bertram stresses the status of the estate by noting, “the house was built in Elizabeth’s time, and is a large, regular, brick building, heavy, but respectable looking” (73). The significance of the wilderness that surrounds it is asserted by the position of “a knoll not half a mile off, which would give them exactly the requisite

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<sup>4</sup> Austen had a special appreciation for trees. Her letters reveal her fondness of trees in general. In a letter dated November 8, 1800, she writes to her sister Cassandra, while being in Hall’s Meadow, about a “dreadful storm of wind” which has done “a great deal of mischief among our trees.” She regrets that “one of [their] two highly valued trees...sunk among [their] screen of chestnuts and firs, knocking down one spruce fir, beating off the head of another.” See R. W. Chapman’s *Jane Austen’s Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others*, p. 86.



command of the house” (70). In like manner, Norland estate in *Sense and Sensibility* represents the many generations of the Dashwood, a family that, according to Austen, “lived in so respectable a manner as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintances” (3). Although the condition of the estate, before falling into the hands of John Dashwood, was secured against “any charge on the estate, or...any sale of its valuable woods (4), a project of improvement is looming on its horizon. Austen’s opposition to these cultural and ecological disruptions has its roots in her personal life as well. While in Chawton, she wrote a letter to her sister Cassandra, dated June 6, 1811, where she talks about her visit to Chawton Park with Mr. Tilson who was “admir[ing] the trees very much but grieved that they should not be turned into money” (289). This indicates that Austen’s value system, which considers the beauty of nature beyond commercial interest, is the exact opposite of anthropogenic views, which undermines all forms of life but regard humans as the center of existence.

Being aware of the intervention of picturesque landscape gardening and the subjective approaches of William Gilpin, Lancelot Brown, and Humphry Repton, Austen did not follow the craze of the picturesque movement and was clear about her disapproval of its manipulative tendencies. Picturesque landscape gardening was a cultural movement that gained strength when it became a discipline that was intently studied, followed, and practiced by artists and amateurs. It unapologetically imposed an artificial system of taste that left little room for natural or unregularized preferences. The anthropogenic effect of this type of landscape lies in its failure to contrive realistic considerations in its vision to revive arid lands, preserve original rivers, or save historic trees. Instead, we encounter a strictly aesthetic theory of distance, subtle shades, groupings of threes, enclosures of plants,

rocky fragmentation, and all alter the natural developing of meadows. Alistair Duckworth discusses the implication of the picturesque mechanism and explains how it involves “not only the indiscriminate cutting down of trees and the magical creation of rivers and lakes but, on occasions, the relocation of whole villages” (44).

In Austen’s novels, we read about many incidents of designing artificial lakes, shifting the direction of streams, and relocating clusters of trees for personal and aesthetic preferences. In *Mansfield Park*, we learn about isolating a small business with its community of clients when Henry Crawford, suggests—in addition to the drastic improvement plan he offers Edmund Bertram—that the farmyard of Thornton Lacey “must be cleared away entirely and planted up to shut out the blacksmith’s shop” (166). This restructuring of nature is a picturesque landscape working toward reifying human prejudice and social inequality. Duckworth points out Crawford’s proposal as Austen’s disapproval of picturesque landscape gardening and affirms that based on “Austen’s symbolic mode...Crawford’s suggestions are insidious enough” (52). Austen’s opposition to the radical nature of picturesque landscape suggests that picturesque designers grant a modern dress that tends to frame, control, and orchestrate nature, thus it is detached from what it ought to be.

When I gave the title “Greenhouses and the Wrongs of Technology” to the last section of chapter one, I was conceptualizing the wounds and injuries modern experimental gardening was inflicting upon nature. In investigating Austen’s exploration of the experimental garden of the greenhouses, we understand how it is yet another backdrop against which we examine humans’ anthropogenic relation with nature. Although these enclosures seem to do what J. C. Loudon refers to in his *Remarks on the Construction of*

*Hothouses* (1817) as “exhibit[ing] spring and summer in the midst of winter” (2), they actually give humans unlimited command over nature. Modern theorists like Jesse Oak Taylor views greenhouses as “the quintessential habitat of the Anthropocene” (23), and part of the reason why greenhouses may be considered anthropogenic is the way they complicate the stability of nature when their system forces plants to develop in a non-native soil and grow in an artificial climate. Generally, greenhouses require the clearing of vast areas of land. They rely on tropical temperature, which is mainly supplied by furnaces, heating stoves, and coal while toxic exhaust is expected as the normal outcome of an extensive system of fuels. The exertion of human labor, horses, and carriages are important necessities; without them greenhouses will not survive. This is all made clear in *Northanger Abbey*, where a village of hothouses is presented to the reader as a bustling village served by a large team of workers and cooks. Although General Tilney describes it as a project unequalled in the entire kingdom, what it is cultivating is what Taylor describes as “the abnatural,” or crops more synthetic than original. Austen included the hothouse in almost all her novels; some of them are referenced directly, such as the one on the premises of Northanger Abbey, and others are alluded to, like the little greenhouse that Fanny tends to in the east room in *Mansfield Park*. But Austen makes her stance clear in *Northanger Abbey*, when Catherine encounters the General’s village, and was overwhelmed with a feeling of “dismay” (167) instead of wonder or admiration.

However, the toxic exhaust of greenhouses caused only a fraction of the air pollution, which was the major characteristic of England’s big cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This leads us to the main topic of Chapter Two, which underscores the contamination of the natural environment with smoke as a consequence of

industrialization. Factories' toxic emission along with coal burning in homes and small businesses contributed a great deal to England's problem with air pollution. I draw on explicit textual references such as "no one is healthy in London" (*E* 75), "smoking in rain" (*P* 95), and "foul air" (*P* 111), "closeness and noise," "bad air," (*MP* 293), and the description of Bath as "a vile place" where "dust is beyond anything" (*NA* 203), to prove that Austen was familiar with air pollution and her references were intentional and clear.

Although air pollution was not widely understood as such until the late Victorian period, the anthropogenic toxins had been compromising air quality in and around London since the Medieval period.<sup>5</sup> England had a catastrophic past of air pollution. It was documented in historical works like John Evelyn's *Sylvia* (1664) and *Fumifugium* (1661), Charles Lamb's *Essays and Sketches* (1820), and James Johnson's *Change of Air, or the Diary of a Philosopher in Pursuit of Health and Recreation* (1831) and continued long after Austen's time. It is the claim of this chapter that the problem of air pollution was widespread and persisted for decades, and so Austen must have been familiar with it. It is true, though, that she never mentions "air pollution" in Lamb's sarcastic tone as "well-mixed Metropolitan fog" (246) or in Evelyn's serious tone as "ruinous smoke," and "sulfurous clouds" (21), nor did she speak of it in Johnson's mournful tone as "murky vapour" (1); yet she referenced it in terms of "London's bad air" and "Bath's foul air" versus "Highbury's fresh air." The various cities and countryside villages that she mentioned in her novels are almost always identified with the quality of the air. According to Barbara Wenner, the towns and villages of the countryside are categorized as "enclaves

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<sup>5</sup> In the late seventeenth century, John Evelyn warned the Royal Society about acts of deforestation, which had reached catastrophic levels; therefore, in his books, *Fumifugium* (1661) and *Sylva* (1664), he advocated the creation of laws designed to ensure the conservancy of the forests.

of civility” (78), which represent health, wellbeing, and organic order, while the polluted cities and urbanized regions are categorized, according to Austen, as the “clamorous and impertinent” (*E*, 270), signifying effluence, chaos, and organic disorder. I argue that this is how Austen charted a map that delineated the most polluted versus the most sanitary towns, making a statement about an undesirable condition of the natural world.

In addition to air pollution, Austen was attentive to noise pollution, which was the natural result of urbanization and industrialization. While we may think that nature rambles and outdoor activities, as depicted in her novels, are exclusive to countryside scenes, the rhythm, and the fast pace of city life demanded a lot of walks and more outdoor activities. This created a dynamic more engendering to excessive noises. I suggest the idea that noise pollution was an environmental problem in modern England though it was never recognized by the English society in terms of hearing contamination, but rather as a condition of inconvenience. Austen was aware of the effect of noises on the quality of life, and she made that clear in *Persuasion* where she referred to the noises of Bath’s streets as “quite innoxious, or most distressing by their sort rather than their quantity” (95). We can imagine these noises as originating from transportation, crowdedness, or factory engines. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne, while in London, yearns “for the air, the liberty, the quiet of the country” (228). In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny experience Portsmouth as a place of “closeness and noise” (293). In *Northanger Abbey*, Isabella is disturbed by the busy traffic and the rumbling of the carriages. What Austen betrayed was a grim picture of noises and unwanted sounds, and there is no shortage in her portrayal of the rambunctious life of London, Oxford, Bath, and Portsmouth.

If noise and air pollution mark the historical moment of England advancing into industrialization, Austen has a unique way of illustrating this advancement as a transition from ruralism to industrialization. She placed rural towns in close proximity to industrial towns and she did this by way of encircling one industrial town with a few rural towns or encircling a suburban freshness with industrial decay. The coupling of rural towns with industrial towns gives a picture intended to portray England's geographical layout at the time when it transitioned from ruralism to industrialization. In *Emma*, Austen placed towns like Kingston, Clayton Park, Langham, Box Hill, and Dorking, which are known for their unique rural features, near Highbury, while Highbury itself is sixteen miles away from London. In *Persuasion*, we learn that Bath, a populous and industrial town, is surrounded by historically rural areas such as Somersetshire and Gloucester County and the village of Clifton, which is described by George Alexander Cooke as a healthy and pleasant place with remarkably pure air. In *Mansfield Park*, Portsmouth, a busy port city, is surrounded by the rich and rural counties of Dorsetshire, Hampshire, Sussex, and Surrey. Although some of these towns are fictional and some are real. The truth about the incongruity of their lay out speaks to a topography actively responding to a social and industrial evolution.

This, indeed, guides us to the main topic of Chapter Three, in which I argue for the same incongruity but on a much smaller scale. I investigate a breakdown in the organic uniformity in the prominent nature scenes of grand estates like Donwell Abbey, Pemberley, and Northanger Abbey. To properly investigate this breakdown, I coin the term "eco-void," which highlights a lack or a disruption in the ecological uniformity of nature when a partial or complete breakdown threatens its organic unity. The focus on the environmental representations of these scenes emphasizes the differing fractions of this eco-void, which

Austen herself does not portray in any simple way. The eco-void can be seen in the fracture in Pemberley's naturalness, the rupture in Donwell Abbey's eco-enclosure, and the manipulation of Northanger Abbey's historical landscape. In delving into these gaps, I am able to assert that Austen, in her attempt to bend a conventional description of nature into arguments of lacks and absences, cleverly raised environmental/ethical questions about humans' relation with nature.

Austen portrays Pemberley's grounds using a pictorial aesthetics of closer and farther aspects; striking views of the grounds are both close and at distance when seen through the rooms of Pemberley. Elizabeth Bennet relays to the reader details of the closer aspects that appear to respond to the owner's wealth and power. Those aspects look natural and according to Austen, were "little counteracted by an awkward taste." Also, according to the eco-void theory, are not entirely exempted from human manipulation. However, the farther aspects consist of "a ridge of high woody hills" (235), which seem to be raw, pristine, and exempted from human influence. This division gives Pemberley a layout of inner and outer grounds, which make it collectively fragmented. Building on Rosemarie Bodenheimer's argument I will demonstrate that pinpointing a void or an irregularity in a seemingly perfect landscape like Pemberley's can, as she says, "suggest [] a process of social discovery or corrected perception" (613) that reveals what has always been veiled by an outer beauty. As for the social discovery, it is made clear that wealthy estate owners have the leisure to impose their aesthetic preferences on nature.

Another social discovery can be traced in *Emma*'s Donwell Abbey, a country house known to possess "a high place in the consideration of the neighbourhood," (290), yet it is stratified socially and environmentally, since it is portrayed as a magnificent estate

surrounded by a considerable slope, thick and rich woods, and a grand bank. Those same meadows are sheltering Abbey Mill a small farm rented and run by a hardworking tenant. There is a noticeable duality in Donwell's encompassing whole: the tenant and the simple ruralism of Abbey Mill versus the landed gentry and the grand ruralism of Donwell Abbey. Meadows, hills, streams, and rivers thrive nicely in the cohesive totality of Donwell's grounds, but when it is measured by power and social ranks, we come across two identities of almost everything. This is precisely where the eco-void exists—in the social and environmental dynamic that forces one solid ground to be ecologically divided.

My discussion of the eco-void extends to Austen's sense of nationalism, which she draws from the grandeur of Donwell, while questioning the validity of displaying its grounds as a symbol of England's national pride. Austen deems the entire ground as “a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort” (292). Yet, the void detected in its social and environmental fracture impels us to ask: how can it represent England's national pride? When the notion of the eco-void divulges these kinds of irregularities, it allows us to scrutinize the cultural and political forces that often act tyrannically and cause a gap in the way landscape is structured and the way it is valued.

In the last section of this chapter, I argue for the historical and ecological preservation of ancient abbeys as one of the best moral valuations of nature. The country house of *Northanger Abbey*, which picks up the same name, is a place with a vanquished history and altered landscape. Both the abbey and the landscape were repurposed to accommodate the residential need of its new owner. The eco-void detected in the entire premises is the result of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, which was a political



movement that allowed the transferring of ecclesiastical properties into the hands of the gentry. The trees, the plantation, and the woody hills of Northanger Abbey are its naturally occurring shelter thus becoming part of its identity. The Abbey, however, is protected by massy stone walls and within those walls the General instigates the worst environmental dichotomies. The historical value of the ancient abbey is contrasted by the new residential occupancy and contemporary prospect. The convent kitchen garden is compromised by the peculiarities of the hothouses and the modern inventions that facilitate the work of the cooks. The sanctity of the ancient cloisters is spoiled by the recreational pursuits of a billiard room. Everything historic is countered by modern equipment and all undermine its historical and ecological value. The eco-void I trace in Northanger Abbey is more interesting because it brings to view the political movement as the major disrupter of both nature and history. In general, this chapter demonstrates how easy it is for the cohesive totality of nature to be divided and how effortlessly it can be tainted when national/political forces are involved. Austen makes this division obvious when the wholesomeness of nature is threatened by the departure of its unity, and it is exactly in this fractured unity that I locate the different shapes of eco-voids.

In Chapter Four, I will consider two American contemporaries of Austen—Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Maria Sedgwick—in order to better understand how the ecological narrative of the Romantic-era is not confined to England. Using a transatlantic method, I will argue that Child and Sedgwick are contemporaries of Austen not just in a temporal sense but also in an anthropogenic sense. Child's and Sedgwick's eco-nationalistic narratives help us understand the environmental degradation that Austen's novels are capturing. When considering the question Alison Byerly raises of “whether a

tree falling in the forest makes a sound if no one is there to hear it” (58), I will extend the discussion of nature’s representations to the falling trees in the American wilderness that virtually no one heard when it was happening. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the tension of the imperial ecocide that was deepened at the establishment of the English colonies. Dialogues of nature manipulation, traces of colonialism, and living memories of political or ecological oppression recorded in Sedgwick’s *A New England Tale*, (1822) and Child’s *Hobomok* (1824) made statements about the status quo of their world. These records testified to their conception of the environment they lived in, and I harness these narratives to argue for England’s imperial eco-cide of New England.

It is important to note that the English people were not the only colonizers of New England. They were always preceded and accompanied by other colonizers, and many scholars, like William Cronon, make general reference to New England’s colonizer as “the European colonizers.” In his book, *Travels into North America* (1750), Peter Kalm, a Swedish travel writer tells us, through his observations of the mistreatment of the American soil, that the easy method of harvesting and getting a rich crop made knowledge about agriculture in New England imperfect. The English, the Swedes, the Dutch, the Germans, and the French could not learn anything yet, “from their gross mistake and carelessness for futurity, one finds opportunities everyday of making all sorts of observations, and of growing wise at the expense of other people” (194). There were multinational colonizers, but for the purpose of this chapter, I focus on the English to gain the greater benefit of exploring and investigating the responses of Anglo-American female authors who were equally affected by the anthropogenic actions of the same nation.

Just like any colonizer, the main goal of the English people was to dominate the naturally generous world of New England and assess how much of its resources they could ship out to England. This attitude is evident in *Hobomok* where Child recounts the list of goods requested by governor Graddock to be prepared and loaded aboard an English vessel when it lands on the coast of Salem. To comply with these demands, there is “a great deal of hurry and bustle ...and for a long while the sound of the axe was busy and strong” (13). In *A New England Tale*, Sedgwick explores the viability of land ownership as an imperial practice that is more harmful to the natural resources. The convenience with which the land is owned, leased, or sold, speaks to the tyranny of a colonizing authority at a time when the concept of land ownership was not comprehended by the Indian people. In the novel, Old John leases a large lot of land from a wealthy family and subleases it to a farmer, while, as he asserts, “it has changed hands many a time.” (131). Both incidents are the actual manifestation of the imperial behavior of a country that perceives, according to Cronon, “the sources of the New England landscape [as] useful to those who could possess them” (165)

As I explore more of these observations, I discover a disturbance in Sedgwick’s and Child’s sense of nationalism, which is the natural reaction for authors who live in a colony manipulated by their motherland. Their national patriotism has a slightly bitter taste of something beginning to go amiss. Their experience with the environmental damage imposed on their present states (the colonies) does not support, much less create, the national pride they try to draw from and attribute to England. The irony resides in their attempt to paint a picture of a colony too drained to represent the political and environmental integrity of its colonizer seems almost impossible to imagine. As readers, it

never escapes our attention that in both novels there are ironic situations with a hint of bitterness that leads to uncertain feelings of nationalism. This torn patriotism stems from and mirrors the odd dichotomies of England's promoted morality versus its tainted political integrity.

Interestingly, this political virtue was never doubted by the English writers within England and Austen's sense of nationalism is resolute. As I will argue, Sedgwick's and Child's nationalism could not develop as part of a positive conceptualization of their natural surroundings because nature, in their view, is always assaulted. Meanwhile Austen's national pride is engendered from great natural scenes. In *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, the term "Englishness," which means the English national identity, is endorsed by the order and the elegance of England's nature. Austen's description of Donwell Abbey elevates the idyllic appeal of its landscape to a nationalistic state, "It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort" (*E* 292). In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny visits the Grant's parsonage and marvels at the ability of the soil and the sun to produce plants beautiful and diverse that "the same soil and the same sun should nurture plants differing in the first rule and law of their existence." (144). Austen makes her protagonists believe in the Englishness of the verdure as worthy of national acknowledgment. This belief is emblematic of an assertive eco-nationalistic tone driven from a positive conceptualization of nature. This is especially true when in *Emma* we consider "The English verdure" (292) as the creation of England's temperate weather and the soil as the formation of its wholesome meadows.

As a romantic writer, Austen expressed profound interest in the natural world. But the social and environmental issues implied in her attention to nature have never been

clearly established. Therefore, the goal of this dissertation is to prove that within Austen's seeming celebration of nature there is an evident discontentment with humans' manipulation of nature and with the culture which those manipulations represent. What this indicates is that environmental problems had a strong presence in the Romantic era—the era in which she lived, wrote, and published novels—and these problems were too strong not to be included in her novels. Hutchings asserts the specter of these problems when he states, “it was during the Romantic era, which witnessed a sharp rise in urban populations and an increasingly industrialized economy, that environmental problems became much more severe and noticeable, taking on a new sense of urgency” (175). As we will see in the following chapters, that sense of urgency is expressed in Austen's novels when she aptly divulges humans' anthropogenic interest in nature. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to place Austen's environmental views at the forefront of ecocriticism, which is, in many ways, indebted to her novels.

**Chapter One: Subjugated Nature and Forms of the Anthropocene in *Mansfield Park*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Northanger Abbey***

In the context of the anti-improvement literature of the time and of the political prose that frequently makes use of metaphors drawn from the practice of estate improvements, Jane Austen's motif takes on a serious meaning. In her view, radical improvements of the kind Repton made were not improvements at all but "innovations" or "alterations" of a destructive nature.

—Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*.

The natural world was of special significance to early nineteenth century British women writers. They perceived a structural parallel between humans and the domination of nature in their time period. They investigated this connection and responded to it in myriad ways. Estates' improvements, and picturesque landscape gardening, topics that seemed to belong to landscape aesthetics, took the lead in their plots. I argue, however, that these topics established a recognition of humans' manipulation of nature, which catalyzed an environmental consciousness similar to the green politics of the twenty first century. As suggested in Duckworth's epigraph, Austen's depiction of nature takes on a serious meaning when she views projects of improvements as innovations and alterations "of a destructive nature." As Timothy Morton explains, "environmentalism is a set of cultural and political responses to a crisis in humans' relationship with their surroundings. Those responses could be scientific, activist, or artistic, or a mixture of all three" (9). Jane Austen, known to be a warm and an emphatic admirer of nature, shares a concern about humans' relation with nature and her novels attend deliberately to the harmful methods the upper class uses to construct and develop estates' improvements, picturesque landscape gardening, and greenhouse enclosures.

## I. Austen's Novels as Models of Anti-Anthropogenic Literature

On numerous occasions, Austen presents the natural surroundings as subject to humans' manipulations spurred mainly by the environmental preferences of the upper class. These preferences are the elite's aesthetic tendencies that give their estates what Henry Crawford envisions as "a higher character" (*MP* 167). So instead of looking like "the mere gentleman's residence," their houses become "by judicious improvement, the residence of a man of education, taste, modern manners, [and] good connexions" (*MP* 167). What is at stake here is projects of improvement as never judicious but rather careless and ill-advised. Its proceedings are never limited to a minor clearing of some trees or shrubberies but a large-scale deforestation that interrupts the developing of soil, rivers, hills, and natural meadows.

These are the kind of activities that eco-theorists would categorize as anthropogenic, especially when human desires are prioritized, and the environment is mitigated biologically and organically. Anthropocentrism is an environmental view that regards humans as the center of existence, thus undermining all other forms of life. It underlines the power of humans' transformative agency and points out their harmful interaction with nature as consequential. The dynamics of the early nineteenth century English society, which are instilled in cultural and economic systems and grant the upper-class free reign over nature, reveal how the gentry develops an agency detrimental to the health of the landscape. In this respect, by allowing eco-theorists to take a lead in the critical analysis of Austen's novels, we are encouraged to view the ethics and the attitudes of the upper-class as environmentally harmful, thereby inaugurating her novels as models of anti-anthropocentric literature.

It is worth noting that Austen was never aware of terms like “anthropocentrism,” “ecology,” or “environment.” These terms were not part of early nineteenth century literary or scientific vocabulary, nor did they have origins in Samuel Johnson’s dictionary, which was published in 1755.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the relevance of these terms to the study of Austen need not depend on their contemporary usage. Her concern for the environment is not expressed through specific environmental jargon or terminologies of explicit ecological bearings, but through her keen observations of the changes that transformed her natural surroundings and her reporting of them as literal examples of nature subjugation.

Lisa Ottum, whose works explore the literary sources of the writers’ shared attitudes toward nature and how Romantic ideals shape contemporary environmental education, suggests, that the ecological reading of early nineteenth century novels is like the “future rewrit[ing] the past fracturing lines of causality between historical moments” (38). When we look at the dynamics of early nineteenth century English society and how these dynamics targets nature to advance the interest of a special group of people, we realize that it is one of the historical moments that needs to be reconsidered from an ecological perspective. The future reassessment of Austen’s novels will support the argument that her fiction does have a specific environmental focus and will uncover the crucial opportunities her fiction offers to redefine nature as susceptible to the putative objectivity of anthropocentrism. Following this line of thought, this chapter aims to open a critical vantage point on projects of improvement, picturesque landscape gardening, and

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<sup>6</sup> In Dr. Johnson’s dictionary, the term “environment,” does not exist. Instead, the term, “environ” can be found; it means “to encircle,” “to surround,” or “to prey upon.” Also, the terms “ecology” or “eco” do not exist. The same with the term “Anthropocene” but we can find “anthropology,” “anthropopathy,” “anthropophagi,” etc. It can also appear within terms like “misanthrope.”



greenhouse enclosures to discuss their harmful impact on the nature depicted in *Mansfield Park*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Northanger Abbey*. The goal is to situate these novels within an anthropogenic framework, thereby demonstrating their sensitivity to the environmental changes that occurred in the world in which they were produced.

Although the Anthropocene was not known as a geological era acknowledged by the English society in the early nineteenth century, modern theorists suggest that humans' anthropogenic actions dated as far back as 1784, the year when the steam machine was invented.<sup>7</sup> Jesse Oak Taylor observes that it started when the analysis of air trapped in polar ice showed deposits of carbon dioxide and methane. This date coincides with James Watts' design of the steam engine, which marks the beginning of the industrial revolution. This definitely helps us outline the Anthropocene as an era we can wrap our heads around to better understand the environment of the English society and feel confident when promoting ecocritical analyses of the literature of early nineteenth century England. In fact, we can extend the boundaries of our ecocritical inquiry over ancient literature when we believe in the theories that push the beginning of the Anthropocene back to the onset of agriculture and the harnessing of fire.

Reading for anthropocentrism involves more than just attending to the many projects that entail cutting down historic trees. But we bring to the discussion the cultural phenomena, and the social and economic conditions that are bound up in the heart and texture of English society. For example, picturesque represents a point of view that frames the natural world into a series of visual tableaux, and picturesque landscape gardening

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<sup>7</sup> Other writers propose other possible date for the onset of the Anthropocene. See Paul J. Crutzen's "Geology of Mankind," *Nature*, pp. 415-23. Also, see Taylor's "Climatic Modernism: Virginia Woolf and the Anthropocene Literary History" under "Archives of the Anthropocene," *The Sky of our Manufacture*, pp. 188-200.

follows intently the same concept with the addition of the upper class's fetishized obsession with it as it gives them license to turn nature into a form of art that embodies the symmetry between the rough and the beautiful. Picturesque landscape gardening becomes a cultural phenomenon that reflects a distinct self-identification of a specific class. As Onno Oerlemans notes, "picturesque is a primarily aesthetic category, which performed the cultural work of detaching landscape from its particular connection to political or ecological orders, turning it into a commodity which might bestow class distinction" (158). Only the upper class has the resources to reproduce nature and impose a certain vantage point where they can elaborate on their aesthetic interest. Estate owners would go so far as structuring extensive picturesque gardens to separate their grand estates from a farm or a small village that distorted the overall landscape of their properties. That same manipulation can be detected in projects of improvement, a trend that bespeaks the ambition of the upper class. Raymond Williams defines two types of improvements, which he believes to be historically connected, "there is the improvement of soil, stock, yield in a working agriculture. And there is the improvement of houses, parks, artificial landscape" (115). The upper class gives a distinct place to both types: the first helps accentuate and expand their mobility and the second, which Williams attributes to their ownership of "agriculture enclosure" (96) leads to the increasing of their wealth. Improvement goes hand in hand with the selling and buying of land and with modernizing historically valuable estates. The gentry who were free to use their land in any way they deemed profitable, participated in all types of land improvement, and the issue of a landowner being attached to the soil will always be subject to what Jonathan Bate calls the owner's "willingness to take the long view of profit" (6).

Central to the social and economic texture of English society is the industry of greenhouse enclosures, which Bate claims to be significant because they, “provide[.] the opportunity to display the trophies of empire” (10). The history of the greenhouse is tied economically to England’s history of imperialism, which is set on exploiting every possible resource of the colonized countries, including exotic plants. It is also tied to what Paula De Vos calls England’s “economic imperial botany,” which is a study of the properties of plants where “the English naturalists...collected ‘exotic’ plants from far-off lands and sent seeds and seedlings to Kew Gardens where they were cultivated and studied, then shipped off to a part of the empire where they could be best grown in large quantity” (404). This study helped popularize horticulture cultivation among the members of the gentry, the nobility, and the gardeners. They became an enthusiastic audience of horticulture and built extensive numbers of greenhouses to pursue their interest in exotic plants while also making profits. Deidre Shauna Lynch affirms that, “Austen’s career coincided with the popularization of the horticulture science...and with an attendant shift in the preoccupation of the English gardeners” (693). This is evident in *Northanger Abbey*, where we see General Tilney showcasing his pineries and taking pride in, as Katherine Kickle argues, “cultivat[ing] crops that would otherwise be only available overseas at enormous expense” (160-61). Indoor plant cultivation stands as a sign of wealth and innovation because it was extravagant, costly, and could only be afforded by those of good means<sup>8</sup>. Despite the expense, the upper class invested heavily in greenhouses, and in Austen’s novels there are

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<sup>8</sup> Ruth Levitt contends, “One estimated report in the Gentleman's Magazine of 1764 calculated that it costs £80 (about £9300 now) to build a pinery that could produce 150 pineapple plants a year; another £50 (£5819) for the plant stock, plus £21 (£2444) annual running costs (for maintenance, tanner's bark, coals, carriage and labour),” p.111.

always several of them built on the grounds of the gentry's estates making clear statements about England's culture and political economy.

## II. The Deadly Sins of Improvements

The relationship between Austen's novels and literary Romanticism has long been discussed, but despite the thematic attention to her nature depiction, attributed mainly to her embeddedness in the Romantic period, certain nature scenes reflect a concern about actions damaging to the environment. Terms like "falling trees," "altered," "cleared away," "shut out," "laid together," "hothouses," "dust," "fog," and "chaos," are frequently used in her novels to draw attention to the domestic activities that interrupt the wider ecosystem. Deforestation, which we now consider as the greatest manifestation of human impact on the environment, takes a considerable share in this interruption. Projects of improvement and greenhouse enclosures require cutting down large numbers of trees, while picturesque gardening mandates uprooting and replacing plants and shrubberies, removing trees to open up spaces, redirecting streams, or creating artificial lakes. Nature oppression resides at the core of these projects and the upper class is desensitized to such violence whenever altering the entire landscape is meliorated by exciting notions of fashion and modernity. Austen highlights the severity of this action by using a rhetoric fraught with sadness and sometimes anxiety. In *Mansfield Park*, Mr. Rushworth plans a project of improvement that requires a cutting down of large numbers of trees. His Sotherton Court estate, which consists of seven hundred acres of open land, is going under a renovation that mandates cutting down a whole avenue of "oak entirely" (60). This renovation is branded as an estate improvement, which also makes Mr. Rushworth's idea of improvement similar to Henry Crawford's vision of a

gentleman's residence as more than just a house but an estate with an image that "opens the prospect amazingly" (MP 41).

Fanny's allegiance is to the oak trees; she laments the unjust destiny for trees with roots instilled for decades in Sotherton's soil. She quotes Cowper's poem *The Task* and declares an objection that mourns the falling of nature "What a pity! Does not that make you think of Cowper? 'Ye fallen avenue once more I mourn your fate unmerited'" (41).<sup>9</sup> It is likely that she is Austen's moral arbiter who advises against the destruction of forest. Rosemarie Bodenheimer points out Fanny's attitude by explaining that when she, "looks out of windows and sees the sublime; she quotes Cowper against cutting down trees; she is a preserver" (613). She is, however, the only person who mourns the cutting down of the historic trees; no other family member shares her empathy. Rather, she is faced with a generically androcentric force represented by Edmund Bertram who decidedly denies her sympathy, stating, "I am afraid the avenue does not stand a chance, Fanny" (41). His stance is related to a societal attitude that built its system of value on locating monetary gain in anything that has economic potential. Yet, Austen insists on communicating a notion about nature as a vigorous entity too valuable to be manipulated with impunity.

Fanny is aware that she may never see the original Sotherton again, therefore, she offers a preemptive nostalgia for what she hopes to survey as a simulacrum of what it once was: "Whenever I do see it, you will tell me how it has been altered" (41). Meanwhile, Mr. Rushworth, affirming the ferocity of his anthropogenic action, is adamant about altering the grand estate; he considers his improvement as, "a modern dress" (41) necessary to make

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<sup>9</sup> Famous lines from William Cowper's *The Task*. Book I. *The Sofa*, 338-39. The same lamentation was expressed by St Aubert in Ann Radcliff's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), where he mourns the cutting down of a historic tree that lived for decades in his ancestral estate.

his estate presentable in trend and fashion. Karen Vailhora indicates that the terms, “improver,” “improving,” “improvement,” and “improvements” are mentioned thirteen times over six pages of dinner conversation about Rushworth’s plan to hire Repton to renovate Sotherton Court” (104). If this is any indication, the practices of estate improvement represent the alteration toward which Austen sees nature and the environment heading. There is a strong possibility that the estate will be altered because Mr. Rushworth is aware that it will grant a saleable use of both the fine woods and the running stream that crowns its prospect. In this sense, projects of improvement expose the tyranny of the gentry’s assessment, which fails to value nature for its inherent aspects and is rather troubled by its existence as a green space full of obstacles that hinder their economic ambitions.

Raymond Williams warns us against viewing landscape as a fixed entity. He believes that it will always be shaped by humans to fit their needs and that everyone can have a sense of nature falling away from their perception except for the improvers because, in their general view it, “fled to the margins, to the remote, the inaccessible, the relatively barren” (80). Fanny’s emotional attachment to the age-old trees shows Austen as a novelist who keeps nature at the center of perception; it never escapes to the margin or the remote. When she gives Fanny the chance to visit Sotherton, on her way through the countryside the readers encounter an ecological perception where Austen integrates all elements of nature, “the appearance of the country, the bearing of the road, the difference of soil, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children” (58). She looks at the country life as entrenched in the richness of the soil and the liveliness of farmers and animals. This description counts a great deal in Austen’s gratitude to the fullness of nature and it is not

without a hint of irony that her vision disparages anthropogenic actions that may make the collectivity of nature falls away from our view.

Conversely, a project of improvement does not take a collective look on nature as a whole; no care is given to soil, trees, animals, or cottages. It also never advocates notions of inclusivity, harmony, or integration. Sotherton Court exists in the middle of a rich countryside, but the projected improvement responds only to the desire of its owner. It will transform the topographical features of the surrounding areas and alienate all other organic elements. This puts forward an ecological argument about the danger of the gentry's environmental philosophy, which assesses nature as their personal garden giving them a sense of ownership that sets no boundaries on how much they can improve.

In like manner, Compton is a grand estate owned by Mr. Smith and it undergoes a major renovation. When Mr. Rushworth visits the estate, he sees how it has changed beyond recognition, "I wish you could see Compton. It is the most complete thing! I never saw a place so altered in my life. I told Smith I did not know where I was. The approach now is one of the finest things in the country: you see the house in the most surprising manner" (39). Mr. Rushworth's interest in the altered place suggests a human/nature relation that struggles with setting moral boundaries. It posits the question of whether this fascination is the root of a malignant unfolding that will harm nature for decades. He represents an egocentric human/nature relation obsessed with innovation. Jonathan Bate establishes this line of thinking when he argues, "Instead of having a responsible, nurturing relationship to the soil, the improver has a merely aesthetic one. He regards his estate as a pleasure-garden rather than as land that needs to be managed with care and consideration" (11). The gentry's insensitivity to the integrity of nature is always provoked by their view

of it as a part of the world that can be utilized not served. In fact, like all other types of transgressions that derive power from unsound economic and cultural dynamics, this insensitivity has an inevitable impact and harmful implications.

The debate over why, or to what extent, the upper class is willing to alter nature opens a unique window into humans' objectifying outlook, which almost always renders nature as measurable, malleable, and quantifiable. This is especially true in *Mansfield Park* when Henry Crawford casts an artistic eye on Thornton Lacey, a parsonage that Edmund Bertram will occupy upon ordination, and offers what might sound like an exploitive outlook:

“The farmyard must be cleared away entirely and planted up to shut out the blacksmith's shop. The house must be turned to front the east instead of the north—the entrance and principal rooms, I mean, must be on that side, where the view is really very pretty; I am sure it may be done. And there must be your approach, through what is at present the garden. You must make a new garden at what is now the back of the house; which will be giving it the best aspect in the world, sloping to the south-east. The ground seems precisely formed for it...The meadows beyond what will be the garden, as well as what now is, sweeping round from the lane I stood in to the north-east, that is, to the principal road through the village, must be all laid together, of course; very pretty meadows they are, finely sprinkled with timber. They belong to the living, I suppose; if not, you must purchase them. Then the stream—something must be done with the stream; but I could not quite determine what. I have two or three ideas. (166)

Henry's remodeling plan is far from being a simple vision of improvement. It inclines more toward a radical proposition that suggests multiple serious transformations. He suggests a clearing of the farmyard, creating a new entrance, moving the garden to the back, laying together the northeast lane with the meadow beyond the garden. The abundance of trees



does not escape his commercial gaze; the term “timber” suggests handsome potential gains. He also deliberates on two or three possible plans to change the flowing direction of the stream. All are modifications that contribute to the severance of Thornton Lacey; it may no longer be the parsonage that has had its name ingrained in the older generations for years, but a gentleman’s estate that is stripped of its identity. Claire Tomalin, Austen’s biographer, informs us that Austen was herself raised in a parsonage that never underwent improvements and that does suggest the possibility that Austen’s allegiance is to unaltered nature; therefore, she intends for Henry’s vision to bring about the hyper visibility of the negative impact of excessive alteration.

Austen’s critiquing of improvement is further exemplified in *Northanger Abbey* where General Tilney attempts to modernize a cloister and quadrangles, which are important parts of the Abbey’s ancient identity. While touring the magnificent rooms of Northanger Abbey, Catherine walks through, “what had once been a cloister” (172) with the fourth side of the quadrangle having been previously removed by the general’s father and a new building constructed by General Tilney himself to distort the overall appearance of the abbey. This building replaces the ancient kitchen of the convent terminating at once the historical antiquity of the abbey. This becomes a modern wing, which Catherine detests because it is modified in a way that compromises the historical value of the abbey. When she stands outside in the lawn and looked back at the abbey, she notices the inconsistency in its outer appearance. Austen informs us that, “Catherine could have raved at the hand which had swept away what must have been beyond the value of the rest, for the purpose of mere domestic economy; and would willingly have been spared the mortification of a walk through scenes so fallen, had the General allowed it” (173). This is an environmental

situation where Austen eschews harmful improvement at the heart of nature and history and lays out a unique argument about restoration versus improvement. The General's indifference to the natural and historical value of the abbey exemplifies the core of this argument. His wealth and power will carry out improvements on a grand scale and modern designs like walkways, courtyards, artificial gardens, and greenhouses will be built as necessary additions to the abbey's modern dress. As Austen says, the General's "improving hand" has adopted every modern invention and, "when the genius of others had failed, his own had often produced the perfection wanted" (172). His renovation cannot be subject to "the failed genius of the others" and his modern vision is readily available to exploiting a facet of England history and making it part of his own present. This attitude—changing the blueprint of a valuable place—is what associate the term "radical" with "improvement" and gives birth to a new aspect of nature aggression with a strategy that prioritizes utility over preservation.

When Catherine visits the abbey for the first time, she witnesses a solemn edifice that emerges as an ancient building altered to be a modern estate. She is disappointed by the abbey's unexpected appearance and the changed interior that is repurposed for residential use. Her outlook is more of a preservationist who seeks value in every crumbling passage and decaying cell. In fact, she denounces the number of greenhouses that require the felling of large numbers of trees and thus distort the abbey's natural surroundings. In a similar vein, Fanny in *Mansfield Park*, and Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility* have the same way of looking at nature: one that genuinely advocates a preservation. They never try to contrive or participate in a plan of improvement or show interest in utility and usefulness. They appreciate unimproved estates and value nature's conservation. Their valuation steps

into what Kathleen Anderson dubs as, “a practical, strategic work of preservationist stewardship” (91).

On the other hand, male gentry view nature as variable and instrumental. Their vision is hardly assisted by seeing themselves as part of it but rather, like general Tilney, they see themselves as the masters who should demonstrate their worth by pursuing what they perceive as meaningful improvements. Barbara Wenner highlights the widely disparate nature-perception between men and women and suggests that the gaze at nature is entwined with self-awareness, which for men is driven by the social dynamic of power relations. In other words, their gaze is one of utilization and control:

The gaze upon the landscape means something quite different for a woman— authors and heroines—than it does for a man. When an eighteenth-century male with a background in the gentry gazes on the landscape, he frames it in a way that objectifies it and indicates its potential for control. When a woman gazes, she imagines where she fits inside the landscape and how she can fit herself inside to be helped by it. (4)

We can understand how General Tilney is responsible for the ways he interacts with nature. His class position harbors a hidden tendency to reign and dominate is driven mostly by the social and financial ascendancy that sustains his position in society. Such capacity provides the upper class with a great deal of control. It emboldens their authority and turns their actions into sinister narratives of bad husbandry. Meanwhile, in *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne is someone who, as Austen describes her, “would have every book that tells her how to admire an old twisted tree” (77). Austen is guided by her environmental consciousness, and by her deeper understanding of nature. She makes Marianne’s gaze accept the beautiful greenery and the naturalness of the environment the way they are. She also makes her appreciate the dead winter leaves and turns her poetic farewell to

Norland's historic tree into a rhapsody on an innate and unchangeable nature, "And you, ye well-known trees!--but you will continue the same. -- No leaf will decay because we are removed, nor any branch become motionless although we can observe you no longer! -- No; you will continue the same; unconscious of the pleasure or the regret you occasion, and insensible of any change in those who walk under your shade!" (23).<sup>10</sup> This tree is an enduring symbol of continuity. Its ecological capacity is measured by its ability to resist deterioration; no death or decay. Such resilience represents a natural forest that is not susceptible to modification and is, certainly, heedless of humans' disruptions. This tree will not be treated the same by John Dashwood, Marianne's brother, and Norland's new owner. He will not hesitate to jeopardize its permanence for his aesthetic pursuits. Austen presents him and his wife as people indifferent to the organic beauty of nature. The pleasure garden that he intends to build for his wife is a careless project that will sweep away organic nature to create a life of leisure and indulgence.

This, certainly, is Austen's eco-consciousness that evinces itself in the value of nature. She advocates a preservation of a world that retains value in all its elements, even in dead leaves. When Marianne reminisces about the natural surroundings of Norland, she recalls a moment where her experience with nature, in the fall season, connects to a higher level of transcendence, "with what transporting sensations have I formerly seen them fall! How have I delighted, as I walked, to see them driven in showers about me by the wind!

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<sup>10</sup> Traditionally, this scene has been interpreted as engaged in romanticism. Some critics see it as an excessive romantic response to nature. Yet, I read it through an environmental lens and argue for nature's right to consistent existence. For the romantic treatment of this scene, see Mavis Batey's "The Agonies of Sensibility," *Jane Austen and the English Landscape*, pp. 27-37, Barbara Seeber's "Evergreen," *Jane Austen and The Animals*, pp. 74-89, and Rosemarie Bodenheimer's "Looking at the Landscape in Jane Austen," pp. 605-23.

What feeling have they, the season, the air, altogether inspired” (73). Marianne is even astonished at those who may devalue the dead leaves and consider them as “nuisance” (73). This is Austen questioning people’s inability to recognize beauty in the natural decay and perhaps ponder their failure to understand growth and decay as the essence of nature. All of this affirms the kind of stewardship she promotes, especially when she makes it incomprehensible by the upper class. Stewardship, in general, requires a simple love of nature; the kind of love that acknowledges nature as both dead and vibrant and also one that resents alteration. Kathleen Anderson claims that this love can be demonstrated through, “a practical, strategic work of preservationist stewardship, in an Elizabethan-like willingness to dirty one’s petticoat” (91). But since it is not possible for the gentry to sully their own petticoats, they will continue modulating nature.

With this in mind, it is hardly unusual that Austen makes Elinor more alarmed by the improvement that will transform Norland than by her own displacement. Elinor sees her brother’s accommodation to please his wife as an act that borders on selfishness and irresponsibility. Yet, she “kept her concerns to herself and was very thankful that Marianne was not present to share the provocation” (185). Dashwood’s act of nature aggression induces a sense of discomfort that Elinor is certain will be upsetting to her sister. She condemns this violation, and her resentment is implicit in a complex word like “provocation,” and the tension implied in the phrase “kept...her censor to herself” can never be more apparent. Austen is adept at utilizing situations loaded with anxiety and in so doing, she invites the readers to pinpoint unnecessary acts of nature abuse. She is keen in presenting attitudes that intensify the difference between those who advocate nature conservancy and those who support radical improvement. As always, the gentry’s relation with nature is

questionable. It suggests a prognosis of what may later be seen as a trajectory of anthropocentrism.

During a walk through the woods of Barton Valley, Edward Ferrars and Marianne have an interesting discussion about the rustic beauty of nature. Ferrars measures nature by its economic productivity, “I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight, and flourishing” (81), while Marianne sympathizes with and defends the beauty of nature with every mounting enthusiasm she has. She is frustrated at the ways people pretend to admire nature more than what their actions suggest, “That admiration of landscape is a mere jargon” (80). She believes that people’s admiration is empty verbiage that reveals nothing but hypocrisy and double standards. In “The Object of Study” Ferdinand de Saussure describes language as a system of values that relies on a network of relationships between words and meanings. These meanings are recognized in relation to other different meanings that exist within the same system. Saussure's ideas about language are illustrated in the way Austen’s characters use specialized vocabulary when they respond to nature. Marianne describes the language used by those who pretend to appreciate nature as “a mere jargon” (80), while Ferrars uses vocabulary that calculates and assesses the economic productivity of nature. Following Saussure’s theory, both examples of language use can be identified as two verbal functions that respectively inaugurate other different concepts. Austen gives Marianne a language that confronts people’s hypocritical relations to nature and gives Ferrars a speech that divulges human pragmatic relations with their surroundings. This double function of language is emphasized by Saussure when he states, “language has an individual aspect and a social aspect; one is not conceivable without the other” (9). Since language is part of a social

institution and cannot be detached from the physical circumstances of a given incident, it is easy to see how Marianne's language stems from a concern about nature (an individual aspect,) while Ferrars's language originates from modes of economy and productivity (a social aspect). The language that Austen assigns to each one, is the function of the transcendental signifier connected to different other meanings, ones that make reasonable avowals about nature and moral responsibility.

Lawmakers and public stakeholders have a larger share and an even deeper effect on changing England's overall landscape. The four thousand acts of enclosure passed by its male-dominant parliament are stark proofs of the males' stronghold on nature.<sup>11</sup> These laws were passed under the terms that open fields and common pastures would be consolidated and become cohesive units. These laws caused catastrophic changes in the topography of the general landscape, and the consequences were far more profound. What this shows is that the decisions regarding the environment may seem purely ethical, but their implications and consequences prove them to be deeply anthropogenic. Between 1700 and 1844, approximately six million acres of open land were enclosed, resulting in major changes in open-field villages, marginal land, common areas, and heaths. Jerome Blum's discussion of the enclosures' cost and the extensive work that needed to be done to make them functional unravels the heavy modifications that had to be implemented. Blum argues that in addition to making, "heavy soils improvements[which] had to wait

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<sup>11</sup> In his book, *The Country and The City* (1973), Raymond Williams listed twenty-three areas in England that are mainly affected by the Parliamentary act of enclosure. He indicates that there are two different kinds of enclosures: the enclosure of "waste," which is two million acres of uncultivated land mainly inhabited by cottagers and isolated settlers and the enclosure of "arable fields," which is four million acres that are under cultivation and inhabited by farmers, laborers, and their families. Both enclosures account for social and economic changes that enhanced England's agrarian capitalism, pp. 96-107

until cheap sub-soil drainage became available” (503), enclosure owners had to, “give[...] six months to fence and ditch the perimeters of their allotments, put in some 90 miles of hedge and about 180 miles of wood fence to protect the hedges until they grew strong enough to withstand cattle” (489). Blum further adds, “Besides the allotments to the owners of land and of common rights, the commissioners had to set aside land for roads, drains, and gravel pits for road repair” (490). These measures are more astonishing when we realize that they had to be applied on millions of acres. The radical nature of these improvements is evident everywhere and, as Duckworth argues, “they could hardly fail to strike [Austen] as emblems of inordinate change” (45).

Traces of the impact of the parliamentary acts on land and farmers can be found in William Cobbett’s *Rural Rides*, published in 1822<sup>12</sup>. He registers his pastoral observations while taking a journey by horseback through the countryside. On the road from Worth to Tonbridge Wells he observes, “The labouring people look pretty well. They have pigs. They invariably do best in the *woodland* and *forest* and *wild* countries. Where the mighty grasper has *all under his eye*, they can get but little.” (205). When he stops at Brenzett he notices villagers living in extreme poverty though the fields are loaded with corn and herds are in large numbers:

The few houses that there are are miserable in the extreme. The church here (only a *mile* from the last) nearly as large; and nobody to go to it. What! will the *vagabonds* attempt to make us believe that these churches were *built for nothing!* “*Dark ages*” indeed those must have been, if these churches were erected without there being any more people than there are now. But *who* built them? Where did the *means*, where did the hands come from?

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<sup>12</sup> In “Three around Farnham,” *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams observes that Cobbett “ran away from his father’s small farm at Farnham. Cobbett rode back through these villages many times in 1820 to write his *Rural Rides*.” See *The Country and the City*, p.108.



This place presents another proof of the truth of my old observation: *rich land* and *poor labourers*. From the window of the house, in which I could scarcely get a rasher of bacon, and not an egg, I saw numberless flocks and herds fattening, and the fields loaded with corn!. (217)

This is Cobette's opposition to projects of enclosure and as Williams notes it is not concerned with, "production as a total figure, but what happened, in details with the people and the land" (109). As for wealthy estate owners, we can look back at the modification done to Adelstrop Park a grand estate owned by Thomas Leigh, Austen's uncle, and consider how he separates his estate from the neighboring villagers and imagine how attuned Austen is to changes of such magnitude. She has the advantage of seeing what the landscape looked like before and after improvement, and she is aware that it is done for merely aesthetic reasons. In addition to building a fountain, alcove, and pool near the estate, the Leigh family modernized it more by diverting a little stream of water, removing the pool, and adding a delightful bath. These transformations are anthropogenic enough to make us believe that Austen is, indeed, aware of the consequences of humans' aesthetic desires.

### **III. The Unapologetic Picturesque Landscape Gardening**

When William Gilpin, a famous nineteenth century landscape designer, advises amateur artists on the preferred methods of art composition, he informs them that they can have total liberty to alter or restructure as many features as they deem necessary, so their art can be reflective of a picturesque viewpoint<sup>13</sup>. In Essay III of his book *Three Essays*:

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<sup>13</sup> Picturesque relates to the British aesthetic theory that was developed by William Gilpin and later introduced to English society in 1782.

*On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape: to which is Added a Poem, On Landscape Painting*, published in 1792, he states:

whether I represent an *object*, or a *scene*, I hold myself at perfect liberty, in the first place, to dispose the *foreground* as I please; restrained only by the analogy of the country. I take up a tree here, and plant it there. I pare a knoll, or make an addition to it. I remove a piece of paling—a cottage—a wall—or any removeable object, which I dislike. In short, I do not so much mean to exact a liberty of introducing what does not exist; as of making a few of those simple variations, of which all ground is easily susceptible, and which time itself indeed is continually making. (3: 68) <sup>14</sup>

Though his opinions on art composition were highly regarded, modern eco-theorists like Bate would analyze it bluntly as a cultural phenomenon that causes, “a catastrophic ecological consequence” (136). What makes it catastrophic is its ability to extend artistic principles and imagine landscapes as what Alyson Byerly labels “picturesque landscaping” (55), along with the fact that it can go from just being what Dabney Townsend calls “a cottage industry” (365) to a cultural phenomenon that presents *unapologetically* various environmental harm as forms of environmental aesthetics.

Gilpin is a landscape designer known for a picturesque vision that tends to associate pictures with appreciation of the natural scenery. This artistic correlation prompts, according to Mavis Batey, “the new craze of picturesque observation” (52). It promotes the public’s tendency to admire a landscape when it resembles a painting. David Marshall

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<sup>14</sup> Gilpin writes as a picturesque traveler touring through Great Britain and Scotland, with sketchbook in hand, documenting the varieties of the natural sceneries. In Essay II: On Picturesque Travel, he popularizes the modern sense of the word “picturesque” by creating what he calls “the picturesque eye” and explains that it is not restricted to nature but extends beyond the limits of art where all elements are the objects of attention “yet, if it be well laid out, it exhibits the lines, and principles of landscape; and is well worth the study of the picturesque traveler. Nothing is wanting, but what his imagination can supply” (2:45).

believes that this tendency, “led a certain class of people to redesign the natural scenery around them in order to reproduce the reproductions of landscape painting” (415). As ironic as this may sound, picturesque painting was a reproduction of nature in art, while picturesque landscape gardening, the product of this movement, became the public’s desire to reproduce nature in a picturesque frame. This concept is the evolution of art and nature merging into one cultural phenomenon and draws its vigor from a class of people who are very much affected by the picturesque paintings of Italians and English artists. Later, these people transform their taste of landscape from a portrait mounted on their walls to a landscape design that elevates the prospects of their estates. This evolution represents more than just a trend in fashionable landscape it is a radical movement that brought together the complex dynamics of the upper class and their aesthetic experience.

A landscape that follows the aesthetic standards of picturesque is characterized by John Nabholz as an art reflecting, “a desire for harmonious visual compositions, which brought into unity varied and intricate parts” (20). But Austen shows no interest in the sophistication of such unity though she makes obvious reference to Gilpin’s theories of beauty and picturesque landscape viewing. Instead, her criticisms, according to Bodenheimer, “are never really levelled against the aesthetic pleasures of picturesque practice itself” (607), but she focuses on problems related to picturesque landscape gardening when it spoils the relationship between estate owners and their natural surroundings. In many incidents, we read about estate owners who practice despotism (as I will elaborate on in chapter three) by restructuring nature in a way that damages its connection with the ecological order: merging grounds, designing artificial lakes, relocating clusters of trees, or creating bare lawns. These are designs that petrify an

alarming picture about excess of aesthetics and artistic intervention. Kim Wilson contends that, “Brown and other early improvers [...] remove so much in the way of ornament from the landscape that the effect was rather bald, with houses rising abruptly from smooth, bare lawns decorated only with clumps of trees” (28).<sup>15</sup> Bate discusses this notion further when he investigates the effect of art in the reproduction of nature, “The picturesque was among the first artistic movements in history to throw out the classical premises that art should imitate nature and to propose instead that nature should imitate art” (136). It risks suggesting that nature and art amount to the same thing and nature, losing its distinctive existence, thus becomes available for emulation.

In Austen’s biography, we learn that she had personal experience with the intervention of picturesque gardening and was very much aware of the subjective approaches of Gilpin, Brown, and Repton. In fact, the name Humphry Repton was by no means unknown to her family. As I previously discussed, during her visit to the estate of her uncle, Thomas Leigh, Austen notices how his estate, known as Adlestrop Park, underwent a major improvement carried out by Repton.<sup>16</sup> Her uncle opened the grounds between his estate and the rectory and constructed a waterfall that went through an artificial flower garden to create one large park space. Batey further tells us that in 1779, Repton asked to, “merge the garden of the rectory with his nephew’s 100 acres to give the effect of a gentleman’s residence in a park. To achieve this, the entrance of the rectory was

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<sup>15</sup> Capability Brown was a leading landscape architect of this period. His greatest achievement is often considered to be his influence on his pupil, Humphrey Repton. For more information on Capability Brown, see Mavis Batey’s *Jane Austen and the English Landscape*.

<sup>16</sup> Adlestrop is a village located in the valley of the River Evenlode, three miles away from Gloucestershire, England. Tomalin mentions that Mr. Leigh hires Humphry Repton as a well-reputed landscape designer, at a great expense to design the improvements of his estate. *Jane Austen: A Life*, p.199.

moved, and a road diverted” (84). This improvement is infused with a picturesque vision, which created an environmental disaster proving at once Bate’s argument about picturesque landscape gardening taking “the aestheticization of landscape to extremes: instead of merely seeking out appropriate views, the viewer altered the landscape to create them for himself” (55). In so doing, the estate owners created separate spaces, which led to isolation, divisions, and enclosures instead of coherence and unity. Williams weighs in on the consequences of such projects and argues, “in the one case the land is being organized for production...while in the other it is being organized for consumption” (124). This is a reminder that decorative interventions are by no means simple; they can give nature a mechanical reproducibility and turns landscape into a product of consumption.

Claire Tomalin sheds light on the high-handed dealings of the improvers and the impact of the picturesque and states, “This last part of the scene can hardly have been considered much of an improvement by the villagers; but they were powerless against the combined power of Repton, fashion, and their landlord” (199). The three types of power that Tomalin mentions are anthropogenic, in that they stem from males’ attitudes that determine how and when they can turn nature into a spectacle for consumption. Picturesque has a similar power that when combined with the gentry’s fancy desires it can deeply disturb the ecological order of nature.

The catastrophic effect of picturesque landscape was recognized by Austen’s contemporaries as well. Four years after her visit to Adlestrop, Mary Berry,<sup>17</sup> a non-fiction writer known for her journals and correspondence, visited Stoneleigh Abbey, another estate

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<sup>17</sup> Berry’s journal is part of a book titled *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence from the Year 1783 to 1852*, Volume II, published in 1865. It contains a collection of Berry’s letters and journals and is known as a reflection of the social life and customs of eighteenth and nineteenth century England.

owned by Austen's uncle, Thomas Leigh, and recorded in a journal, dated Oct 6, 1810, her observation regarding the estate and its and natural surroundings. She mentions that any estate not transformed by a landscape designer is "unspoiled by improvement," also asserting that, "If this park shows some marks of neglect, it is at least, unspoiled by improvement." (434). Berry is aware that Stoneleigh is "a clumsy house" (433), but she appreciates the magnificence of its natural surroundings and the trees that enrich its twelve thousand acres. At the same time, she is aware that these trees bear potential value and will be cut eventually since they constitute, "a magnificent possession of real wealth" (433). Berry inadvertently declares a perceived threat and an ongoing behavior that is characteristic of the upper class's concept of proper remodeling. She does inform her readers that Repton is expected to work on improving Stoneleigh Abbey at a great expense, and he would follow intently the requirements of picturesque principles. This reveals the extent to which picturesque landscape gardening contributed to environmental degradation at the time when estate owners were habituated to considering picturesque works as the genesis of modernization and economic prosperity.

Similarly, William Cowper, who was Austen's contemporary and a poet she quotes frequently in her novels, registers a sense of anxiety in the third book of his poem *The Task*. In a sarcastic tone, he references the works of landscape designers like Brown and specifies his sweeping capability of transforming the English countryside: "The Lake in front becomes a lawn / Woods vanish, hills subside, and valleys rise / and streams, as if created for his use" (3. 774-76).<sup>18</sup> Cowper's discontent with this entire project is attested in the

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<sup>18</sup> Cowper's *The Task* consists of six books. The third book is titled "The Garden". In the journal article "The Structure and Meaning of "The Task,"" Thomas E. Blom notes that it focuses on rural gardening, the domestic interior, and humans' spiritual discipline that can only be achieved through the humble activity of gardening.

label he gives Brown in the previous lines, “Lo! he comes—the omnipotent magician, Brown appears” (3.765-66). He clearly popularizes a nascent argument about the works of picturesque gardening and demonstrates the ultimate power landscape designers possess and how damaging it can be to the environment.<sup>19</sup>

While Brown, Kent, and Repton are renowned picturesque figures, it is Repton whom Austen singles out as the one responsible for picturesque projects in her novels. He is notorious for his extensive and exaggerated remodeling of the countryside. Duckworth assets this fact by stating that contrary to the popular belief, Austen “chose to cast Repton as a negative social impact” because he does not apply the same naturalistic styles of Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price (42).<sup>20</sup> This circles back to the anthropogenic side of picturesque gardening, which strikes us as a cultural trend that spoils an already healthy nature. It never intends to revive an arid land or preserve an original river, nor does it attempt to save historic trees or keep the fish flowing in the natural stream. Instead, we read about distance, third distance, subtle shades, rocky fragments, enclosures of plants, and grouping of threes, which all seem to be theoretical and unpractical if applied to actual landscapes. In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry Tilney speaks of Bath’s picturesque nature and “decided on its capability of being formed into pictures,” Catherine, meanwhile is confused

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<sup>19</sup> In his essay ““The Present Obfuscation””: Cowper’s Task and the Time of Climate Change,” Tobias Menely suggests that Cowper’s *The Task* reveals how much he is influenced by the effects of modern climate, urbanization, enclosures, and industrialization.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Payne Knight was Gilpin’s contemporary and a poet whose writings are occupied with idealizing nature. Uvedale Price was an amateur artist who had a distinguished theory about “the picturesque.” He published his *Essay* (1794), which delineates “the Picturesque” as a mode of landscape. He had many public debates with Humphry Repton over his approach to landscape designs and with Payne Knight, whose theories of landscape betrayed a more esoteric attitude. See Charles Watkins’ and Ben Cowell’s *Uvedale Price (1747-1829): Decoding the Picturesque Garden and Landscape History*.

and realizes that “the little which she could understand however appeared to contradict the very few notions she had entertained on the matter before” (103). Her confusion speaks to Austen’s discontent with the picturesque. This is why Kim Ian Michasiw concedes that for Austen “the picturesque was valuable only as an idea, as a taste that was never to be inscribed upon the landscape ... its benignity depended wholly on its not being applied” (96).

Additionally, much insight can be gleaned from the judgments and taste of Austen’s characters regarding the landscape. Their attitudes capture her dissatisfaction with picturesque work that produces a nature more injured than reformed. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Edward Ferrars’s idea of a fine countryside is a picturesque one that tends to make use of its multiple resources.

I shall call hills steep, which ought to be bold; surfaces strange and uncouth, which ought to be irregular and rugged; and distant objects out of sight, which ought only to be indistinct through the soft medium of a hazy atmosphere...It exactly answers my idea of a fine country, because it unites beauty with utility, and I dare say it is a picturesque one too. (81)

In Ferrars’s speech, Austen relays to us exactly what happens when picturesque is no longer a theory, but a method easily inscribed on actual landscape. It is what Townsend calls an “aesthetic that looks to aid nature by imposing an order and smoothness upon it that its outward appearance lacks.” (367). Imposing order and smoothness is mainly true in Ferrars’s views. He tries to soften and perhaps domesticate the appearance of the hills by making them look bold instead of steep, and the surfaces look irregular instead of uncouth. He does the same with the distant objects, which he makes look indistinct instead of distant. He molds them into more picturesque tropes than being rugged; thus, the countryside



becomes approachable and accessible, the matter that makes it easily available to any project, taste, or desire.

Ferrars's perception insists on familiarizing nature by looking at its elements as assessable and quantifiable. During his rambles in the woods of Barton Valley, Marianne tries to draw his attention to the rustic beauty of its unique hills and asks him: "look at those hills. Did you ever see the equal?" (73), but his vision can only see the muddy condition of the lanes located at the bottom, especially when it rains in winter.<sup>21</sup> His view gives nature a problematic aspect during certain seasons. It assumes a disruption to its usefulness and makes its efficacy contingent on weather conditions. He likes the fine prospect of nature on picturesque terms rather than organic principles; all elements have to be flourishing, blooming, and most importantly, useful: as he phrases it, "I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles or thistles, or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watch-tower, —and a troop of tidy, happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world." (81).<sup>22</sup>

Ferrars's picturesque view, which fetishizes nature merits a critical scrutiny of an attitude that continues to be distant from nature's authentic attributes. The woods must be full of fine timber, the valleys should be rich with thick meadows and the farmhouses should be scattered and give signs of bustling and hardworking habitation. These features,

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<sup>21</sup> For information about the picturesque as a mean of consumption, see William Galperin's "The Picturesque, the Real, and the Consumption of Jane Austen." Also, see Thomas Hothem's "The Picturesque and the Production of Space: Suburban Ideology in Austen".

<sup>22</sup> Many critics consider Ferrars' comments as gearing toward the excessive application of picturesque theory on the landscape. My argument is that his involvement in picturesque contributed to his practical view, which is rooted in evaluating nature by its usefulness. See Jonathan Bate's "The Picturesque Environment," *The Song of the Earth*, pp. 119-52.

though imaginative, advocate a mode of identification that eschews a self-reflexive engagement in nature exploitation. They unravel the ability of anthropogenic imagination to disrupt the true course of nature only to count for an agenda that search for monetary gains in the treasures of the meadow. Ferrars will not hesitate to deforest some of his lands to build lavish greenhouses. Kevin Hutchings sees this view as an environmental philosophy that gives humans leverage to: “instrumentalize the things of this world; that is, they valued non-human objects and organisms primarily for the ‘useful’ roles they could be made to play as ‘instruments’ promoting human sustenance, wellbeing, and progress” (180). It is reasonable to suggest that the picturesque theory involves the spectators in a somewhat pragmatic view and makes it difficult for the gentry to sympathize with nature as long as it remains, as Michasiw suggests, a “way of seeing [which] serves as a necessary precondition to exploitative efforts on the part of the landowner.” (76).

As I mentioned earlier, the powerful effect of picturesque finds its way into *Northanger Abbey* where Henry Tilney has views that are steeped in picturesque theory revealing the subtlety of humans’ encroachment on nature. His opinions are set in a conceptual mode that sweeps away outstanding beauty and natural flora to satisfy notions of aesthetics; such picturesque tampering with nature catalyzes anthropogenic attitudes and alter the way people interact with nature. As I mentioned earlier, when Tilney explains the overall scenery of Bath to Catherine, he introduces it as a painting of abstract entities rather than a habitable place of living things. He talks of “foregrounds,” “distance,” and “second distances-side screens and perspectives-lights and shades,” and describes “rocky fragments, the enclosure of oaks and forests, waste lands and crown lands” (140). What he

describes attests to the picturesque ability to grant any individual an autonomy to define and redefine the naturalistic identity of a given place.

Tilney, in this sense, is redefining an entire town and its ability of being constructed into pictures, “with all the eagerness of real taste” (103). However, Catherine’s view of Bath, which is a place she has previously admired and been charmed by “Oh, who can ever be tired by Bath?” (30) is deeply altered. When she “gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape” (104). Her view is already obscured, and her taste is spoiled. She now resents it and sees it as a place of no value. With such ease, Henry establishes a defamiliarization with the landscape, “it seemed as if a good view were no longer to be taken from the top of a high hill, and that a clear blue sky was no longer a proof of a fine day” (104). Not only does Bath escape Catherine’s affection, but it drops out of her range of values. It is possible that Austen sweeps aside the actual beauty of Bath to direct the focus on Tilney’s abstract vision and reveal how picturesque fails to maintain the essence of nature, making it instead a work of art that covers up the kind of environmental degradation already at work.

Equally important, Austen delves into the fallibility of picturesque landscape gardening, when in transforming nature into an orderly or a contained space, it damages the environment. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen flaunts a passion mixed with a concern for nature in a sublime narrative.<sup>23</sup> While looking out the window, on a clear night, she

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<sup>23</sup>A discussion about the difference between picturesque theory and the sublime can be found in William C. Snyder’s “Mother Nature’s Other Nature: Landscape in Women’s Writings 1770-1830.” He observes that the emergence of the picturesque widened the artistic range by revitalizing themes and imageries that are not categorized under the sublime. He also observes that picturesque principles seek new fields of association that blend opposing features of landscape, such as “combin[ing] the humble with the grand, the mellow with the bold, the smooth with the rugged, and the aged with the youthful,” p. 104. This further proves that the connection Austen establishes between nature and the sublime affirms the workings of the picturesque.

celebrates nature's beauty and warns against the threats that will eventually lead to its damage. She envisions nature capability of inducing peace and tranquility but vulnerable to humans' negligence. As we are already aware of the popular forces that shape the landscape in early nineteenth century England, we are also tempted to look at this vulnerability as a source of mishandling executed by artists, improvers, and landscape designers:

All that was solemn and soothing, and lovely, appeared in the brilliancy of an unclouded night, and the contrast of the deep shade of the woods. Fanny spoke her feelings. "Here's harmony!" said she, "Here's repose! Here's what may leave all painting and all music behind, and what poetry only can attempt to describe! Here's what may tranquillize every care, and lift the heart to rapture! When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of Nature were more attended to, and people were carried more out of themselves by contemplating such a scene.  
(80)

Austen renders this scene in extreme agreement with picturesque principles; the contrasting shades of the wood, the unclouded sky, and the sublimity of nature are features set in a harmonious night. Fanny complicates this visual more by adding an apprehensive tone to denote a partially safe sublimity since the way humans treat nature will always be mitigated with carelessness and inattention. Fanny is connecting this attitude with an environmental ethic: if more people are carried out of themselves and experience the sublimity of nature by way of contemplating its beauty, they will be encouraged to respect its health and wellbeing. It is not surprising that Fanny who was, earlier in the novel, lamenting the projected demolishing of Sotherton's trees is also the one rhapsodizing the sublimity of nature with a hint of anxiety. Austen understands that what nature needs is care not

dismantling—the exact opposite of picturesque. If this is any reminder, it is the integrity of nature that is being compromised by the manipulative visions of picturesque gardening. That same compromise was indicted by Austen’s contemporary Richard Payne Knight in his poem “The Landscape, a Didactic Poem,” (1794) where he made a direct reference to the improvers who with their pens and rules reinstated artificial notions fail to refine nature and destroy its charm. He asserts that they are unaware that nature is supposed to be “irregular and free”<sup>24</sup>. It does not act by “lines but by gen’ral sympathy” (10).

#### **IV. Greenhouse Enclosures and the Wrongs of Technology**

When J. C. Loudon praises the magical work of the hothouse in his *Remarks on the Construction of Hothouses*, (1817), he commends the fact that it enables “the horticulturists to exhibit spring and summer in the midst of winter and bring to perfection the delicious fruits and splendid flowers of the torrid zone in a temperate or cold country” (2). His passion reminds us of the passion of the men of rank, scientific amateurs, botanists, and gardeners, which all contribute to the increasing demand for the exotic pleasures of the hothouse, in early nineteenth century England. Yet, the fondness for hothouses and the plants they produce turn into a fashion when it is no longer, according to Loudon, “the study of the philosopher, [but] became articles of trade and taste” (8). But whether it is the magical works of hothouses or the plants that turn into means of trade and taste, modern theorists like Taylor would agree with Loudon’s opinion regarding the power of the

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Payne Knight’s poem “*The Landscape, a Didactic Poem. In Three Books Addressed to Uvedale Price, Esq.*” p. 10. He criticizes the improvers in a way that recalls Austen’s underlying message that nature cannot be a subject of improvers chain, “Nature in all rejects the pedant’s chain; / Which binding beauty in its waving line, / Destroys the charm it vainly would define; / for nature still irregular and free, / Acts not by line but gen’ral sympathy. / The path that moves in even serpentine, / Is less nat’ral than the pointed lines...” pp. 140-46.

greenhouse when it gives humans “so proud a command over Nature” (2). He considers this power to be what makes the greenhouse “the quintessential habitat of the Anthropocene” (23). The reason why it is considered anthropogenic is the way greenhouses (also called “forcing houses,” “glasshouses,” or “hothouses” complicate the stability of nature when plants are forced to perform the same laws of nature while growing in an artificial climate. This artificial climate is the tropical temperature required to grow exotic plants and is mainly supplied by furnaces, heating stoves, coal burning, and an extensive system of fuels. It, therefore, produces toxic emissions and causes air pollution. Generally, building greenhouses require the clearing of vast areas of green land regardless of the value of the trees. Bate is aware of the depreciation given to historical trees and asserts that it was easy for “Old English trees [to be] felled to make way for the exotic plants of the hothouses” (9). In addition, greenhouses cannot be built without providing large clear land as well as the aid of human labor, horses, and carriages, which all add to the long list of wasteful and unnecessary consumption.

This sizable nature waste brings forward the flaws residing in the motivation of greenhouse owners and the rationale behind cultivating exotic plants. Aside from being a symbol of wealth or a generator of revenues, there is something more akin to a man’s manipulative attitude towards nature when he encloses a natural space and modifies plants. Perhaps we can draw some answers from Kate Baker’s ideas about a walled landscape when she observes, “By internalizing landscape within boundary walls, we transform it, and thereby demonstrate our beliefs and attitudes toward nature” (8). We may perceive a greenhouse as an enclosed space where exotic plants are cultivated, and where the upper class demonstrates their intently possessive mindset. Also, while Baker believes that the

construction of an enclosed garden makes it possible for the owner to change many features of the interior including the climate, we can imagine the greenhouse as an enclosed garden circumscribed by the walls of the upper class, who can control climate and modify plants' properties. Further, Baker's idea about a bounded piece of land "as a defined and owned space" (8) resonates with the delineation of the greenhouse as an experimental garden defined as a project owned and demarcated by the upper class. There is a big resemblance between the way Baker sees an enclosed landscape and a greenhouse. Despite a walled landscape being part of nature, they are both vanquished, confined, and altered.

Austen refers to hothouses in many of her novels, which is another way she engages in exposing humans' domination of nature. Her exploration of the experimental garden of the greenhouses places them as the backdrop against which we examine new models of thinking about humans' anthropogenic relation with nature. Greenhouses existed in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, and even in *Mansfield Park*, where Fanny enjoys her little geranium in the east room and makes sure that it maintains the required tropical temperature. But the most enduring manifestation of greenhouses is found in *Northanger Abbey*, where Catherine cannot look without feeling dismay at the size of a whole village of greenhouses as it arises among the walls of the abbey:

The number of acres contained in this garden was such as Catherine could not listen to without dismay, being more than double the extent of all Mr. Allen's, as well as her father's, including church-yard and orchard. The walls seemed countless in number, endless in length; a village of hot-houses seemed to arise among them, and a whole parish to be at work within the enclosure. (167)

Although *Northanger Abbey* is an antiquated beauty that nestles in the heart of "a grove of ancient oaks" (160), it has not been spared General Tilney's "improving hands." The

ancient oaks are replaced by plants native to tropical climates boxed in glasshouses, and the toxic emission that these houses produce lingers in between and hovers above the remaining oaks. This reminds us of Taylor's analysis of the greenhouse, which he perceives as a scientific project that creates an anthropogenic climate or a climate manufactured by artificial heat, thus producing toxic exhaust. This exhaust may not be directly referenced in Austen's novels but can be deduced by contemplating the excessive numbers of Tilney's greenhouses and the heating system that provides the plants with tropical temperature during long winter months.

Ironically, this distortion cannot be perceived by the General whose egotistical disposition give him leisure to deploy every natural resource, so his self-celebratory pursuits are properly bolstered. Austen's allusions to the pride the General takes in his hothouses being "unrivalled in the Kingdom" (167), offers a perspective on humans' intended way of subjugating nature. Robert Kern understands humans' tyrannical domination of nature and condemns their failure to establish a sensible relation with it. He argues, "how much management is too much, and what balance to strike between giving nature free reign and imposing our will upon it—clearly persist into our own time in which they have become even more urgent" (17). Failing to strike a balance between enforcing our will upon nature and allowing it to develop naturally is the topic that we frequently encounter when reading about the flaws of greenhouses, or as I call it, "the wrongs of technology."

General Tilney and John Dashwood of *Sense and Sensibility* are self-absorbed landowners whose management of their property is similarly flawed. Their unrestrained use of nature does not just represent economic and cultural systems that validate



subjugating nature but showcases the greenhouses as scientific conservatories with ungoverned experimentation of nature. Katherine Kickle notes, “In the nineteenth century, pineries as well as orangeries were signs of technological innovation in enhanced indoor plant cultivation” (160). The General’s pineries produce one hundred fruits in one year, which is not a surprising number considering the different types of pines that were recorded in the reports of the botanists and the gardeners of the era.<sup>25</sup> Loudon, in his book *The Different Modes of Cultivating the Pineapple* (1822) lists sixteen varieties of pineapple that are commonly grown in Britain and another eight types, that are “not generally known or of inferior value” (9). The process of cultivating plants far from their native habitat is identified by Taylor as an abnormal process manufactured by humans to make “nature exist apart from itself” (23). The pineapple varieties noted by Loudon testifies to the work of hybridization that may have begun in the early nineteenth century.

Narin Hassan makes a special reference to the working of hothouses in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s novel *Aurora Floyd* (1862). She depicts the natural struggle between the old and the new plants and explains how the refinement of the English plants “composed the new ‘high style’ of Victorian gardening, a style that emerged as a result of technological innovation, glasshouse design, and improved systems of plant transportation” (68).<sup>26</sup> More interestingly, Braddon’s novel *The Doctors Wife* (1865) acknowledges the growing of fruits inside a hothouse when the protagonist Roland Lansdell sends Isabel Sleaford, the heroine, a basket of “hothouse grapes and peaches,

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<sup>25</sup> Pineapples were considered a delicacy in the early nineteenth century English diet and they cost a fortune to grow. For information about their cost, see Levitt’s “A Noble Present of Fruit’: A Transatlantic History of Pineapple Cultivation: Garden History.”

<sup>26</sup> For more information about Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s novel *Aurora Floyd*, see Robert Lee Wolff’s *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon*.

crowned with a pineapple” (260). Although Braddon’s novels were published during the Victorian era, which is decades after Austen wrote her novel, they still point to the fact that the process of reproducing and refining plants is done inside a hothouse; an unnatural process that Hassan estimates as “a reminder of the collapse of natural and constructed worlds in the mid-nineteenth century” (74).

This may explain the three different types of strawberries collected by the ladies during a picnic at Box Hill in *Emma*. While enjoying the fun of strawberry picking, the ladies discuss the unique characteristics of each type and announce their unique names—hautboy, chili, and white wood. While we may think this incident as an organic way of communicating with nature and interacting with natural harvesting of crops, we should direct a curious eye on the technology that proliferates the “abnatural” in the strawberries:

the best fruit in England—everybody’s favorite—always wholesome.—  
 These the finest beds and finest sorts—Delightful to gather for one’s self—  
 the only way of really enjoying them.—Morning decidedly the best time—  
 never tired—every sort good—hautboy infinitely superior—no  
 comparison—the other hardly eatable—hautboys very scarce—chili  
 preferred—white wood finest flavor of all—price of strawberries in  
 London—abundance about Bristol—Maple Grove—cultivation—beds  
 when to be renewed—gardeners thinking exactly different—no general  
 rule—gardeners never to be put out of their way—delicious fruit—only too  
 rich to be eaten much of—inferior to cherries. (291)

The fact that strawberries are collected in the outdoor does not mean that the three types were previously engineered inside a hothouse. Hassan argues that the complex notion between the natural and the artificial requires certain boundaries but these boundaries “are often permeated by the consistent inclusion of hothouse flowers, pruned gardens, and floral motifs that interrupt a single reading of nature and botanical culture and remind readers of

the new, industrial model of reproducing and negotiating nature” (74). That very model brings forth an argument about hothouses running for longer hours and consuming more raw material. Ruth Levitt traces the growing popularity of cultivating plants in England and references a gardener’s recommendation on how to grow a healthy crop in the “Horticultural Society of London” published on February 18, 1834, “I have sometimes had the heat stand at 80° of Fahrenheit for fourteen months within the bed, which is a long period, and may seem improbable to any man till he tries the experiment” (115). By the gardener calculation, the greenhouse will require 80° twenty four hours a day resulting in fourteen months of toxic emissions. What is ironic is that what the greenhouses produce is a rarity that only serves the taste of the upper class.

The fascination with this rarity extends to *Sense and Sensibility* where John Dashwood plans to improve his estate by building a pleasure garden and a greenhouse “upon the knoll behind the house” (185). He tells Elinor, “The old walnut trees are all come down to make room for it. It will be a very fine object from many parts of the park, and the flower garden will slope down just before it and be exceedingly pretty” (185). He intends to clear away historic walnut trees and old bushes that excessively “grew in patches over the brow” (185). Obviously, there is a slightly bitter taste in the story of a felled tree to satisfy human indulgence, and Austen’s somber tone of the greenhouse violence cannot be more evident. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny enjoys her little geraniums located in the east room, Mansfield Park’s former schoolroom. She cares for them by making sure that the room maintains a tropical temperature. Fanny’s greenhouse is not as large as Dashwood’s and her plants are simple geraniums, but it is significant in being part of the pervasiveness of an enterprise that makes nature exchangeable, flexible, and malleable. Deidre Shauna

Lynch pinpoints the significance of the east room along with Mrs. Grant's housekeeping at Mansfield Parsonage by stating:

Mrs. Grant's housekeeping at Mansfield Parsonage begins with her making "a choice collection of plants and poultry" (*MP* 41), the former a category that evidently includes tender specimens in pots, since we listen in as she worries about the plants' possible exposure, should they be left outdoors, to the November frost that may terminate an unseasonably warm and protracted autumn (*MP* 212). Even Fanny turns florist and participates in the period fashion for container gardening when she slips away to the east room, the former schoolroom of Mansfield Park, in order to air her geraniums (*MP* 152). Her little domestic establishment, too, contains its slice of the southern hemisphere. (712)

Mrs. Grant's concern about the plants' possible exposure to November frosts and Fanny's regular visits to air the east room and relieve it from excessive heat is a documentation of domesticating nature and turning into a hobby. The people interested in this hobby are too rapt in its wonder to notice its danger. In *Northanger Abbey*, a fire catch, "now and then," in Mrs. Allen's "one small hot-house, which [she] had the use of for her plants in winter" (178). The question here presents itself, why is a small greenhouse that catches fire every so often important to Mrs. Allen? Is she following a popular trend? Is she using it to generate revenue? Or is she just enjoying the feasibility of subduing nature? This, certainly, gives unfavorable answers to questions about the problematic relation between man and nature and from the point of view of modern ecological theories the answer is unfriendly to nature.

Austen's contemporaries give similar unfavorable answers in their depiction of nature. They show how humans' relation with his natural surroundings reveals the same serious truth that modern theorists identify. We need not look beyond Ann Radcliffe's *The*

*Mysteries of Udolpho* where she presents Emily St Aubert as an observer of nature and a student in the exotic world of her father's greenhouse.<sup>27</sup> She informs us that she does this for the sole purpose of learning and gaining knowledge. But the position of the greenhouse as adjacent to the house, which is already set as a laboratory site, raises questions about her father's motivations. Is this greenhouse for studying or reordering nature? Is it for cultivating or taming nature? Is it for production or reinventing? Is it for educational or commercial gains? These are the kinds of questions that challenge the ambivalent anthropogenic purposes in the novels, and by attempting to answer them we can begin to identify the authority of the upper classes and how they render the manipulation of nature as a matter of great purchase.

To conclude, Austen's novels reveal the complex and often unperceived ways that anthropocentrism is entrenched in her society. When we look at the various ways the upper class exploit nature, we are assured that material conditions led to anthropogenic actions. Therefore, we contemplate the gentry's environmental values, interests, and preferences, which carry a complex and a manipulative affinity with nature and argue that this affinity is the root of anthropocentrism in early nineteenth century England. Austen's depiction of nature reveals new dimensions in the way the gentry think about the natural world and their relationship to it. Projects of improvements, greenhouse enclosures, and picturesque landscape gardening are mainly executed to flatter their ego and advance their own interest. But they also cause terrible ecological consequences. Meanwhile, estates'

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<sup>27</sup> Although growing exotic plants in greenhouses started as a hobby for a few wealthy men, it later promoted greater interest and demand. For further details about the multiple uses and productivity of the greenhouse, see Dustin Valen's *On the Horticultural Origins of Victorian Glasshouse Culture*. He notes, "Located at the intersection of horticulture, medicine, and technology, the glasshouse was a critical medium through which architecture and the sciences communicated," p. 402.

improvement requires a clearing of large areas of land causing a disruption to the proper developing of nature. Picturesque landscape gardening invades nature's wholesomeness and infuse artificial features while applying theoretical ideas on natural landscapes. Greenhouse structures cause toxic emissions and sizable nature waste. These are all practices that prompt different forms of nature oppression and Austen, the keen observer of all sorts of manipulation, documents the practices that transform soil, rivers, plants, and trees and strategizes her environmental critique by relaying, in an illuminating but disfranchised manner, a notion about nature as a vigorous entity too valuable to be manipulated with impunity.

## Chapter Two: Reading the Pollution: Mapping the Air of the Cities and the Countryside in Austen's Novels

In a well-mixed Metropolitan Fog, there is something substantial and satisfying—you can feel what you breathe, and see it too. It is like breathing water as we may fancy the fishes do. And then the taste of it when dashed with a fine season of sea- coal, smoke is far from insipid.

—Charles Lamb, *Essays and Sketches by Charles Lamb*

The above epigraph conjures, in a humorous tone, a concern over the air quality of the metropolitan area in early nineteenth century England. This epigraph is part of Charles Lamb's essay "London Fogs," in which his labeling of London's air as "a true London Particular" betrays the metropolitan climate as laden with toxic particulates. Although his tone is comical and witty, it bears a dark humor that is never void of serious meanings.<sup>28</sup> The fog can never be tasted or touched, but it is loaded with sea coal and smoke, so its taste is, as he sarcastically suggests, "far from insipid." It also wraps human bodies, "all around like a cloak" (246) indicating the full swathing in smoke. By praising the unappealing flavors and textures of the London fog, Lamb holds up the human activities that created such toxicity to ridicule, exposing the complexity of pollution as something manufactured by, "Coal Gas, Smoke, Steam, and Co." (246). The fact that Lamb's *Essays and Sketches* was published in 1820 makes him a near contemporary of Jane Austen who experiences toxic air in early nineteenth century England, therefore, affirming the presence of air pollution during her time.

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<sup>28</sup> The term "true London Particular" is often attributed to Charles Dickens because he used it in his novel *Bleak House*, but it originally appeared in Charles Lamb's *Essays and Sketches by Charles Lamb*, which was published in 1820. In one of these essays, Lamb talks about London fog and describes the Metropolitan climate as manufactured by polluting particulates.

## I. The History of Air Pollution in England

Ken Hiltner identifies the history of air pollution in England as, “surprisingly extensive” (96), which is a statement that affirms what Lamb’s “London Fogs” reveals as fierce and intense. John Evelyn’s *Fumifugium*, published in 1661, is also one of the earliest works that discusses modern air pollution and the effect of sea coal on humans, plants, and animal life. Because of the affordability and availability of sea coal—it is given this name because it was shipped to London from the coast—its use increased dramatically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. London at that time was not an industrial city, though pollution was sensed everywhere in the big cities. Hiltner observes that by the end of the sixteenth century, the citizens used coal with high sulfur content as the main energy source. It became the dominant fuel for domestic uses such as residential heating and cooking, and for minor businesses such as the work of metal smiths, brewers, dyers, salt makers, lime-burners, and soap boilers.<sup>29</sup>

Since sea coal creates more smoke than wood and its smoke is particularly toxic, the problem of air pollution turned into a crisis. In *Fumifugium*, Evelyn describes a cloud of sea coal smoke that hangs over the city. His concern over that cloud compels him to appeal to king Charles II for immediate action so the city can regain its glory:

Whilst this smoke belches from their sooty jaws the city of London is more akin to the face of Mount Etna, The Court of Vulcan, the island of Stromboli, or even the very suburbs of hell, than an assembly of rational creatures and the Imperial seat of our incomparable Monarch. For, although in other places in England the air is serene and pure, in London the

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<sup>29</sup> As sea coal came into extensive use, business like extracting salt, refining sugar, dying, as well as the manufacturing of glass, bricks and tile, tobacco pipes, and anchors for ships relied heavily on sea coal. See “Coal Mining and Utilization.” *A History of Technology*, edited by Charles J. Singer, pp. 76-77.



sulphurous clouds are so dense that the sun itself has trouble penetrating it and the weary traveller sooner smells than sees the city he approaches. It is this ruinous smoke that sullies the city's glory, imposing a sooty crust or fur on all the city lights, spoiling man's property, tarnishing the plate, gildings and furniture, and corroding even iron bars and the hardest stones because of the caustic elements that accompany the sulphur. So it is that it kills more people in the city in one year than the country air could in several hundred.  
(21)<sup>30</sup>

Evelyn's petition reveals his indignation with the heavy smoke that often lingered over London, his home city. He aimed to document the detrimental impact of pollution on the health of people, plants, and animals in his work and he even offers solutions to help address the problem of what he calls the "nauseating smoke" (9). He offered a plan that would attempt to counteract the coal smoke by increasing greeneries in the areas that surrounded the city. He also proposes to supply the city with plants and shrubs that yield nice fragrances to "ensure that the air was continually filled with the scent of so many hedges, fragrant shrubs, trees and flowers and all the inhabitants of the city would experience the sweet and delectable variety of scents, and would benefit from the pleasant sights and places to relax." (50). But despite this pleasant suggestion, there is no solution provided, and the idea that planting large amounts of scented and aromatic shrubs could resolve the problem was never followed through. Arnold Marsh follows this line of argument and contends, "To millions of our town-dwellers smoke is just what comes out of the chimney, as coal is just what goes on the fire. The idea that smoke is a "problem" that something to be prevented, simply does not exist" (264). Marsh is aware that England's

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<sup>30</sup> This is part of an essay Evelyn sent to King Charles II. See *Fumifugium or the Inconvenience of the Aer and Smoke of London Dissipated Together with some Remedies humbly Proposed by J. E. Esq; to his Sacred Majesty, and to the Parliament now Assembled*, (1661). Evelyn was a prolific writer, and his publications included works on history, religion, forestry, horticulture, architecture, and law.

reliance on coal as a source of energy makes smoke a persistent problem. Hiltner extends this truth by adding that air pollution in the seventeenth century had dire consequences as “according to some midcentury [it was] second only to the plague as the leading cause of human deaths in London” (95). The problem of air pollution has persisted for centuries, and the antidote will be exceedingly difficult.

Steam engines played an important role in making coal use the perfect replacement for renewable energy sources. Steam power came into existence in the last quarter of the eighteenth century when James Watt—building on Thomas Newcomen’s original invention of the steam engine—improved the efficiency of steam power and made it a reliable source of energy in industry. Peter Thorsheim, a leading environmental historian of modern Britain, explains the exact efficiency of steam power and how it led to a prevalent use of fossil fuel, “the early nineteenth century steam engines were sufficiently compact and powerful to become mobile...[and] also allowed coal to be transported to places that previously had been forced to rely on renewable sources of energy” (3-4). This mobility facilitated the use of coal in steamships and railroads, while factories started to rely on and consume enormous amounts of it. Industrialization, in particular, caused the air of big cities, already polluted by the coal use of homes and small businesses, to further deteriorate. Generally, the burning of coal emitted large quantities of smoke, soot, and acid vapor, and made England, as Thorsheim notes, “the first industrial nation...in which the modern idea of pollution was invented” (2).

James Johnson, a British writer and surgeon who founded and published several medical reviews, was struck by the deteriorating condition of London.<sup>31</sup> In his book, *Change of Air, or the Diary of a Philosopher in Pursuit of Health and Recreation*, published in 1831, he laments the no longer salubrious city, “My eyes ranged along the interminable groves of masts that shewed her boundless commerce—the hundred spires that proclaimed her ardent piety—the dense canopy of smoke that spread itself over her countless streets and squares, enveloping a million and a half human beings in murky vapour” (1). His description of a predominantly dark city renders a surprisingly dramatic picture of air pollution affecting land, people, and historical artifacts. While his eyes range over ships and church spires, he sees how they lost their symbolic significance because of the “murky vapor” that dims their glory. The various streets and squares are no longer the same, and one and a half million people are besieged in a “dense canopy of smoke.” It is not just his heart that felt melancholic but his eyes as well because the city can never be bright when it is enveloped in its own pollution.

The expansion of urbanization makes London even less cheerful. Johnson believes that it is no longer a Babylon but a “Modern Babylon” (1). It is losing its authentic self and picking up a modern identity imposed by an industrial advancement that does not compromise the rural identity of London and various other towns but causes an overwhelming growth of urbanization. Thorsheim attributes the reason for this expansion to the coal-burning steam engines, which freed factories from “the geographical and seasonal constraints inherent in the use of waterpower” (4). Thus, many cities expanded

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<sup>31</sup> James Johnson discussed a similar topic in his works *Change of Air, or, The Philosophy of Travelling: Being Autumnal Excursions*, (1831) and *Excursions to the Principal Mineral Waters of England*, (1843)

and became more business oriented. Towns like Leeds, Glasgow, and Sheffield experienced population growth and increased in size and population nearly ten times during the nineteenth century. Manchester, as an industrial city with a population less than one tenth of London's population, used, according to Thorsheim, "nearly half as much coal per year" (5).

It is important to note that the term "air pollution" was not known or commonly used by the British population in the early nineteenth century. It was defined in ways that make the dark clouds seem like an inconvenience rather than a harmful occurrence. Adam W. Rome argues, "In Britain as in the United States, people routinely referred to the dense, dark clouds created by the combustion of coal as 'the smoke nuisance.' But the British had a more encompassing phrase—'noxious vapours'—for the gaseous, metallic, and chemical pollution of the air produced in the manufacture of chemicals, metal products, pottery, glass, cement, and illuminating gas." The term "smoke nuisance" was not as distinguished. Rome points out how, it was part of other "civic nuisances" that people would complain about, such as "'the noise nuisance,' 'the dust nuisance,' 'the garbage nuisance,' even 'the billboard nuisance'" (19). The most interesting label is "the smoke plague," which was used in the late nineteenth century by a number of activists who tried to make the claim that if air pollution affects the public health the same way a pandemic does, then it should be considered a plague.<sup>32</sup> In 1878, the English public health official John Simon tried to make this claim when he testified before a royal commission in the English Parliament about the hazards of "noxious vapours":

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<sup>32</sup> To read more about the varied British responses to air pollution, see Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*.

While we are unable to say that the statistics adduced furnish any convincing proof of the injurious effects of these vapours on health, it would be unreasonable to disregard the opinion universally expressed by medical men that some injurious consequences are due to these gases, and that the public health would be benefited by their diminution. Still less should we be justified in putting aside as unworthy of notice the mass of evidence given by witnesses from every part of the districts inquired into, as to the sufferings, more or less transitory, more or less severe, endured by them from the presence of irritating or sickening vapours.” (Noxious Vapours Commission 26-27)

The term “noxious vapours” was specifically used by the upper classes who were concerned about the effect of smoke on their estates, Rome observes, “With few exceptions, the worst industrial polluters were in the countryside-near mines, for example and so the great landowners bore much of the cost of toxic emissions. Because the largest property owners were part of the aristocratic elite, a class of unrivaled wealth, power, and prestige, the British investigations of ‘noxious vapours’ inevitably stressed the damage to property” (20). Similarly, Mr. R. Shaw was a gardener whose personal experience with the effect of vapors from Alkali works on trees and plants was presented before the royal committee the same year. In the Report of the Royal Commission on Noxious Vapours, his concern is introduced as follows:

r. Shaw, a landscape gardener, describes the destructive effect within the last three or four years of the vapours from Widnes at Halsnead Park, five or six miles from the works. The older trees were getting prematurely stag-headed, and were no longer ornamental; while the younger plantations, including oak ash beech birch and coniferous plants, were most seriously damaged. Of the fir trees on the estate, which had been remarkably fine, not one was left. He had also recently examined trees at Bold Park, three or four miles from St. Helens, and four or five miles from Widnes, which he had

not seen for ten years, and found that “from the time that he had seen them before they u'ere completely riddled. (Noxious Vapours Commission 26-27)

Widens is an industrial city that grew in population and became an important center of the chemical industry. Mr. Shaw's complaint is an example of how easy it was for rural cities to lose their connection with nature especially when industrialization engulfed them in layers of dark clouds.<sup>33</sup> His description of the trees at Bold Park that he visited ten years later and found as “completely riddled” alludes to a new form of nature that is badly damaged but not entirely dead. Elizabeth Grosz defines this new structure as a “double nature,” or two types of nature: “nature as material to be exploited” and nature “as becoming or evolution.” One is a source available for exploitation, and the other attempts to regrow and develop, challenging “the suppression and transformation of [its] limits” (100). But since this evolution is always, according to Stacy Alaimo, “ignored repressed, or battled in a culture bent on excessive consumption or control” (32), factories will keep polluting the air and nature will not evolve properly.

A more interesting term used to represent air pollution during Austen's time is “miasma,” a term that translates as foul air or something poisonous enough to change the quality of the air. It dates back to medieval times and continued to have viability through the mid to late nineteenth century. It started as a theory that considers air, not water, as the cause of diseases. Therefore, air was seen as polluted and hazardous to human health. Wietske Smeele notes that miasmatisms such as William Farr and other social reformers believed that diseases were created and carried by foul air emanating from sewage. He

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<sup>33</sup> For more information about England abandoning its connection with nature, see Martin A. Danahay “Matter Out of Place: The Politics of Pollution in Ruskin and Turner,” pp. 61-77.

states: “With so many people packed into increasingly cramped spaces that were not adequately equipped with the sanitation measures necessary for such large populations, foul air became a norm of the urban landscape, as did infectious disease” (19) Later, England’s health officials proved that miasma is born from London’s sanitation conditions. John Snow conducted a thorough study that proved that it was sewage and polluted water that spread diseases, but people remained skeptical of his theory, opting rather for the airborne theory. Although Snow came up with the investigation of the “Broad Street water pump,” which proves that its water is the source that spreads disease, people along with sanitarians were adamant about miasma as the agent that is responsible for all the outbreaks. This should give us an understanding of why everything that is airborne—dust, fumes, soot, and smoke—is seen as the culprit of “bad air”.

Austen seems to have been aware of the history of air pollution in England. She makes apparent references to it in *Emma* (1815), *Persuasion* (1818), *Mansfield Park* (1814), and *Northanger Abbey* (1817). She uses terms like “bad air” “foul air,” “dust,” and “bad smell” which Margaret Kennedy considers as parts of “miasma language.” She also identifies terms relating to polluted air such as “foul,” “fume,” and “smoke” deeming them as “the familiar language of miasma” (510). She argues that the novelists who employ miasmatic language make visible the reality of air pollution:

Many authors often substituted one sense for the other as a means of concretely representing filth, frequently referring to the “damp,” “foul,” or “pestilent[ial]” “smokes and smells” plaguing the environment. This miasmatic language... characterizes a shared language that rhetorically reconceives toxicity as man-made, even miasma, which, although organic, is tied to human obliviousness and recklessness. (511)

While Austen's terms make a strong connection between contamination and pollution, they remain underappreciated evidence of air pollution. As I will explain later in the chapter, Austen characterizes the environmental features of cities like London, Bath, and Portsmouth using exactly those words and, in the process, she suggests an anxiety toward a transformation brought to the world of her characters. The history of industrialization and the uncanny persistence of air pollution contributed a great deal to her attempt to reveal this transformation. In her novels, she presents polluted air as a palpable feature intimately connected with people's health conditions, in both industrial and urbanized towns. It is true, though, that she did not articulate the intensity of air pollution using the dramatic rhetoric of Evelyn's "ruinous smoke," or "sulphurous clouds" (21) or Johnson's "dense canopy of smoke" (1), but she did report it in notions like the peculiar occurrence that abruptly disturbs the normal image of a landscape, the changing characteristic of a village neighboring an industrial town, the noise and the chaos of a recently urbanized area, and the healing air of the countryside versus the air of the city.

Ironically, "air" that odorless, tasteless, and invisible element is the common denominator between rural towns and industrial cities. It is the test of quality that Austen uses to measure the purity of air in a town. In general, the terms "air" or "airy" are frequently mentioned in almost all of her novels. In many incidents, she uses them as the antidote for a down spirit or ill health. Sir Thomas Bertram, in *Mansfield Park*, advises Fanny to go out for an hour as "the air will do [her] good" (218). In *Emma*, Frank Churchill yearns for Highbury and calls it "that airy, cheerful, happy looking Highbury" (156), and in *Northanger Abbey* Catherine finds "walking and breathing fresh air" (163) an activity that is appealing enough to get her out of doors. Austen herself sent a letter to her sister



Cassandra, where she describes her ramble through Sydney Gardens as “my airing.”<sup>34</sup> Each form of the word “air” signifies a fresh and ethereal atmosphere and stands as the characteristic of the air quality of the town with which it is associated. But this is not the only representation of the term “air”; it will definitely have serious indications, as I will discuss later in the chapter. Juliette Wells provides a more specific definition of the term “air” when she discusses its negative inferences within London’s ecological dynamics. She contends, “among the factors considered crucial to health was so-called good air, meaning air of proper temperature and moisture, uncontaminated by any fumes” (413). However, the rapid growth of industrialization polluted this pure element, and Austen has always been, as Johnathan Bate notes, “suspicious of mobility and the city” (543). Therefore, in her novels she unhesitatingly renders many uncertain feelings regarding the condition of the big cities.

For the most part, Austen portrays the countryside as the emblem of organic order, harmony, and fresh air, while portraying the cities as symbols of chaos, decay, and foul air. This stark contrast holds the quality of the air as the measure that determines the environmental setting of both types. Raymond Williams points out cities like Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Bradford, and Manchester as “places built for work: physically in their domination by the mills and engines, with the smoke blackening building and effluents blackening the rivers” (220). Those cities were the creation of industrialization with a rate of population increasing in unimaginable numbers. The countryside remains true to Austen’s depiction. Her rural towns are located in historical rural counties with Mansfield Park in Northhamtonshire, Lyme Regis in Dorset County, and Box Hill in Surrey County.

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<sup>34</sup> This letter is dated May 26, 1801. See Claire Tomalin’s *Jane Austen: A Life*, p. 136.

They all keep their distinctive rural features where green meadow, tranquility, and fresh air are their valuable offerings to a healthy nature.

## **II. Austen's Ecological Map: the Countryside Versus the Cities**

In the introduction of her book, *Mapping The Victorian Social Body*, Pamela A. Gilbert states, "NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND saw a growing concern with what came to be known as social problems—poverty, crime, and what would finally be termed 'public health' issues. Much of this has been attributed to urbanization and industrialization." (3). Central to this chapter, is the incipient urbanization and industrialization in Austen's novels, which I understand as early symptomatic precursors of what becomes (as Gilbert notes) more intense in the early Victorian period. In Austen's novels, there is what I understand as an imaginary delineation of "environmental mapping" created by her demographic representation of certain regions based on levels of polluted versus pure air. To fully understand this delineation, it is important to consider the connections Austen renders between air quality, population concentration, and physical health. As we will see, later in the chapter, there is no simple relationship between rural and urban towns, or, to invoke Raymond Williams's famous opposition, "the country and the city," since industrial towns are dominating through their industrial powers and rural towns fall victim to the industrial towns' capitalistic advancement.

The early signs of air pollution, which started in the seventeenth century, increased after Austen's times. The parliamentary reports of 1878, which recorded increased levels of air pollution, testified to an environmental problem that could not be considered as the occurrence of the present but rather the accumulation of prior decades of contamination. Richard Brooke was an estate owner who had personal experience with the effect of vapors

from Alkali emitted from Runcorn, a neighboring town to his property. His case was presented in the Parliamentary Report titled “Noxious Vapours Commission,” as follows: “Sir Richard Brooke whose woods and park are situated about three miles from Widnes, and two and a half miles from Runcorn, stated that his “property has deteriorated in every way since these works have been in operation, and is hourly deteriorating now” (Parliamentary Report, 1878). Runcorn had always been a small settlement of no commercial or industrial ambitions but because the government expanded the Bridgewater Canal into its premises, it turned into a busy port serving Liverpool, inland Manchester, and Staffordshire. The docks were built and enabled the growth of industries such as shipwrights and chemical works. This simple town was no longer idle, it suddenly possessed valuable features and tempted capitalists and investors to utilize some of its areas. Archie McNab evaluates these features as “dominant physical features [which] have played a significant part in the structure of the town. Together with the proximity of road, rail, and water connections they have governed the selection of sites for the main industrial area” (404).

Runcorn’s transformation was the beginning of England’s own transformation, which started as early as 1820. In fact, the period between 1820 and 1900 constituted a turning point in England’s history. Although, at this time, it was still a rural country starting to gradually emerge, by the 1830s, there was a noticeable urban transition in many of its regions and later it became the cradle of the industrial revolution. To understand the progress of this transition, we have to consult Henry Heller’s article “The Industrial Revolution: Marxist Perspectives,” where he emphasizes the impact of industrialization on the rural occupations starting as early as the sixteenth century:

Rural and domestic handicrafts did not simply disappear in the face of the development of manufacture beginning in the sixteenth century. Rather they coexisted with and were reorganized by manufacture...The stage of manufacture, therefore, always rested on the handicrafts of towns and the domestic subsidiary industries of rural districts, over time destroying these in one form and resurrecting them in another. It produced a new class of small villagers who cultivated the soil as a subsidiary occupation, but found their chief occupation in domestic handicraft manufacture...Town merchants enlisted the services of spinners and weavers, but also tanners and ironsmiths and other artisans, in the rural areas, effectively subordinating them to urban manufacture. (182)

With the manufacturers' exploitation of rural occupations and England's capitalistic ambitions, industrialization gained more strength as more factories were built, and with their aim to increase productivity, smoke, soot, and dark clouds were emitted in profusion.

This history is key to understanding how England's rural towns lost their identities, and Austen, most certainly, noticed the shifting character of these places. The towns Williams refers to—Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Bradford, and Manchester—are located within the same distance range from London as Portsmouth, Bath, Brunswick Square, and South End Beach—the main towns in *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Persuasion*, and *Northanger Abbey*—and Austen presents these town as having problems with air pollution and unsanitary conditions. London's atmosphere is described by Mr. Woodhouse of *Emma* as a prolonged season of bad air, he says: "in London it is always a sickly season" (82).<sup>35</sup> In *Persuasion*, Anne Eliot, upon entering Bath, takes a view "of the extensive buildings,

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<sup>35</sup> For more information about London's air pollution, see Ken Hiltner's "Representing Air Pollution in Early Modern London," *What Else is Pastoral*, pp. 95-124. Andreas Malm's *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam-Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, and E.A Wrigley's *Continuity, Chance and Change: The Character of Industrial Revolution in England*.

smoking in rain,” and sees their development as “disagreeable” and “too rapid” (95). In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny, during her stay at Portsmouth, finds herself in the middle of “confinement, bad air, [and] bad smell” (293). Also, In *Northanger Abbey*, Isabella, in conducting her daily life, finds Bath a “vile place” where the “dust is beyond anything” (203).

These textual references help us understand how Austen deploys an ecological map based on her characters’ experience with air pollution. Although it is not an actual map, the readers can see how she delineates an environmental sense—the most polluted versus the most salubrious cities—only to offer a reconfiguration of England’s towns in light of the ecological complexities of industrialization. This sort of towns/cities delineation is based on experiential and sensory information relayed, most pointedly, by the characters’ sense of place, which is the microcosm of the larger environment. In this notion, I am following Gilbert’s lead on humans’ sense of space, which I envision Austen using as a tool to chart a precise environmental map. Gilbert writes, “human beings use many cognitive strategies for representing and practicing (acting in) space. The most important ones for our daily lives seem to be experiential, having to do with the way we interact with objects, space, and places on a regular basis” (11-12). In almost all of her novels, Austen’s characters have direct interactions with their own locales. Whether it is in the suburb or the city, they take every chance to declare their connection with their surroundings, and their reaction, even if it is sentimental, remains environmentally based. In *Emma*, Frank Churchill has a unique passion for Highbury’s fresh air; he has no doubt that as a rural town it will have “very pleasant walks in every direction, but if left to him he should always choose the same Highbury, that airy, cheerful, happy-looking Highbury, would be his

constant attraction (156). In fact, when Austen points out Highbury as a “particularly healthy spot” (16), she makes it one of the many towns that she ordains as environmentally healthy.

Admittedly, Austen’s novels are mainly set in the countryside, and this setting stands as a necessary foil to the polluted cities, whose decaying characteristic, when compared to the countryside become noticeable. Austen is quite different from the writers whom, Tobias Menely identifies as, “liv[ing] in London but retain[ing]experience of seasonal rhythms and dilatory rural time” (480). She is the exact opposite because she lives in rural towns writing her novels while retaining a vivid experience of big cities, which she visits occasionally.<sup>36</sup> Austen spent most of her life in Steventon and Chawton but managed to retain a vivid experience of the transformation that was taking over her surroundings. Tomalin notes, “To remove [Austen] from Stevenson was to destroy the delicate pattern she had worked out, in which she could take her place within the family... She had enjoyed a certain amount of travel, visits to Kent, Bath, London and Ibthorpe; but even before 1801 there are signs of her wanting to protect her time at home” (175). This time period marked what Menely calls, “the beginning of a modernization process defined mainly by the industrial combustion of fossil fuels” (478). Therefore, when Austen’s characters visit or discuss the environment of London, Bath, Portsmouth, Oxford, Brunswick Square or South End Beach, we see a spatial narrative associated with the incipient conditions of a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing England. Likewise, when Austen invokes small towns and

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<sup>36</sup> Austen’s letters provide a great deal of information about her life. See *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters, a Family record*, collected by Austen-Leigh, William and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh.

places such as Highbury, Surrey, Weymouth, Box Hill, and Cromer, we see a similarly spatialized narrative—but one associated with bloom, health, and pure air.

These unique narratives testify to Austen’s ability to experiment with spaces and pollution and envisions a progressive environmental map. Yet, her mapping of England’s towns in such a manner does not affix the air pollution problem to a specific city but unravels other underlying and related problems such as England’s unregulated industrialization and imperialistic ambitions. Gilbert notes that these “maps comprised a dual project: the representation of a reality, which was, simultaneously, a disciplining of that reality” (113). We may argue that Austen’s map presents the reality of air pollution, and she disciplines this reality by chastising the effect of industrialization on magnificent nature. In this manner, she precedes the Victorian novelists in generating models of thinking about the effect of this industrialization and urbanization on air, land, and humans.<sup>37</sup>

In the introduction of their book, *Ecological Form*, Nathan Hensley and Philip Steer make the conscious awareness of a changing environment specific to Victorian writers, while I see it very much applicable to Austen. As I discussed in chapter one, Austen proved to be a sharp critic of all sorts of alteration and her depictions of these alterations were unflattering as she portrayed them as practices inherently destructive. This same view is intrinsic in her environmental layout of England’s towns and cities and her views anticipated the progressive thinking of the Victorian writers. Her novels predated their novels in understanding the power of England as an industrial nation thriving on carbon

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<sup>37</sup> Examples of Victorian novels, which portray an image of darkness and air pollution in industrial cities: Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*, (1848), and *North and South* (1854), Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1854), George Eliot’s *Silas Mariner* (1861), and Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* (1878).

emission. Hensley and Steer contend, “Victorian writers experimented with new formal techniques, and generated new models of thinking in order to comprehend the two massively networked and often violent global systems that organized their experience...the British Empire and the Industrial Revolution’s carbon economy” (4). Although Austen avoids direct discussion of England’s imperial policies, and does so by, “resisting or avoiding the other setting” (96), as Edward Said argues in his postcolonial analysis of *Mansfield Park*, she is quite aware of the wealth these imperial policies brought and how much it supported England’s prosperity, especially its industrial economy.<sup>38</sup>

Austen’s characters travel frequently to the big cities. They enjoy every prospect a metropolis area can offer. They visit Bath, the hub of fashion and wealth, the theatre performances of London, the open sea of Lyme Regis, the tranquil ruralism of Woodston, and the sea breeze of Cromer. Through the experiences of these characters, we get a glimpse at the different environmental features of each town. Despite this metropolitan appeal, cities such as London, Bath, and Portsmouth are notorious for fumes, smoke, and particulate matters; they hold a repository of pollution problems that permeate the lives of those who live in them. On the other hand, towns like Box Hill, Woodston, and Lyme Regis are considered the sites of health, wellbeing, and clean air and those who visit them register an immediate state of delight and wellbeing. It is, however, notable how easily these towns can be categorized. In her essay, “Enclaves of Civility amidst Clamorous Impertinence,”

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<sup>38</sup> Susan Morgan asserts that the role of the Royal Navy was “crucial to British takeovers of states and regions around the world, from the West Indies to Singapore and the Malay Peninsula.” See Captain Wentworth, *British Imperialism and Personal Romance*,” (89). In *Persuasion*, Austen refers to Admiral Croft’s frequent trips to the West and the East Indies with no apparent reason other than being a navy officer. In *Mansfield Park*, Mr. Bertram’s sugar plantation in Antigua is stark evidence of exploiting the natural resources of some Caribbean islands. These incidents prove, beyond a doubt, Austen’s familiarity with matters relating to England’s imperialism.



Barbara Wenner introduces Donwell Abbey, with the areas that belong to Hartfield, Highbury, and Randalls as representing the “enclave of civility” (78). She believes that Austen is emphasizing peace, harmony, and regularity as their main characteristics. Meanwhile, in *Emma*, Austen categorizes the area located at “the broader batch of greensward,” where the gypsies linger, as “all clamorous and impertinent” (270). Some regions in *Emma* can be assessed as “enclaves of civility,” and others are estimated as “clamorous and impertinent”. Each area has its particular identity, and no area can be extricated from its own environment.

The metaphor that emerges out of this labeling can be applied to all of Austen’s towns. They are portrayed with different environmental characteristics and can bring a new understanding of what we now perceive as the environmental geography of Austen’s England. To give an example, big cities like London, Brunswick Square, and Bath are represented as cities struggling with air pollution, unsanitary conditions, and urban chaos, therefore, they belong to “the clamorous and impertinent” (270) Mr. Woodhouse describes South End as an “unhealthy place” (85) and mocks his daughter’s decision to “travel forty miles to get into a worse air” (85). Noise pollution plays a significant part in making them particularly clamorous. Industrialization and urbanization give them a rambunctious nature that interferes directly with the wellbeing of people, land, and air. Meanwhile, towns like Highbury, Woodston, Box Hill, and Lyme Regis are the true representation of “enclaves of civility.” They are places of clean air and serene nature. In *Emma*, Box Hill is never touched or altered by humans and its condition is as pristine as can be imagined and Fanny assures us that it is a place, “so well worth seeing” (286). These two categories—the civil

and the impertinent, the tranquil and the clamorous—are quite suggestive of the way Austen maps her towns.

### III. The Polluted Air of the Clamorous and the Impertinent

Should we look at Austen's mapping as the major index of England's transformation or as a sad story of carbon inconvenience? Perhaps it is both since charting towns and cities in such a manner signifies a decisive historical moment of England's ecological wellbeing. F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson point out the change in the economic and the social system as inevitable, since it is part of any country's history that one system replaces another, "The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England and the continuity is not organic, but mechanical" (75). A perfect example of this blotting is found in the famous opening page of Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton* (1848) where she describes a countryside being absorbed by industrialization. Gaskell depicts a beautiful pastoral field oddly blended with an industrial town:

There are some fields near Manchester, well known to the inhabitants as "Green Heys Fields"...[T]here is a charm about them which strikes even the inhabitant of a mountainous district, who sees and feels the effect of contrast in these common-place but thoroughly rural fields, with the busy, bustling manufacturing town he left but half-an-hour ago. Here and there an old black and white farm-house, with its rambling buildings, speaks of other times and other populations than those, which now absorb the population of the neighborhood. Here in their seasons maybe seen the country business of hay-making, plowing, &c., which are such pleasant mysteries for townspeople to watch; and here the artisan, deafened with noise and tongues of engines, may come to listen awhile to the delicious sounds of rural life. (1)

By drawing attention to the vanishing countryside outside England's industrial cities, Gaskell reveals a transition process where a cultural and social shift takes over English society. Her observations register not just a historical development where a new system is taking over an old one, but a concern over an inorganic blending of agrarianism and industrialization. Three decades earlier, a similar narrative was already presented by Austen when she positioned rural towns in close proximity to industrial towns. She does this by way of surrounding one industrial town by a few rural towns.<sup>39</sup> In *Emma*, towns like Kingston, Clayton Park, Langham, Box Hill, Mickelham, and Dorking are known for their unique rural features and fresh air; they are also near Highbury, which is sixteen miles away from London. In *Persuasion*, we learn that Bath, the epitome of congestion and urban chaos, is surrounded by historically rural areas such as Somersetshire, where Kellynch Hall and Uppercross estates are located, and Gloucester County, where South Park—a town in which Walter Eliot's father-in-law is granted the title of Esquire—is located. Bath is also surrounded by the village of Clifton, which is described by George Alexander Cooke in his book *A Topographical and Statistical Description of the County of Somerset* (1810) as “one of the most agreeable, healthy and pleasant spots in the kingdom; the air is so remarkably pure and salubrious” (115). In *Mansfield Park*, Portsmouth is a port city—Austen identifies as a town of noise, confinement, and bad air—is surrounded by the rich rural counties of Dorsetshire, Devonshire, Sussex, and Surry. Hamilton again describes the air of Devonshire County as so invigorating and salubrious that “Medical men recommend it to their consumptive patients” (41). He also identifies the county of Dorsetshire by its pure

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<sup>39</sup> This is a hypothetical map of Austen's vision of fictional and actual towns. A discussion of their location in almost all her novel can be found in “Maps of the Novels” published by Jane Austen Society of North America. This work also includes a collection of critical essays that discuss the social and geographical significance of certain towns and the protagonists' relation to them.

air and distinguished agriculture features, “The growth of flax and hemp, and particularly the former is of great importance in [its] agriculture” (45). Dorsetshire is known for its flooding meadow land, which he believes to be equally important since “the early vegetation produced by flooding, is of such consequence to the farmers, that without it, their present system of managing sheep would be almost annihilated” (358). Some of these towns are fictional and others actually exist but, in general, both are important for shaping the regional mapping of each novel and emphasizing the peculiarity of an industrially polluted town inconveniently existing in the heart of the countryside.

Portsmouth, in *Mansfield Park*, is the prime example of “the clamorous and impertinent,” or to apply the literal meaning of this label, an example of an insolent environmental chaos. It is a port town that bears all the strains of a coastal area. When Fanny goes back to her family home, she registers a sense of dirt and stain that immediately translates into pollution. Her observations impart a disturbing aspect of Portsmouth’s environment that goes beyond the walls of her small house,

She felt that she had, indeed, been three months there; and the sun’s rays falling strongly into the parlour, instead of cheering, made her still more melancholy; for sun-shine appeared to her a totally different thing in a town and in the country. Here, its power was only a glare, a stifling, sickly glare, serving but to bring forward stains and dirt that might otherwise have slept. There was neither health nor gaiety in sun-shine in a town. She sat in a blaze of oppressive heat, in a cloud of moving dust.” (298)

Fanny is quite conscious of something polluted and unsanitary, which the sunrays made more visible. Ruth Bernard Yeazell attributes her consciousness to Austen’s allusion to the polluted condition of the entire town, “Austen’s heroine sees her family home as stained and polluted. Fanny may have been too long pampered at Mansfield Park, or Austen may

have been tempted to indulge in some conventional disparagement of town life” (133). The rich greenery of Mansfield Park and its “increasing beauties, from the earliest flowers, in the warmest division of [its] garden, to the opening of leaves of [its] plantation,” intensifies Austen’s disparagement of Portsmouth’s “closeness and noise,” along with the “bad air, bad smell,” which have been “substituted for liberty, freshness, fragrance, and verdure” (293). Mixing Portsmouth’s Sea breeze with polluted air is not just an unpleasant anecdote about a heroine’s unsalutary residence but a reality that becomes forbidding when Austen compounds it with clouds of dust and waves of heat.

Austen’s observations of air pollution take a more interesting approach in *Emma*. She casts doubt on the air quality of South End Beach, which is a sea-bathing place, located forty miles from London and thus assumed to be of “a worse air” (85). When Isabella Knightley decided to vacation in South End Beach, her father, Mr. Woodhouse, considers her decision as a “sad consequence” (84). He makes a blatant statement about the town as “an unhealthy place” (85). His criterion of a healthy town is one that is a hundred miles away from London. Cromer is a sea bathing place that is a hundred miles away from Brunswick Square, one of London’s neighborhoods and, therefore, preferable to South End Beach. But again, Mr. Woodhouse makes it clear that, “where health is at stake, nothing else should be considered” (85). He maintains that “in London it is always a sickly season” (82), and “nobody is healthy in London, nobody can be.” He even adds that “the air is bad” (82). Mr. Woodhouse is known for his hypochondriac condition and anxiety about “bad air,” and both are related to his concern over cleanliness and sanitary issues. Yet, we cannot think of his panic and fear without thinking of the environmental reality that triggered them.

William Cowper, Austen's contemporary, was as disconcerted as she was about air pollution. His poem "*The Task: The Winter Evening*" like Austen's *Emma*, captures hints of damaging pollution effects that even a poet's imagination cannot avoid.

E'en in the stifling bosom of the town,  
A garden, in which nothing thrives, has charms  
that sooth the rich possessor; much consoled,  
That here and there some sprigs of mournful mint,  
Of nightshade or valerian, grace the well.  
He cultivates. These serve him with a hint  
That nature lives; that sight-refreshing green  
Is the livery she delights to wear,  
Though sickly sample of the exuberant whole. (4: 754-61).

This is presumably a description of a lovely garden, but it is a city garden that cannot survive the stifling air of London. Cowper is aware of the dying plants, but he insists on giving them life and attempts to see charm in the "sprigs of mournful mint," and "the sickly exuberant whole."<sup>40</sup> Menely mentions in his essay "The Present Obfuscation': Cowper's *Task* and the Time of Climate Change" that Cowper is familiar with air pollution because he "was writing in the late eighteenth century at the beginning of a modernization process defined by the industrial combustion fossil fuel" (478). Cowper tries to override the effect of pollution on the plants by making their deathly status delightful and soothing; but he defeats his own argument when he acknowledges that a garden in the bosom of London will not thrive.

If the statement about London's air pollution makes an appearance in Austen's *Emma*, the bad air of Bath has a stronger presence in *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*, as

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<sup>40</sup> Cowper expresses his concern about smoke and pollution in other parts of England. He makes a specific mention of smoke pollution in Buckinghamshire. See *The Task*. Book III, "The Garden." (3.732-38).

well as her personal letters. Tomalin explains how the nature of Bath was never inviting to Austen despite, “the attraction of the city, chiefly in public activity, public gardens and parties, rather than in domestic pleasure.” (149) This is not the kind of atmosphere that Austen would seek to write her novels. She would want to be absorbed in calmness, greenery, and pure air. To her, public gardens and public activities would be more of a distraction than an enjoyment. It is no wonder that she only lived there for few years. Austen’s letter to her sister Cassandra is an actual documentation of her discontent with the town.<sup>41</sup> She gives details about her daily activities during her stay at “The Paragon,” her uncle’s estate in Bath, and describes it as a town of smoldering air,

The very view of Bath in fine weather does not answer my expectation; I think I see more distinctly through rain. The sun was got behind everything, and the appearance of the place from the top of Kingsdown was all vapour, shadow, smoke, and confusion. (132)

It is obvious that the sunrays are badly obscured, and the town is seen more distinctly during the rain, while barrier of vapor, and smoke appeared lingering over the city making everything look like shadows and confusion. This is a perfect example of environmental pollution that distorts the energy and radiance of a specific place. We may try to figure out what Austen means by seeing vague shadows and bewilderment instead of meadows, people, and buildings, but we can only understand her pictorial perception if we look at the town through the same dim layer of smoke. In *Persuasion*, that same “dim view” is caught by Anne Eliot when she enters the town and is also mixed with smoke, rain, and noise. She “persisted in a very determined, though very silent, disinclination for Bath; caught the very

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<sup>41</sup> This letter was dated May 5, 1801. It can be found in *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters: A Family Record*. On information about pollution and the middle class, see Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 201.

dim view of the extensive buildings, smoking in rain, without any wish of seeing them better; felt their progress through the streets to be, however disagreeable, yet too rapid; ... [she] looked back, with fond regret, to the bustle of Uppercross and the seclusion of Kellynch" (95). When a town's features are wrapped in a dim layer of smoke and fumes, a sense of vagueness prevails, and its appearance is rendered shadowy and ghostly. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen theorizes "grey ecology" as an ecological concept that "includes a world of forces, objects, and nonhuman beings." His theory helps us understand Austen's unidentifiable "shadows" and "confusion," and how they resemble what he describes as "the varying densities of matter and shifting velocities: stormy thicknesses as well as serenely heterogeneous clumps...composites and microclimates." The density of floating substances in Bath's air is a mark of an atmospheric decay. Moreover, the color gray is usually associated with ambiguity and dullness, and when it prevails a general view, it relays a sense of ambivalence and confusion. In Austen's case, it represents the uncertainty that accompanies England's transition from agrarianism to industrialization or, in Cohen's terms, the era of "the in-between or the uncertain" (271). This shadow is not just an imaginary shade or a ghost but the reality to which Austen and perhaps the entire nation belongs. In other words, it is the history of excessive use of coal unfolding disastrously as a toxic build up in Austen's time.

Consequently, instead of being charmed by the city's public gardens or public activities, Austen is more occupied with its pollution. The world of her novels bears some resemblance to the world she inhabits, and it is possible that the shadows and the smoke that she distinctly points are something she experienced daily. More importantly, her documentation of this experience is anticipated, and her observations were embodied six



decades later in the Parliamentary Report, John Simon and R. Smith (1878). Austen was not just open about pollution in her novels; but her personal letters reveal a tone also determined on exposing its effects. However, “noxious vapours” are not the only pollution that Austen pins to Bath in that time period. She brings forth “dust” as an extra layer of contamination that wraps its squares and streets. In *Northanger Abbey*, Isabella Thorp sends a letter to Catherine informing her about the dust mediating the air and making living in Bath as a nuisance, “Thank God we leave this vile place tomorrow. Since you went away, I have had no pleasure in it—the dust is beyond anything” (203). It was rare for the authors of the period to identify “dust” as a polluting matter that renders an entire town “vile,” but Austen is inviting her readers to contemplate its weight in the general atmosphere. We are aware that smoke and vapor are already filling Bath’s atmosphere, but dust is the unpleasant particulate that Austen is adding to the town’s long list of air polluting materials.

Austen’s bird’s eye view of Bath is as troubling as her view of the actual streets. Her description of the streets’ congestion is regarded as her sense of the hazardous condition that endangers the safety of the public. The infamy of Bath’s over crowdedness is best presented in Austen’s detailed view of Cheap Street, which she labels as “impertinent in nature” (38). This street is connected to the great roads of London and Oxford, which are two large cities with a lot of commotions and industrial activities. People who live on Cheap Street are usually held on one side by speeding carriages, hasty horsemen, and dirty gutters. Austen describes this disturbance as insolent but also frequent and malevolent:

This evil had been felt and lamented, at least three times a day, by Isabella since her residence in Bath; and she was now fated to feel and lament it once

more, for at the very moment of coming opposite to union passage and within view of the two gentlemen who were proceeding through the crowds, and threading the gutters of that interesting alley, they were prevented crossing by the approach of a gig driven along on bad pavement by a most knowing looking coachman with all the vehemence that could most fitly endanger the lives of himself, his companion, and his horse. (38)

Despite the two different views—the one from the top of Kingston and the one from within the streets—both were consistent in presenting a troubling picture of Bath as a town engulfed inwardly and outwardly by the chaos of urbanization.

It is known that cities are usually congested, chaotic, and void of green spaces. People who live in them do not have access to places of special beauty and are often deprived from physical contact with nature. Going back to her letter, Austen's view of Bath after being cleared by the rain evokes a sad story of a deteriorating town. Rain is supposed to clear the air, replenish plants, and irrigate streams, rivers, and lakes, but when it falls in Bath it unmasks the great misery of the people. John Thorpe verifies this misery by stating, "I never saw so much dirt in my life. Walk! You could no more walk than you could fly! It has not been so dirty the whole winter; it is ankle-deep everywhere" (78). In *Persuasion*, Mrs. Smith spends her entire life in Bath; she resides at the Westgate buildings, a building of "paltry rooms" in a town known by its "foul air" (111). It is also located in one of the worst neighborhoods in Bath. Nikolaus Pevsner observes that around the 1730s and 40s the area of the West Gate Buildings used to be fashionable but, "by Jane Austen's time [it] had indeed come down. Much more radically than Queen Squares" (416).<sup>42</sup> In general, the

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<sup>42</sup> To highlight the severity of the deteriorating conditions of the Westgate Buildings, Nikolaus Pevsner is comparing it to Queen Squares, which used to be "the first planned comprehensive composition of Bath" (416), but later lost its glamour. In *Persuasion*, Austen affirms the beauty of Queen Squares when the

conditions of the roads across most of early nineteenth-century England was chaotic and sometimes crippling. But the roads in urban areas are notorious for becoming muddy swamps during rainy days in addition to being congested with horses and wagons making crossings impassable for pedestrians.

It is important to ask how Austen, an author who spent most of her life in the countryside, was able to present a vivid picture of smoke, dust, and urban chaos. What experience did she have to be able to weave skilled narratives of pollution? And more importantly, how deep was she involved in city life? Apparently, Austen never lived in cities—except for Bath, where she lived for a few years—and her novels were mostly written during her stay in the countryside. But we can attribute the scenes of pollution in her novels to her awareness of the Industrial Revolution being in full swing. James Brown asserts that by the time of her death the Industrial Revolution was well under way. He notes that if Austen lived longer, her novels would have included some industrial scenes. To prove his argument, he draws on a letter Austen sent to her sister Cassandra while writing *Mansfield Park* asking her to describe the hedgerows of Northamptonshire:

Yet, had she lived as long as some of her siblings, she could have read the industrial novels of the 1840s, and the ways in which her question regarding hedgerows could have been answered and would have been transformed by the railway and the camera. Had she lived until 1852 and wished to see the Northamptonshire hedgerows for herself, then she could have caught a train from the newly opened Alton railway station a couple of miles from

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Musgrove daughter suggests to her father that they “must be in a good situation” If the family plans to spend the winter in Bath, “none of [his] queen squares for [them],” p. 31.

Chawton, crossed London, and carried on by train into Northamptonshire.  
(23)<sup>43</sup>

Although Brown's imaginative scenario is valid and quite realistic, we need not draw on the hypothetical possibility of Austen's exposure to the later effect of industrialization. Traces of air pollution and urban chaos are real and have a strong presence in many of her novels. Her technique brings forth a narrative that goes beyond an aesthetic gaze at a town's landscape or artistic visual of a countryside. Despite the limited number of air pollution scenes, they stand as exceptional and somewhat striking. They most certainly draw attention and raise question about their place in a romantic narrative. Indeed, when a literary work of a specific era cannot evade references to pollution it means that what it cannot escape is a problem and its manifestation—even if sparse—is the response to an issue the author sees as complex and persistent.

#### **IV. The Doubling Down of Noise Pollution**

Noise and unpleasant sounds appear to be another inconvenience in Austen's novels. She highlights them as harmful occurrences that disrupt people's lives. These noises are usually associated with the clamorous nature of big cities like London, Bath, and Portsmouth. But while Austen regards them as "sound inconveniences," we give them a modern sense, and label them "sound pollution". Noise is generally regarded as the natural results of industrialization and urbanization and in her novels, they were consistent with

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<sup>43</sup> Austen's letter is dated 29 January 1813. See Jane Austen's Letters, ed. Deirdre Le Faye. (202). Also, for discussions about the interaction of Austen's characters with nature, see Rosemarie Bodenheimer "Looking at the Landscape in Jane Austen." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, pp. 605-23 and Roger Sale, *Closer to Home: Writers and Places in England, 1780-1830*, p. 35.

how much each town is invested in England's industrial growth. We can always think of London's noisy factories, Bath's congested streets and hasty carriages, and Portsmouth's ships, ducks, and store houses to understand why she refers to sounds and noise as "quite innoxious." (P 95). In *Persuasion*, she writes, "everyone has their taste in noise, as well as in other matters; and sounds are...most distressing by their sort rather than their quantity" (95). Austen knows that this sort can range from combustion engines, transportation, to congestion and over crowdedness hence she is more concerned about the source of the noise than the quantity. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne is impatient with her stay in London and yearns "for the air, the liberty, the quiet of the country" (228). She expects "much pleasure in [London} but [has] found none" (199). There is, however, no picture more provocative than the one Austen evokes in *Mansfield Park* for domestic noise. Fanny informs us that "At Mansfield, no sounds of contention, no raised voice, no abrupt bursts, no tread of violence was ever heard; all proceeded in a regular course of cheerful orderliness." Meanwhile, at her home in Portsmouth she notices that "everybody was noisy, every voice was loud...The doors were in constant banging, the stairs were never at rest, nothing was done without a chatter, nobody sat still, and nobody could command attention when they spoke" (266). Each residence seems to be microcosm of its own town: The tranquil domesticity of Mansfield Park testifies to the serenity of Northhamptonshire County, while the endless noises of her Portsmouth abode attest to the tumult and clamor of Portsmouth. W. H. Charpentier, a known publisher in the early nineteenth century defined Portsmouth in his guidebook, *Portsmouth, South Sea, Anglesey & Hayling Island Guide*, (1850), as a busy port city known to be "a harbor...capable of receiving the greater

part of the British Navy” (141) as well as the constant activities of “shipping passing to and fro, and numerous fishing vessels” (104).

In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen deems any street connected to the great roads of London and Oxford noisy and dangerous. The noises emanating from hasty carriages speeding on the bad pavement of roads already rife with pedestrians were not just exemplified in Cheap Street where Isabella has her share in its nuisance, “oh, these odious gigs!...how I detest them” (38) but similar narrative is found in *Persuasion*. Austen describes “the long course of streets from the Old Bridge to Camden-place” as roaring with “the dash of other carriages, the heavy rumble of carts and drays, the bawling of newsmen, muffin-men, and milk men, and the ceaseless clink of pattens” (95). What Austen relays is the eccentricity of noises emanating from everyday life. The horses’ hooves, the rumbling carriages, and the bawling of traders and sellers are producers of different sounds, but they still constitute the collective sound pollution as experienced in industrial/urban towns. David Garrioch delves into the various sources of noise and loud sounds and argues that they were the characteristic of the industrial cities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries not just in England but in many European countries.

Rhythmic hammering and the whoofing of bellows reverberated from forges. Sawing, hammering, grinding and sanding marked the workshops of cabinetmakers, shoemakers and locksmiths, carriage-makers, tin- and copper-smiths, and many other trades, while building sites and shipyards added to the hubbub. The regular click-clack of looms marched out of open windows, and women on the banks of urban waterways beat their laundry with wooden batons. (9)

Austen was very attentive to the noises of the cities and detailed them in the manner that Garrioch did. Her description of the traffic noise, which Garrioch indicates as “a striking

difference” to the “soundscape” (21) that Londoners experience, confirms her awareness of noise as a pervasive and potentially harmful occurrence. Garrioch, again, betrays a grim picture about the traffic in London when he notes that by the 1780s, there were more than 700 public cabs in London and a man who is in town for the first time would “crawl[] along in front of the houses like a thief, and at every coachman’s cry fancies himself crushed under wheels and horses’ hooves. These were vital warnings to pedestrians since most towns had no footpaths” (7). Austen is attentive to the impact of noise on the personal communication between people in crowded cities and how it makes their conversations subject to misperception and misunderstanding. In *Persuasion*, she makes sure that a quiet environment is the preferable setting for the characters to exchange information. Admiral Croft insists, during his walk with Anne in Milsom Street, on not communicating any information about Louisa until they reach “the greater space and quiet of Belmont” (120); Anne maintains a persistent affinity when meeting with Lady Russell in the confines of a quiet countryside; Captain Harville comes to a clear understanding of women’s constancy through Anne’s intellectual discussion within a quiet and secluded apartment in the White Heart Inn; and Mrs. Smith establishes a sisterly bond with Anne in a calm and hidden space in her apartment at Westgate. In general, personal communications absorb the tranquility and beauties of the place thus contributes a great deal to the deepening of relations among people. On the other hand, psychological tension and emotional pressure builds up among the same community when individuals meet in theaters, busy streets, and social gatherings. The distraction of the outside world affects the productivity of their communication; their attention is somewhat scattered, and their activities fall sterile. While being held up by rain, Anne has to seek shelter in a shop in Bath, where she meets Mr. Wentworth by a mere

coincidence. They first have a normal conversation, but the noise gets in the way, and he is not quite at ease. Anne is aware that, they previously, used to talk to each other in apparent calmness but this time she noticed that he is “not comfortable, not easy, not able to feign that he was” (124). Anne and Mr. Wentworth could not have an earnest conversation because of the confusion brought by the noise.

By contrast, communication seems to run smooth within the tranquil atmosphere of *Emma*'s Highbury and its surrounding rural towns. As George Bramer observes in his analysis of the setting of *Emma*, “there is the feeling that communication between persons living in different parts of the community is perfectly simple and natural. Frequently, the reader is informed of intelligence exchanged without any hint of where, or when, or how. It is assumed that the people of Highbury see each other constantly, as people living in the same house would” (154). The way the people of Highbury meet and communicate is indicative of a world free of distraction no noise of traffic, machines, or combustion engines. Their daily activities are run naturally, “three pairs of friends take it as a matter of course when, coming from different parts of the village, they meet in town during their evening strolls, walk together, and finally retire to a home for after-dinner tea” (153). No rumbling carts or roaring carriages obstructing their moving from one town to another. Emma and Harriet have many walks to and from Randall's, and Sally Palmer contends that during these walks Emma “uses the same walking habit to become intimate with Harriet Smith and to further her persuasive power over Harriet's life” (157). The fresh air of the countryside gives them leverage to reevaluate and make clear decisions. Jane Fairfax takes a long walk to reevaluate her feelings about her engagement to Frank Churchill, and Emma and Mr. Knightley come to an agreement on a controversial topic while walking in the



shrubbery. It is as if these walks promote communities' social harmony as well as people's mental and emotional progress.

Direct exposure to noise and pollution has an impact on the health of Austen's characters. When Mrs. Churchill is removed to London to regain her health after being chronically ill, her family decides to take her back to Richmond because she has not benefited from the change, "It soon appeared that London was not the place for her. She could not endure its noise. Her nerves were under continual irritation and suffering and by the tenth days' end, her nephew's letter to Randall communicated a change of plan. They were going to remove immediately to Richmond." Austen then informs us that, "much benefit expected from the change" (257). Paradoxically, all the advantages of a quiet and airy countryside are made visible in Mr. John Knightley's "two eldest boys, whose healthy, glowing faces shewed all the benefit of a country run" (87) due to their daily trips to Donwell Abbey, and Emma, who has been living all her life in Hartfield, possesses "a bloom of full health" which radiates "in her air, her head, and her glance" (30).

In *Mansfield Park*, Susan Price, Fanny's sister, is made aware of the curing powers of Mansfield Park and she expects these curative powers to prevent eminent evils. Fanny herself loses her bloom while staying in Portsmouth, "she had lost ground as to health since her being in Portsmouth" (278) but quickly regains it when she returns to the crisp and fresh air of Mansfield. Henry Crawford suggests that next to walking, riding a horse is the best exercise for Fanny to improve her health and these exercises can only be afforded by the pleasures of the countryside. Furthermore, the health of Lady Bertram and Mrs. Price represent the sad dichotomy of those who live in the countryside versus those who live in the city. Fanny reflects on the condition of her mother (Mrs. Price) and wonders how

circumstances caused her mother who is “as handsome as Lady Bertram,” who never lived in Portsmouth to have “an appearance so much more worn and faded, so comfortless, so slatternly, so shabby” (277). The novel suggests that even though poverty or “circumstance” could be a reason for not thriving, it is never the only one. Mrs. Price’s “worn and faded” looks owe as much to noise and air pollution as anything.

When Bruce Smith argues that culture determines people’s identity “not only through things seen but through things heard and said” (48), we can think of England’s environmental degradation that Austen saw in the “vapour” hanging in the sky of Bath, heard in the rumbling noise of hasty carriages and factories’ machinery, and talked about explicitly in her novels.<sup>44</sup> When he describes the noises of the big cities as the products of human activities that “function as a given within which the culture of a particular place is constructed” (47), we can think of how England’s economic growth and industrial ambitions determine the environmental conditions of towns and cities. We can also argue that it is this “constructed environmental conditions that prompts Austen to map her towns into “the clamorous and the impertinent,” or communities symbolic of pollution, chaos, and noise, while mapping others, as I will discuss, as “enclaves of civility” or communities emblematic of harmony and organic order.

## **V. The Pure Air of the Enclaves of Civility**

Lyme Regis, Box Hill, Woodston, and Mansfield Park find their way into an outstanding ecological representation. Each one stands as the epicenter of pure air and rich hedgerows, and each becomes the sharp foil of an industrial city. The harmony, regularity,

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<sup>44</sup> For details about the history of noise pollution in England see Bruce Smith’s “The Soundscape of Early Modern England: City/ Country/ Court.” *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, pp. 49-96.

and ecological order of each town testify to its status as what Austen terms “the enclave of civility.” In *Persuasion*, Lyme Regis has a deeper hold on this label because of its distinguished features. It is both a countryside and a coastal town with rich history and valuable geological attributes. Austen’s description of its beauty is worth quoting at length:

the Cobb itself, its old wonders and new improvements, with the very beautiful line of cliffs stretching out to the east of the town, are what the stranger’s eye will seek; and 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. The scenes in its neighbourhood, Charmouth, with its high grounds and extensive sweeps of country, and still more its sweet retired bay, backed by dark cliffs, where fragments of low rock among the sands make it the happiest spot for watching the flow of the tide, for sitting in unwearied contemplation;—the woody varieties of the cheerful village of Up Lyme, and, above all, Pinny, with its green chasms between romantic rocks, where the scattered forest trees and orchards of luxuriant growth, declare that many a generation must have passed away since the first partial falling of the cliff prepared the ground for such a state, where a scene so wonderful and so lovely is exhibited, as may more than equal any of the resembling scenes of the far-famed Isle of Wight: these places must be visited, and visited again, to make the worth of Lyme understood. (69)

In this description we are guided by Austen’s appreciation of Lyme’s authentic nature; the forest and the partial cliff along with the flow of the tide are parts of the town’s order and propriety. Every rugged stone and romantic tree add beauty to the general scene. Even the line of the cliffs testifies to its geological history. It belongs to the “enclave of civility” because it has nothing peculiar or imperfect, but a rich history and healthy ecology. Austen is not concerned about “the new improvement” that is coupled with Lyme’s “old wonders.” She understands that the fragments of rocks and the scattered trees are preserved in one

healthy environment. Mary Beth Tegan analyzes Austen's description of Lyme's nature as a response highly appreciative of the natural environment, "The picture composed of Lyme reflects a forming consciousness that is highly receptive to its surroundings, well disposed to being moved, even transformed, by the natural environment" (44). Austen is also reflecting on an environment conducive to healthy survival. Unlike the "stifling bosom" of London (Cowper 4: 754,) the "bad air" of Portsmouth, (*MP* 291,) or the "odious gigs" of Bath (*NA* 38), Lyme provides a significantly healthy atmosphere for both its residents and tourists. After his year-long illness Dr. Shirley Hayter, the church curate, declares that "coming to Lyme Regis for one month did him more good than all the medicine that he took" (*P* 73). Likewise, Anne is looking extremely well during her stay, "her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion, and by the animation of eye which it had also produced." (*P* 75).<sup>45</sup> It is literally the better air that improves Dr. Hayter's and Anne's health making that scene a true reflection of the benefits of a countryside and coastal air.

In addition, Lyme's nature speaks notably to its historical and geological value. It is not only a place where many generations have passed but also one of the world's important heritage sites. Amy King, in her book *Bloom: The Botanical Vernacular in the English Novel*, provides an insight on Lyme as a town deeply appreciated by the novelists of the period for its geological and historical value thus worthy of conservation. "Lyme was known as well in the late eighteenth century as a center of a kind of a turn-of-the-

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<sup>45</sup> William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh affirm that Austen's impression with Lyme was so profound that she retained a vivid memory of the details of the town eleven years after her first visit, "in *Persuasion*, Austen allowed herself to dwell on them with great fullness and greater enthusiasm than she had ever displayed on similar occasions before" *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters: A Family Record*, p. 140.

century ecotourism, where the novel pleasures of sea-bathing and fossil-hunting were jointly available” (129). This, certainly, explains Austen’s assertion of Lyme as a place that, “must be visited and visited again” so that it’s worth can be “understood.” Lyme’s nature does not just stimulate the brain but pleases the spirit, something that cannot be afforded by industrial towns.

In *Emma*, Austen introduces Box Hill as a prominent countryside compatible with Lyme Regis in possessing a natural history and untrammelled nature.<sup>46</sup> It is also worthy of being part of “the enclaves of civility,” since its forests were never appropriated, owned, or manipulated and all contribute to giving it a setting of pure air and pristine nature. Douglas Murray observes that Box Hill “took its name from the box trees (*buxus sempervirens*), which had long grown there, plants whose profusion produced maze-like paths and, under mature shrubs, private enclosures” (962). He believes that “early-modern accounts of Box Hill make clear that it is a place never quite owned, never completely appropriated by the hegemony of Austen’s era. Despite the era’s mania for enclosing wasteland, Box Hill remained what cultural geographers call a contested space. Is it a natural site? Or is it a constructed site? Is it really owned by anyone?” (965) Since it was not clear if it was owned by Mr. Knightly or any wealthy member of the gentry, we can assume that it has an independent character and an uninterrupted organic order.<sup>47</sup> William

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<sup>46</sup> Douglas Murray asserts that Austen “visited her godfather, Rev. Samuel Cooke, [at least twice] in Great Bookham, a Surrey village only four miles northwest of Box Hill. These visits [were] in the summers of 1799 and 1814—at this later date Austen was writing *Emma*—lasted long enough for excursions to local beauty spots,” p. 963.

<sup>47</sup> More information about the nature of Box Hill can be found in Celia Fiennes’s *Illustrated Journeys, 1682-1712*, and *Excursions in the County of Surrey*. Also, see John Timbs’s *A Picturesque Promenade round Dorking, in Surrey*.

Gilpin, a travel writer and an expert in picturesque theory, was aware of its valuable contribution to England's natural history. In his, *Observations on the Western Parts of England, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty*, (1798), he asserts that Box Hill, "should be considered as making the natural history of England." He reminds us that, the box trees are "native to England" and "if it were not for the growth of the Box on the Surrey Hills 'whose precipitous sides refuse cultivation,'" it would not have retained its original state (12). Box Hill is known for its high-water table and its dry chalky soil, and both features make it a less desirable spot for cultivation or development; therefore, it is less inviting for the gentry or wealthy landowners. Austen tries to give Box Hill familiar characteristic by describing it as an open space with "a whole extent of gardens," and as having "the delicious shade of a broad short avenue of limes" (E 292). As I mentioned before, the strawberry-picking picnic scene shows the ladies interacting with the ecology of Box Hill in a pleasurable way asserting its harmony and organic order.

Similarly, Austen's description of the lawn of Mansfield Park renders it an "enclave of civility". When Fanny returns after a long and unpleasant sojourn in Portsmouth, Austen celebrates her return as a homecoming to nature and pure air rather than the mansion, her "eyes fell everywhere on lawns and plantations of the freshest green; and the trees, though not fully clothed, were in that delightful state, when further beauty is known to be at hand, and when, while much is actually given to the sight, more yet remains for the imagination" (303). Austen illustrates the vast difference between the two towns when she makes Fanny ponder sadly the sunshine as "a totally different thing in a town and in a country" (298). Her emotions are leaning more towards the advances of March and April in Mansfield Park wondering at how it "cannot be unlovely" (293). Austen invests further in Mansfield's

beautiful nature; its fresh air, woods, and the early blossoms of the garden; each represent Mansfield's harmony and organic order. The airy aspect of the mansion does not escape Fanny's notice and her sister, who accompanied her, is immediately aware of the place's healing aspect. She is quickly predisposed to its healing power as "she was provided with happiness, so strong in that best of blessings, an escape from many certain evils" (304). Austen crowns all these aspects by presenting the mansion as a symbol of "elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony—and perhaps above all, [...] peace and tranquility" (266).

Alternately, Woodston, in *Northanger Abbey* is "a large and populous village" (200) with a simple and rustic character that has a foot in the "enclaves of civility" as well. It is known by its "fresh air" (202), "green meadows," and "apple trees" (201), and although "there was not a shrub in it higher than the green bench" standing in the corner of the parsonage, it is "prettier than any pleasure-ground [Catherine] had ever been in" (202). Its rustic simplicity defeats the elegant antiquity of *Northanger Abbey*. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, the Abbey was vanquished by the tyranny of modernization. The General altered both its landscape and its religious value and it lost its harmonious and organic features. Meanwhile, Austen structures Woodston away from the hands of improvers and farther away from industrial towns to allow its landscape to develop naturally.

When Catherine visits the parsonage in Woodston, which is supposed to be her marital home, she is pleased with the shrubs, the nursery, the litter of puppies, and the apple trees, which all constitute an organic culture that combines animals, plants and soil. Katherine Kickel suggests that these organic elements make it stand in defiance to human manipulation. "At Woodston Catherine and Henry can look over the meadows to apple trees in their backyard rather than oversees 'a village of hot houses' and 'a number of

servants” (166). In fact, “The house stands upon fine meadows facing the south-east, with an excellent kitchen-garden” (164). Woodston is a small village of hardly any importance, but it represents rural idealism in its true sense. It is fortified by everything nature can offer and within its boundaries there are shrubs trees and puppies. There is no mention of hothouses to provide artificial fruits or pollute the air. Therefore, its place in the enclave of civility is as significant as Mansfield Park, Lyme Regis, and Box Hill.

In summary, England’s history of air pollution dated as far back as the early sixteenth century when the public relied on burning fossil fuel as a source of energy for residential use. The burning of coal emits large quantities of smoke, soot, and acid vapor. Small businesses contributed to air pollution where dark clouds and the noxious vapor lingered on top of industrial cities. The public was enraged by the pollution and started to record their observations in treaties, literary works, and Parliamentary reports. Austen joins this indignation by presenting air pollution in her novels as a toxic inconvenience. She draws on a metaphorical portrayal of the towns’ civil and impertinent nature, using air quality and organic nature, as tools by which she measures the towns’ healthy status. Towns like Bath, London, and Portsmouth are industrial in nature. They battle with problems of air pollution, noise, and eroded infrastructure; therefore, they belong to “the clamorous and the impertinent.” Meanwhile, towns like Lyme Regis, Box Hill, Woodston, and Mansfield Park in Northhamtonshire, enjoy a great deal of pure air and organic order hence they belong to “the enclaves of civility. Austen provides a negative portrayal of noise and offers it as an extra layer of pollution, pointing it out in the tumult of industrial towns. There is no shortage of descriptive details about the rambunctious life of London, Bath,



and Portsmouth in her novels, and she clearly equates the clamor of these cities with the decline of her characters' health.

Looking back at Austen's portrayal of nature, we realize that her novels did not just explore sublime nature or glorious countryside sceneries, though this has been the focus of many critics; but examined the hidden danger of toxic pollution, industrialization, and urban chaos. There are many textual references that refer directly to England's environmental decline, but they are subtly embedded in her romantic narrative. Austen's exploration of these issues shows her as a novelist who, despite being a romantic author writing romantic novels, has a consciousness highly receptive to the offences committed against the environment. She preceded her contemporaries and the Victorian novelists in defining England's environmental problems and highlighting their impact as something that was too severe to be ignored.

### Chapter Three: The Moral Valuation of Nature and the Eco-void in Austen's Grand Estates

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

— Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*.

When Donald Worster describes nature as, “the most mute and defenseless of entities” (48), he sheds light on the importance of taking the right approach to interact with the natural surroundings and consider the moral issues that will enlighten humans’ environmental choices. These moral issues can be determined when humans understand the limits of their consumption and draw a balance between their care for and their manipulation of nature. As suggested in the top epigraph, the best moral valuation of nature is the one that preserves “the biotic community,” and maintain its wellbeing.<sup>48</sup> Aldo Leopold establishes a deeper ecological ethic when he asks humans to celebrate the land as “not merely soil; [but] a fountain of energy: flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals” (216) and to respect the lands’ right to continue existing “in a natural state” (204). The lack of this ethic will lead to anthropocentric attitudes that place nature in an instrumental position and makes it an object that fulfills humans’ desires. In this sense, the moral obligation toward nature becomes only integral when it disciplines and even restrains humans’ tendency to manipulate nature.

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<sup>48</sup> Leopold’s “Land Ethic” asks people to extend the moral meaning of “community” and allow this meaning to include soils, waters, plants, and animals. He believes that people must abandon their role as consumers and think of themselves as conservationists. He claims that integrity, stability, beauty, and health are criteria for a healthy environment. For more information, see Lewis P. Hinchman’s “Aldo Leopold’s Hermeneutic of Nature,” pp. 225-249.

## **I. The Moral Valuation of Nature in Austen's novels**

The moral environmental vision is never lost in Austen's novels. It is implicit in the heroines' veneration of nature and in her critiquing of what seem to be aesthetically exemplary landscapes, while, in reality, it is her criticism of the upper class's utilitarian relation to nature. She promotes an environmental ethics that aims to preserve the integrity and the stability of nature. This was made clear when she pinpoints the gaps embedded in the harmonious grounds of Pemberley, which cause fragmentation to its nature, the division in the natural aspects of Donwell Abbey, which turns it into an estate that fails environmentally and socially, and the patriarchal power of the owner of Northanger Abbey, which compromises the historical value of the landscape. To appreciate Austen's environmental critiquing, we need to develop new ways of thinking about her nature-depiction scenes. Leopold's views will benefit this chapter, when I draw on his idea of land ethics as "an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity" (203) and argue for Austen's environmental observation as a version of her own land ethics.

By bringing Leopold's idea of 'the land' to bear on Austen's novels, we can expand the boundaries of her environmental perception and include not only humans, but soil, water, plants, and animals—or what he collectively calls "the land" (203). In Austen's nature scenes, we ponder her techniques of exposing human manipulation of nature in an attempt to reach a better understanding of her environmental awareness. One conclusion we can draw from this is how her depiction of nature brings to light cultural phenomena such as patriarchy, landscape gardening, wealth, and estate ownership as the prompters of nature's shattered essence. Her concern over the unity of the landscape, which is frequently implied in her depiction of the grounds of Pemberley, Northanger Abbey, and Donwell

Abbey, illustrates an apparent void in their ecological cohesiveness. Therefore, her depiction does not just evoke an environmental concern but delivers a message and maybe a plea to allow nature to continue thriving in its own right.

## **II. Eco-void: What Does it Mean?**

Eco-void is a term I coin to highlight a lack or a disruption in the ecology of nature when a breakdown threatens its organic unity. We become aware of this breakdown when we notice a change, a gap, or a fracture caused by human actions and disrupts the cohesiveness of the natural surroundings. Oftentimes, this breakdown is triggered by projects of innovations that are originally created by cultural and social phenomena. The fashionable approaches adopted by estate owners to aesthetically modify their landscape is one example. The term “eco-void” refers, most pointedly, to a lack in the conformity of nature and denotes an absence of unity of its ecological attributes. Gardening that follows the principles of picturesque theory is the perfect example of this absence, since it focuses on scenic pleasure and reorders nature by creating odd clumps of trees, artificial lakes, open plains, or changing the direction of natural streams. In such cases, the landscape becomes artificial and loses its authenticity. Nature is, certainly, ubiquitous; it blooms and unfolds in magnificent ways, though its wholesomeness, which has always been compromised by human action, escapes our attention. We tend to notice the value of its wholesomeness when a manipulation occurs. In *What Else is Pastoral*, Ken Hiltner discusses the environment’s capability of being known when only a fracture disrupts its uniformity. He believes that nature, or the “backdrop of our existence” is something that humans tend to overlook but become aware of it only when they notice something as lacking or not belonging. He refers to this lack as “a partial or temporary breakdown” (36).

In Austen's novels, the landscape of the country houses has a seemingly solid presence that the readers recognize through the beautiful view of trees, hills, and valleys; but a closer look at their hidden aspects reveal many concerning issues. These hidden aspects can be seen in the fractured ecology of Pemberley's naturalness, the ruptured enclosure of Donwell Abbey, and the manipulation of Northanger Abbey's historical landscape. Austen points directly to these irregularities and her recognition of these breakdowns represent what modern theorists call, "environmental consciousness." In her nature-depiction, this consciousness emerges as a sensible awareness of the environment. Such awareness allows her to evoke a picture of an ecosystem that is never held in balance thus unsettles nature's intrinsic character. In other words, Austen conjures, in enlightening moments, the voids subtly embedded in nature and the vacuities that renders it disjointed and unintegrated.

By coining "eco-void" as an ecocritical category useful for analyzing the landscape of the country houses, I am bringing a new understanding of Austen's depiction of nature and a new dimension that will add to her views of the environment. The void seen in the divisions, the alienation, and the breakdown in the landscape of the country houses is a critical approach that is different from what her critics use to examine her nature scenes. To illustrate, one of the methods they use is analyzing her nature scenes as related to romantic narrative while pointing to how the protagonists are placed within its boundaries and being served by it. Rosemarie Bodenheimer, Ann Banfield, and Barbara Britton Wenner write essays that examine Austen's nature from exactly this perspective. In *Mansfield Park*, Banfield analyzes the landscape of Mansfield Park, the estate, as quite a delightful natural place for Fanny to enjoy "the pleasures of spring" (5). Bodenheimer

evaluates Elizabeth Bennet's visit to Pemberley as intended to stupefy the heroine with an overwhelming and positive vision of Darcy. "From every point of view—and many are packed in—Darcy appears as a virtual model of perfection" (610); and in *Persuasion*, Wenner sees Mr. Benwick as a widow overcome by sadness and his over sentimentalization of the landscape is not even helping him to live happily, while Anne Eliot "found signs that become favorable to her emotional survival. And so, it is not at all surprising that she found 'the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind, which had been blowing on her complexion'" (92). Such critical discussions confine Austen's attention to nature and the protagonists' response to it in a romantic pictorial framework. But my approach is taking this convention in a completely different direction. It searches within the visual aesthetics—of what Austen presents as ideal landscapes—and pinpoint the vicissitudes observed in the landscape of the country houses. It also questions the disjointedness located in the cohesiveness of the protagonists' natural surroundings.

Further, the eco-void embedded in the landscape of the country houses highlights Austen's moral valuation of nature, which materializes in her vision of country houses nestling in a landscape that "neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up" (*E*, 290), and have never been "counteracted by an awkward taste" (*P&P*, 267) but left to grow naturally allowing, "the steep woody hills rising behind to give [them] shelter" (*NA*, 166). In all irony, these aspects are often compromised evoking, in the process, a concern over the voids that threaten the cohesiveness of their nature. Therefore, this chapter investigates a breakdown in the organic uniformity of nature in the grand estates of *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey* (1816) and *Pride and Prejudice*, (1813). The environmental representations of their country houses shed light on the eco-void nuances that Austen

herself view in a profound way. There are fractions and divisions along with the fact that each estate has its own character, identity, and a varied impact on the natural surroundings. The fragmented sentimentality of Pemberley's landscape is different from the divided ruralism of Donwell Abbey, and both are different from Northanger Abbey's mutilated nature and history. But by the very fact that Austen is bending nature depiction into arguments of gaps and voids she manages to turn a conventional description of nature into an environmental awareness that helps bring the readers into a better understanding of a supposedly wholesome nature.

### III. The Eco-void in the Naturalness of Pemberley

In investigating the eco-void in Pemberley, a quintessential country estate in *Pride and Prejudice*, it is important to point Austen's pictorial documentation of the varied breaches embedded in a landscape that appears to be naturally integral. The aim is to call attention to the voids in the naturalness of Pemberley's grounds and point to them as the irregularities that destroy the sense of unity in the readers' perception. Bodenheimer contends that in *Pride and Prejudice*, "Jane Austen draws on the metaphorical possibilities in the rather technical relationship between 'the eye,' on the one hand, and 'the prospect,' on the other. The pictorial style of response is particularly appropriate when looking at the landscape suggests a process of social discovery or corrected perception" (613). With the eco-void in mind, the larger configuration of the natural scene of Pemberley will assist in correcting our nature perception and even discovering the individualistic social attitudes of estate owners.<sup>49</sup> These attitudes are important in the ecocritical discussions of this chapter

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<sup>49</sup> Discussions on the landscape and the garden of Pemberley can be found in Kim Wilson's "Pemberley and the Great Estate." *In the Garden with Jane Austen*, p. 21. Also, for information about the power, wealth, and the character of Darcy Fitzwilliam, see Claudia Johnson's "Pride and Prejudice and the Pursuit of Happiness," *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, pp. 73-93.

when attempting to highlight the power estate owners possess and the various ways, they use it to shape and reshape nature. The ease with which they transform nature is instigated by their desire to exploit landscape for personal preferences and/or financial gains; thus, it is crucial to view them as responsible for causing the breakdown in the natural surroundings.

Pemberley's grounds are designed in a manner that overwhelms the reader with a positive vision of its landscape. Elizabeth's first sight of it registers striking views that are discernable both close and at a distance as the grounds stretch over ten miles round. At a distance she sees hanging woods, a river, and a bank that are hardly adorned but in the "nearer aspects of a landscape" (235), she sees a grand estate residing on an elevated ground being highly adorned:

They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; - and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned...She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. (235)

Austen presents a portrayal of nature that is slightly pretentious. She is revealing signs of human intervention in the mansion's surroundings though she references it as "little." We see the void evident in the woods that ceases to exist when the house gains prominence in appearance, in the road leading to Pemberley as it winds "with some abruptness," and also in the banks of the stream as it appears swerving somewhere in between being informal



and important. Austen does not completely deny human intervention she leaves room for the readers to ponder the possibility of some tampering; a landscape that is not *never* but “little counteracted by an awkward taste,” (235). Robert Kern considers this as the influence of, “what one imagines to have been some strenuous efforts of earth-moving and landscaping, and Elizabeth seems all but conscious of the extent to which what she sees here is a calculated illusion. Indeed, much of the charm of Darcy’s landscaping lies in the way it has been hidden or disguised” (15). Austen’s observation is unwilling to admit a complete naturalness of the grounds: on the one hand the grounds are naturally beautiful and on the other they are disturbed by some stylish tampering. This is similar to her description of the banks as not formal but also not “falsely adorned.”

Theodore Adorno’s “Nature as Not Yet,” a widely discussed work on the relation between art and natural beauty, emphasizes art’s inability to represent nature. He believes that if art defines nature “through its antithesis to society then it is not what it appears to be” (82). Therefore, when nature is represented as entirely organic in a society that encourages artificial landscaping, it is likely that it will be structured in a reified version, and what we experience is nature “suffering at the inadequacy of the appearance which fails beauty while wanting to make itself like it” (82). The truth about the inadequacy of nature’s appearance, and the beauty it fails to achieve, is the void that dramatizes Pemberley’s nature as divided and spoiled. This is the result of a cultural phenomenon, namely fashionable landscape designs, which govern the appearance of nature and disorient rather than stabilize the way we view a landscape. When the natural structuring of Pemberley disappears from our perception and our eyes can see woods, a bank, and a

road trammelled by a seemingly clever design, we realize that Austen is making a statement aligning with what modern eco-critics consider as voids within nature.

Notwithstanding, there is still innocent, pure, and unspoiled nature located outside the boundaries of Pemberley, which in turn makes “the nearer aspects” of the landscape suffer from a comparative inadequacy of appearance. While surveying its prospects, Elizabeth tours the grand rooms and notices:

The hill crowned with woods, from which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its banks and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight. As they passed into other rooms, these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen. (236)

Although Elizabeth sees beauties from every window, it is not lost on the environmentalist’s eye that the overall landscape has been ecologically divided. Duckworth is not an eco-critic, but his view regarding this scene proves that the environmental division is strong enough to be noticed by a critic who does not necessarily have an ecological focus, “There is a kind of a scenic *mediocritas* about the estate. A mean between the extremes of the improver’s art and uncultivated nature” (123). By looking through the windows, Elizabeth gains a wide view of the landscape and while she is moving from one room to another, nature takes on different outlooks, “these objects were taking different positions” (236). Through these differing views Elizabeth is made aware of the variability of nature, especially the closer aspects of Pemberley and how they are designed to fit the owner’s landscape fantasies. This is what makes them, in every measure, human constructs. By contrast, in seeing the farthest aspects inclining more toward wilderness

escaping humans' manipulation, abounding freely in plants, and responding nicely to the laws of nature, we are assured that they are constructs made organically by nature.

However, Lawrence Buell does not agree about naming these areas as wilderness; he believes the term "to be a relative rather than an absolute" (67). He believes that what we call wilderness is something that can be estimated differently. They may have been previously used or inhabited by someone else. In fact, these areas, as uncultivated as they might seem, are inhabited by farmers and villagers who would benefit from the open land—the commons and the heaths—before the implementation of the parliamentary Reform Act of 1832. Wilderness, in the English landscape means, something quite specific; although it is uncultivated, it is available, approachable, and open for human interaction. They are not heavily manipulated by humans the way estate owners use their lands. They maintain their attributes and serve the larger population. The wilderness that surrounds Mrs. Bennet's house picks up a friendly characteristic from the hermitage that resides at its heart. The religious activities that it invites—prayers, meditations, or regular visits—turns the wilderness into a friendly and serviceable part of nature. When Lady Catherine de Bourgh notices "a prettyish kind of a little wilderness on one side of [the Bennet's] lawn," she declares her desire "to take a turn in it" with Elizabeth's company. Mrs. Bennet agrees and asks Elizabeth to "show her ladyship about the different walks," knowing that "she will be pleased with the hermitage" (333). Although Lady Catherine intended to have the walk to discuss serious issues with Elizabeth, she is not fearful of the wilderness; she finds it useful in giving her the privacy she needs. Her desire to walk through the wilderness is similar to the regular nature rambles that Austen's protagonists take to benefit from its positive energy.

It is surprising how the unmaintained part of a landscape, or the wilderness, can compete with the highly tamed landscape in providing the same sense of comfort. This raises the question of whether Austen is raising awareness to the value of the rough nature and promotes a revolutionary innovation that adds to the garden variety of the English landscape in the early nineteenth century. Isis Brook refers to this innovation as a cultural response to nature, which incorporates wilderness in the English landscape designs creating “a newfound appreciation of nature” (109).<sup>50</sup> Brook argues that this cultural innovation “could be seen as a way of bringing nature into the garden. Before the break with formal garden styles and the move to the more informal, there was already a trend for setting aside part of a garden for small areas of woodland or informal planting. These were called wildernesses” (108). Austen emphasizes that nature can be enjoyed not as something to look at from a distance but as the backdrop to the landscape. It is possible that Lady Catherine’s request to walk through the wilderness is built on the cultural vision that regards nature and gardens as a cohesive whole. The availability of the wilderness in this manner defeats any notion that makes it separate from the rest of nature as in the case of Pemberley. The wilderness that surrounds the Bennet’s house appears as part of nature that is friendly and amicable.

Thomas Bewick in his *A Memoir of Thomas Bewick Written by himself*, written in the 1820s, presents a picture of wilderness as functional and useful to those who seek its

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<sup>50</sup> Isis Brook explains the innovative landscape design as follows: “An early post-medieval development was called a mount, this small, constructed hillock allowed those enjoying the garden to view the world beyond its enclosure. Often, they were mounted by a spiral walk, and the summit was graced with a summer house arranged for the best views... At the same time as the development of the mount, walls were being pierced with window-type openings that allowed for views beyond the garden,” p. 107. This notion is what inspired a revolutionary innovation of the landscape called the French: *ha-ha* or “saut de loup,” which is a recessed landscape design that creates a barrier without interrupting the entire view.

benefits.<sup>51</sup> He records the works of a farmer living in the commons of Northumberland in the 1780s. He describes the saga of his life and work as it may not be noticed in the large commons despite being fruitful and productive:

Here and there on this common were to be seen the cottage, or rather hovel, of some labouring man, built at his own expense, and mostly with his own hands; and to this he always added a garth and a garden, upon which great pains and labour were bestowed to make both productive; and for this purpose not a bit of manure was suffered to be wasted away on the “lonnings” or public roads. These various concerns excited the attention and industry of the hardy occupants, which enabled them to prosper, despite being ever numbered with the parish poor. These men...might truly be called—“A bold peasantry, their country’s pride. (34)

It is important to note that the farmer has a more organic relation with wilderness than Darcy with Pemberley. The farmer makes wilderness organically healthy by immersing his hands in the foot of the soil cultivating and harvesting, while Darcy’s hands work more in taming, curbing, and conquering. Bate rightly observes, “A successful ecosystem is one which is held in balance” (145), and Pemberley’s ground connects with nature in a mediocre way. As a large stone building situated well, “at the top of considerable eminence” (*P&P* 235), Pemberley appears as a virtual model of superiority that fails to establish a simple connection with nature. Its aesthetically tamed features render it distinct from zones similar to the zones of Bewick’s “bold peasantry” (Ch. 3). It will always be defined by its prominence and will always be detached from familiar nature.

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<sup>51</sup> In the footnotes of *A Memoir of Thomas Bewick Written by Himself*, we read, “This fell, or common, containing about 1852 acres, was divided in 1812. By this division, the poor man was rooted out, and the various mechanics of the villages deprived of all benefit of it. The neighbouring farmers who reared their young cattle, and kept as many sheep upon it as they pleased, must now pay rent for the allotments laid to their farms. The wisdom which dictated this change is questionable, but the selfish greediness of it is quite apparent.” (np)

Evidently, there is nothing subtle about the loss of a seamless unity in Pemberley's collective ground. Austen's description of the farther aspect still bears witness to that marked division. When Elizabeth and the Gardiners walk in the grounds and reach the area of the farthest aspects, they are impressed by the quality of what they are seeing. There are, "many charming views of the valley, the opposite hills, with the long range of woods overspreading many, and occasionally part of the stream" (241). There is also an area of the valley where it is "contracted into a glen" (243) and described explicitly as "a spot less adorned than any they had yet visited" (243). It has kept its flaws and imperfections, affirming the beauty of wilderness, unlike the closed sphere of the free-flowing trout stream and the circuit walk. As Mavis Batey indicates, Gilpin praises a circuit walk in his book *Forest Scenery* only as a design that shows how "the natural advantage of the scene can be judiciously exploited" (73), and Pemberley's circuit walk is man-made, designed to fulfill the owner's desires for pleasure walks. The farther aspects of Pemberley remain the emblem of its own division; they are portrayed as a less decorated, narrow, hidden, and, more importantly, part of the hanging woods located in the back of Pemberley.

This fragmentation invites us to direct a heedful gaze at the landowner and hold him responsible for the formation of two natures. One represents the wilderness that sits outside Pemberley's ten-mile radius, and the other represents the nearer area that sits within that radius. The wilderness appears to be free, infinite, and pristine, and despite the minor workings of farmers, it is still exempted from human influence. On the other hand, the nearer aspects appear to be measured, confined, assessed, and notably relinquished by the aesthetic desires of its landowner. It is through the push and pull of these two formations that we get a glimpse at a new nature; one clearly characterized by a lack of homogeneity

and autonomy. More interestingly, Pemberley's grounds are conditioned by class and land ownership. Therefore, we see a landscape and wilderness: a landscape, which includes refined and sophisticated grounds that are sequestered by the circuit walk, and a wilderness that is free, sprawling, and unpretentious.

Delaford, a country estate in *Sense and Sensibility*, stands as the complete opposite of Pemberley. It is not only the "self-sustaining agrarian utopia" (89) as Kathleen Anderson defines it, but a place that is never marked by lack of uniformity or excess of aesthetics. It is consistent in its agrarian identity being near the church and the turnpike road where the villagers pass by comfortably. Mrs. Jennings, a friend of the Dashwood ladies, describes Delaford as:

a nice old fashioned place, full of comforts and conveniences; quite shut in with great garden walls that are covered with the best fruit-trees in the country: and such mulberry trees in one corner! Lord! how Charlotte and I did stuff the only time we were there! Then, there is a dovecote, some delightful stewponds, and a very pretty canal; and everything, in short, that one could wish for: and, moreover, it is close to the church, and only a quarter of a mile from the turnpike-road, so 'tis never dull, for if you only go and sit up in an old yew arbour behind the house, you may see all the carriages that pass along. (160-61)

Delaford is a country house owned by Colonel Brandon, a man equal to Mr. Darcy in wealth and rank, but his estate differs in the way its rural features mark its identity as a real country house. Though it does not reside on a substantial eminence, and it is not crowned by hills and woods, its grounds are never divided into landscape versus wilderness or highly adorned versus less adorned. It is not exactly the reserved and detached estate-like Pemberley; the church and the country road make it friendly while the nearness of the passing carriages makes it uniquely sociable. Its best ecological feature is seen in how it is

seamlessly blended with its surrounding. Its garden walls are covered by “the best fruit trees” (160) even the dovecote, the stewponds, and the canal, which are manmade, are used for practical not for aesthetic purposes. As for its general air, it is known for its curing aspects; it was the convalescent place for Marianne, who spent many weeks within its walls to regain her strength. These features are the determining factors of its ecological cohesiveness, and such qualities are lost in Pemberley. The eco-void is almost nonexistent at Delaford. We see no signs of human intervention and any works of imposed aestheticization will only stand at odds with its domesticity.

Certainly, we are compelled to inquire about the social and economic dynamics that compromise nature’s authenticity. On a closer look, we realize that nature is often appropriated to serve humans’ ends, which is evident in a country house that stands as a representation of the owner’s affluence and social worth. Kern argues that in Austen’s novel ““nature”” is clearly a ““commodity”” (and not only in a figurative sense) that has been refashioned to serve needs and represent values, which have little to do with the physical environment as a reality in itself.” (16). Christopher Hitt envisions the refashioning of nature as an “aesthetic of control and mastery” (130) driven mainly from the desire of, “a sovereign subject” (130) to control and remodel nature. But whether this subject is a wealthy landowner, or a cultural trend contrived by artists and adopted by landowners, they both make nature a social construct; one that speaks to the identity of its manipulator. It is very likely that Delaford, based on people like Mrs. Jennings, who considers its serene domesticity as one of its defining characteristics, is socially constructed as a communally benevolent estate.



Simon Pugh seizes on the idea of nature as a social construct and assures that such construction is determined by those who have “the power and the money to use nature as a disguise, as a subterfuge, as a pretense that things were always thus unchangeable and inevitable, which they never were” (2).<sup>52</sup> This is something we notice in Pemberley’s grounds, where its landscape is losing authenticity, and also in the power of its landowner which gives him leisure to change its ten-mile-long radius. Darcy’s power and wealth are established earlier in the novel, when we learn that he has an annuity of “ten thousand a year” (*P&P* 12), and since he is a member of the British elite, Pemberley assumes the same strength of its owner and becomes socially constructed as a place with a force that alters both its own grounds and the grounds that lie outside its borders. Austen presents it as mansion with striking views and a prominent position. Terry Gifford observes that, “notions of natures are, of course, socially constructed and determine our perception of our direct experience, which in turn, determine our communication about them” (174). As readers, we become immediately aware of Pemberley’s inherent force. There is wealth, distance, and prominence that inaugurate its landscape as a landscape of power.

As such, Elizabeth’s response to Pemberley’s grounds is a unique experience where we see a heroine overwhelmed by the power implicit in the landscape. As she enters the grounds, she “watched for the first appearance of Pemberley woods with some perturbation; and when at length they turned in at the lodge, her spirits were in a high flutter (*P&P* 235). She contemplates the significance of being its landlady, “to be mistress of

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<sup>52</sup> Terry Gifford informs us that the following passage from Pugh’s argument affirms “the next generation’s restatement of Raymond Williams’s pioneering six-page definition of nature, see *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, published in 1976. Gifford believes that Williams states that “any full history of the uses of nature would be a large part of human thought” and affirms that nature is, indeed, “a way of thinking” “The Social Construction of Nature.” *The Green Studies Readers: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, p. 174.

Pemberley might be something” (235). Her excitement is strengthened by the general prospect of the grounds, which in its totality look imposing, and her delight is driven by its power, which is drawn from the social and financial merits of its owner. Mrs. Reynolds, Pemberley’s housekeeper, points out Darcy strength by declaring, “How many people’s happiness were in his guardianship!—How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow!—How much of good or evil must be done by him!” (240). Every praise brought by the housekeeper is in favor of Darcy’s character, and Elizabeth “thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude” (240). This praise also illustrates the gravity of what he can bestow or deprive. Pemberley is the exact reflection of his power. Nick Gallen associates the identity of a dwelling that exist in a rural community with its dweller, “all those who reside within shape those places” (103). Darcy gives Pemberley importance and social prominence, but also deprives it of its organic nature. It is no longer one solid ground but a combination of tame and docile nearer aspects and raw and liberal farther aspects.

J. C Loudon, an author and landscape gardener known for his *A Treatise* (1806), which discusses improving landscape in the early nineteenth century, is highly critical of projects of improvement.<sup>53</sup> He points out estate owners’ misunderstanding of the real purpose of enhancing landscape and believes that they understand improvement as a fashion devoted to customizing landscape so it suits their taste. He maintains that “men of true taste” will perceive the art of enhancing property “as mere whims or caprice and never

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<sup>53</sup> J. C. Loudon’s *A Treatise on Forming, Improving, and Managing Country Residences* (1806) offers advice for owners and future country house’ purchasers on the best way to structure, improve, and manage their properties. It discusses the most appropriate improvement projects for the different social classes. It also suggests ways to unite a taste in nature with economy and utility when constructing gardens and landscapes. The book contains many illustrations of sceneries, sketches, and building structures to help property owners make the right decision.

can excite any other emotion than that of surprise” (39). He believes that improvements often submit nature to the use and adaptation of the proprietor. Loudon marks this adaptation as an attitude specific to the way estate owners interact with nature. To recap, this attitude summarizes all environmental issues Austen tries to address in her account of England’s nature. She does not just depict the country houses and their associated landscapes as imagined grand or solitary structures, or as socially constructed spaces, nor does she present them as ecologically void properties, but rather she depicts them as combining all these simultaneously, and she does this in a way that advocates the right for nature to grow intrinsically.

#### **IV. The Void in the Eco-enclosure of Donwell Abbey**

Donwell Abbey, *Emma*’s prominent country house and the home of George Knightley, reflects Austen’s consciousness of yet another ecologically divided landscape. Donwell is surrounded by a considerable slope, thick and rich woods, and a grand bank. Meanwhile, Abbey Mill is sheltered by Donwell’s landscape and enriched by its meadows and the riverbank. More interestingly, Abbey Mill is run by a hardworking tenant and Donwell is owned by a wealthy member of the upper class.<sup>54</sup> This tenant-landowner dynamic forces one solid ground to be divided into two socially distinct grounds. In this way, we are presented with an enclosure unconventionally classified by environmental and social hierarchy. This classification defies the traditional notion of a country house as a paean to the ideal countryside. In other words, the gap between Donwell, the grand country house, and Abbey Mill, the small farm, and between George Knightley, Donwell’s wealthy owner, and Mr. Martin, Abbey Mill’s tenant, do not fully serve the ideal expectations of a

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<sup>54</sup> For information about Austen’s commitment to social ethics, see Beth Fowkes Tobin, “The Moral and Political Economy of Property in Austen’s *Emma*,” pp. 229-54.

rural enclosure. The disparity in the status of each structure reveals a void that exacts a heavy toll on the uniformity of the Donwell/Abbey Mill enclosure.

An enclosure is defined as an area surrounded by fences or walls and its enclosed contents, and the position of Abbey Mill as situated within the larger grounds of Donwell, while being owned by the same proprietor, makes the whole grounds stand as an enclosed two-building property where one is encompassed by the other. Abbey Mill, however, occupies the middle ground between Donwell Abbey and the river, which positions it below the all-encompassing Donwell and makes it protected by its general ambience. When Emma Woodhouse describes the layout of the grounds, she introduces it as an enclosure with an intimate environ.

The considerable slope, at nearly the foot of which the Abbey stood, gradually acquired a steeper form beyond its grounds; and at half a mile distant was a bank of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well closed with wood; - and at the bottom of this bank, favorably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey-Mill Farm, with meadows in front, and the river making a close and handsome curve around it. (290)

The pastoral beauty of the Donwell/Abbey Mill enclosure is unrivalled, though its organic uniformity is severely fractured. Austen presents Donwell Abbey as a magnificent estate standing as a beacon of wealth and power. It is graced by ample meadows, thick woods, and a bank of great distinction. On the other hand, Abbey Mill is a farm sitting on the bend of the river “favorably placed and sheltered” (292) by the prosperity of Donwell Abbey. But the image of a nurturing shielding relationship between the two structures is shattered once we realize how Abbey Mill’s welfare is conditioned by the financial interests of Mr. Knightley. Bate informs us that Donwell is “surrounded by mature woodland that signifies Knightley’s willingness to take the long view of profit—potential timber is an investment

for future generations” (6). This commercial gaze gives a preemptive vision of Donwell as a place of consumption, and Knightley’s anticipated utilization of its timber, which is abundant “in rows and avenues” (290), will always be the imminent threat to the wellbeing of the abbey. The notion of an unsecured dwelling aligns with Abbey Mills’ precarious situation when it is tied to Knightley’s—and, in practice, any landowner with a property abundant in timber—hunt for monetary gain. Dwelling remains merely a form of human behavior and those who dwell take on different roles by virtue of their demands and ambitions. Hence, we can see how a probable desire to maintain the wealth of Donwell can dictate Mr. Knightley’s behavior toward his own as well as neighboring properties.

The environmental view of Donwell Abbey is unique. It posits an argument about the social and economic privilege of a landowner and how it prompts an environmental division and social disparity within his property. It makes one dwelling more significant than another. Although Abbey Mill is part of Donwell’s landscape, Austen describes the latter as “a residence of a family of true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding” (291). Abbey Mill is portrayed as a small farm occupied by Robert Martin, a tenant farmer described by Duckworth as an “industrious tenant farmer” (151). His family, as Austen depicts them, is “coarse and unpolished...and very unfit” (*E* 18); and just as Abbey Mill is located below Donwell Abbey in environmental hierarchy, Robert Martin is ranked below Mr. Knightly in social hierarchy. Douglas Murray casts a critical eye on this social gap and observes, “the tenant class—here Robert Martin and his family—remains at a distance from the “seat” of power and exists in a comforting, non-threatening relationship to the scene as a whole” (960). Abbey Mill, in its subservient position, should be indebted to Donwell because it would have been in danger had it not been protected by its power. The gap

between the two images cannot be more explicit; it makes visible the unruliness of the fragmentation sitting deeply in what seems to be ideal—nature and society.

Interestingly, while Donwell rests on grounds shared by another farm and other individuals it does not abide by the values of a shared local community, which acknowledges the welfare of its members. In following Richard Kerridge's idea about the interconnectedness of the natural world within a local environment, we come close to unraveling the problematic nature of Donwell when it fails to support "the relationship and interdependencies within shared local environments and [...] the relation of such environments to larger ecosystems" (268). For example, Donwell, as a place of consequence and nobility, may seem like a sheltering entity but does not properly serve the inhabitants of its enclosure. It is defined by how much its owner engages with and contributes to those inhabitants. Batey argues that for the best interest of Donwell, Mr. Knightley "kept 'in hand the home farm at Donwell' and with the assistance of his trusted steward, William Larkins, kept himself informed about the state of the harvest, drainage, fencing, new seed drills, and cattle shows" (98). With such attentiveness, it is possible that Mr. Knightley would decide on deforesting hundreds of acres to make profit from timber sales and terminate the livelihood of the Martins. This is, certainly, a family of industrious farmers whose hands involve in farming, harvesting, and cattle raising.

Abbey Mill is a place in which a visitor like Harriet Smith, a seventeen-year-old woman and Emma's close friend, experiences "many comforts and wonders" (20). She connects with it through a sense of comfort developed by the ease and simplicity of a rural life, which in turn helps her understand what is natural in the truest sense. Therefore, she will be able to serve it rightly. Meanwhile, the grandeur of Donwell overwhelms people's

experience with its “many comfortable and one or two handsome rooms,” and visitors like Emma are struck by a sense of pride, which increases her passion for its grandeur, “She felt all the honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future proprietor could fairly warrant” (290). How a place is perceived by an individual can have an effect on his/her ability to serve or have a positive effect on the community. For example, Emma is consumed by what Donwell Abbey offers and she will always expect to be served by it, while Harriet, who takes pleasure in the simple wonders of Abbey Mill—the cows, the flocks, and the small summer house—is grounded in the hard work of the farm and consequently helps it thrive. Donwell/Abbey Mill enclosure symbolizes a new relationship between humans and nature and what each property represents determines how this relationship is shaped.

It is not then surprising that Austen remains reluctant to admit a collective cohesion within its grounds. There is a duality that lodges in its encompassing whole. Meadows, hills, streams, and rivers thrive nicely in the entirety of the enclosure, but when it is measured by the indexes of power and social rank, we come across two identities and two landscapes. Abbey Mill’s identity is informed by its rural vividness and bucolic warmth. Austen is specific about these aspects and makes its rurality inherently organic. She highlights its “appendages of prosperity and beauty, its rich pastures, spreading flocks, orchard in blossom, and light column of smoke ascending” (293), and sheds light on livestock raising, “eight cows, two of them Alderneys, and one a little Welch cow.” She also depicts the good times in its small but “very handsome summerhouse [located] in their garden” (21). Such in-depth description of a rural life reminds us of Hiltner’s discussion of the capability of a dwelling to reveal, and not endanger, the countryside. Whereas Donwell,

stands more for majesty and grandeur than rurality and simplicity, Abbey Mill fits into Hiltner's view of a dwelling that "would not reveal its surrounding environ by being something altogether other: quite the contrary, by being startlingly like its surrounding, it would prompt those viewing the house into seeing the countryside as if for the first time" (8).

We are also gaining an insight into the Martin's dwelling as a place intimately connected with its surroundings—plants, animals, and soil—and where they work, as well as their own happiness and wellbeing.<sup>55</sup> As for its landscape, Abbey Mill's general air of hospitality and congeniality are unmistakable; there are "meadows in front, and the river making a close and handsome curve around it" (292), together with, "the broad, neat gravel walk, which led between espalier apple-trees to the front door" (149). These features present a harmonious landscape that is, in some way, reflective of the way the family members interact with other individuals. When Harriet visits them, she feels quite integrated; they do not judge her because her social class is unknown or as Mr. Knightly says, "the natural daughter of nobody knows whom, with probably no settled provision... and certainly no respectable relations" (48). In contrast, Donwell Abbey's hospitality is seen in the strawberry-picking event where Mr. Knightley's strict notion of the etiquette of eating outdoors on "a table spread in the shade" forces the ladies to eat in the style that fits the decorum of his social class. He believes that "the simplicity of a gentlemen and ladies, with their servants and furniture... is best observed by meals within doors" on a table spread in the dining room. It is difficult to see simplicity in Mr. Knightley's logic, especially where

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<sup>55</sup> The role of all species in developing the ecosystem and human impact on the ecosystem is discussed thoroughly in Rachel Carson's "Nature Fights Back." *Silent Spring: The Classic that Launched the Environmental Movement*, pp. 245-61.



he considers the outdoors as more complex than the indoors. It is, nevertheless, easy to see it in the congenial environment of the Martin's, where humans' interaction with nature and with other individuals is integral and vital.

Additionally, Donwell's identity stems from its abiding mastery over the entire town. Austen describes it as an estate, "to which all the rest of Highbury belonged" (109) because it has "a high place in the consideration of the neighbourhood", and since it is privileged by its "respectable size and style" (290), it becomes the landmark of the entire town, especially when Austen makes Hartfield, Emma's residence, look "inconsiderable [and] being but a sort of notch in the Donwell Abbey estate" (109). Austen also presents its owner as a wealthy member of the upper class who is labeled as a good farmer and a benefactor, but there are no scenes where he soils his hands with the work of farming or harvesting. Batey asserts this fact by observing that his Larkins his steward whom he trusts greatly manages every aspect of his business from harvest to "cattle show" and everything is executed and decided for by Larkins. There is no information about agricultural equipment or livestock. We are only aware of his horses, which, as Batey affirms, "were seldom called upon to draw carriages" (98). His estate is missing the rural idealism that enriches Abbey Mill. Donwell's owner does not establish a nurturing relationship with the soil but calculates with attentive mind "what every field was to bear next year" and "the plan of a drain, the change of a fence, the felling of a tree, and the destination of every acre for wheat, turnips or spring corn" (80). Mr. Knightley exemplifies William Cobbett's detached landowner whom he critically referenced in *Rural Rides* as "a gentry only-now-and-then residing at all...looking to the soil only for its rent, viewing it as a mere object of

speculation, unacquainted with its cultivators” (np)<sup>56</sup>. Cobbett reveals the disparity in the attitudes between the landowners who own the soil and those who cultivate the soil and Austen’s Knightley, despite being a good farmer, is far from getting his hand in the soil. His business in farming is done and supervised by other people.

Admittedly, Donwell’s “old neglect of prospect” (290), and its evasion of any projects of conservation makes a statement about a place that cannot retain its identity as an abbey. It is later transformed into an estate with a rural identity. There is a complete disregard to its history, and what we have at hands is an abbey that has fallen into the hands of someone whose interest in economic gain overpowers any intention to respect its historical past. Beth Kowaleski Wallace agrees with this line of argument and notes that Donwell is “not given a fictional history of a “rich endowment,” it does not appear to be haunted by former inhabitants. Its...landscape appears to have been drawn purposefully to banish any hint of darker days” (174).<sup>57</sup> In this sense, any reading that declines a notion of a grand estate with a domesticated landscape or perhaps a modern and secular landscape could be said to fly in the face of the obvious. If Donwell kept some of the original landscape, we would have seen natural surroundings that speak to its respectable history. To put it mildly, we would have seen historic trees and remnants of the monastery’s

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<sup>56</sup> In this passage Cobbett distinguishes between a native resident, who is attached to the soil, and from his childhood learns to be a hard worker, and the member of the gentry who is always absent, distant, and haughty. See Jonathan Bate’s “Going Going,” *The Song of the Earth*, pp. 1-23.

<sup>57</sup> Beth Kowaleski Wallace borrows the idea of ancient abbeys’ lack of preservation from Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, 1817, in which she describes General Tilney’s contribution to Northanger Abbey as something that would only please its benefactors. What Wallace is alluding to is that the information about the sponsors and supporters of Donwell Abbey is obliterated due to its modern renovation.

architecture.<sup>58</sup> But, instead, we witness an “old neglect of prospect” and a lack of symmetry that permeates its grounds.

its ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream, of which the Abbey, with all the old neglect of prospect, had scarcely a sight—and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up.—The house was larger than Hartfield, and totally unlike it, covering a good deal of ground, rambling and irregular...It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was. (290)

In this passage, it is evident how Donwell’s landscape is irregular, with a broad and short avenue of limes. It stretches on a distance from the river and ends at the pleasure grounds only to, “lead to nothing; nothing but a view at the end over a low stone wall with high pillars, which seemed intended to...give the appearance of an approach to the house” (292). These irregularities seem to vanquish the green plethora that ornaments its surroundings and even defeat the beauty of the abundant timber, which has not been uprooted or touched by fashion. We can better understand the asymmetry of Donwell’s landscape when we look at Hartfield’s grounds, which are small but, “neat and pretty while the house itself is modern and well-built” (217). In addition to the many laurels, there is a large tree standing as a canopy and a nice welcoming bench and both are protected by a “great iron sweep gate” (269) that is not “twenty yards asunder” (270) from the front door. These features are lost in Donwell, and their absence makes it lack the welcoming attributes of both Abbey Mill and Hartfield.

With such voids, it is ironic how Donwell, is celebrated in a patriotic tone and even singled out as the representation of the entire nation. As critics have regularly pointed out,

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<sup>58</sup> On religious commentaries regarding *Emma*, see Michael Giffin’s “Marriage and Bad Okonamia in The Parish.” *Jane Austen and Religious Salvation in Georgian England*, pp. 160-67.

Austen chooses its landscape as a metonym for the spirit of the English nation, “It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun, bright without being oppressive (292).<sup>59</sup> The Englishness that Austen attaches to Donwell’s grounds is a nationalistic sentiment laden with a positive energy that is driven from the lushness of England’s landscape. As Bate asserts, “What Austen regarded as authentic national identity is derived not from a set of political institutions,” but from “the verbal euphony of ‘verdure’ and ‘culture’” (6), and Austen intends for the grounds of Donwell to display England’s verdure and culture in a heightened sense of nationalism.<sup>60</sup> However, one might ask how can Donwell’s grounds represent England’s national pride when it can shelter but not serve its community, when its owner’s “hunt for gain and success” tempt him to sell its abundant timber threatening, in the process, the wellbeing of the lesser farm, and when it presides as the seat of power for a member of the upper class but not all classes. Most importantly, can the collective image of the Donwell/Abbey Mill enclosure, which presents a vivid narrative of environmental and social fracture, represent the real spirit of England?

A more concerning question arises when we realize how this green nationalism draws its legacy from the part, not the whole and when it reveals within its narrow projection a variety of uncertainties about an individual or an enclosure. We should also ask: can this enclosure exemplify the nation’s true identity? The answer that comes to

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<sup>59</sup> This speech has been frequently viewed through a patriotic lens. Douglas Murray observes, “It has often been viewed through a patriotic haze, conscripted as Austen’s contribution to the nation-defining discourse of the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic era, “Donwell Abbey and Box Hill: Purity and Danger in Jane Austen’s “Emma,”” p, 954.

<sup>60</sup> For information about pastoral literature serving political and cultural purposes see Ken Hiltner’s “Pastoral and Ideology, and the Environment,” *What Else is Pastoral*, pp. 67-91.

mind is that Austen's celebration of the enclosure suggests a more conservative nationalism than would be present in the representation of patriotism and rural settings. Why not represent the country's pride in a collection of diverse towns? For example, Highbury, Surrey, and Box Hill, the novel's famous towns, comprise grand estates, cottages, gentry, laborers, estate owners, tenants, extravagant gardens, wasteland, as well as wilderness and farmlands. All should be referenced in similar patriotic rhapsodies. Each town represents the diverse workings of England's great countryside, and each epitomizes the rural dynamics of different communities. In fact, Highbury is defined by Barbara Britton Wenner as a town that "represents England in its best sense, arising from the preservation of English history and culture" (78). F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson believe that England, at that time, was predominantly rural and "the towns themselves were real community...they were in close touch with the sources of their sustenance in the neighboring soil" (74). They believe that Farnham is a little town that conducts its business, "in the spirit of the village" (74). Austen's towns, as depicted in her novels, are closely tied to their ecological order and most possess distinct agriculture features. Dorsetshire and Devonshire counties are important parts of the geography of *Mansfield Park*. Their topographical features are given ample description in George Alexander Cooke's book *A Topographical and Statistical Description of the County of Somerset etc* (1810). He describes Dorsetshire's cultivation pattern as known for "the growth of flax and hemp, and particularly the former is of great importance in [its] agriculture" (45). Cooke also depicts Devonshire as a county privileged for having varied soil, "red land" and "peat soil," but remarkable for growing "a rapid spontaneous production of grass" (41). Certainly, in exploring the possibility of these towns as being legitimate to represent England, we are

looking at a broader ecological representation that is not restricted to the image of a country house, and in so doing, England can have an expanded national image.

A similar scene in *Mansfield Park*, raises a question about Austen's intended exposure of social and environmental hierarchy in her portrayal of the country house. During her visit to the Grant's parsonage, Fanny marvels at the charming attributes of its evergreens, "how beautiful, how welcome, how wonderful" (144).<sup>61</sup> These trees also carry a nationalistic undertone, that I will elaborate on in chapter four, though she still wonders at how such blooming was made possible while, "three years ago it was nothing but a rough hedgerow along the upper side of the field" (144). At the same time, she is concerned about its permanency and wonders if, "in another three years we maybe forgetting—almost forgetting what it was before" (143). Austen suggests the instability of the parsonage's landscape by maintaining that its shrubbery, "is converted into a walk, and it would be difficult to say whether most valuable as a convenience or an ornament." (143)

Unlike Mansfield's parish, which she sees as old as Mansfield, and therefore remains "perfect in her eyes, as everything else, within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park had long been" (321), the parsonage never had a permanent landscape because it is a dwelling for successive parsons. Its natural and historical features will be susceptible to change, and it will always lack authenticity. There are those who will keep it as a "rough hedgerow" and those who will add a walkway or plant more laurels and evergreens.

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<sup>61</sup> Jon Mee takes an interesting approach to Austen's Nationalistic impulse. In "Austen's Treacherous Ivory: Female Patriotism, Domestic Ideology, and Empire," *The Postcolonial Jane Austen*. Mee connects Fanny's enthusiastic reaction to her sense of patriotism: "Fanny has a feeling for what she thinks of as distinctive beauties such as the evergreen of the English countryside, which she only praises in comparison to the flora of other countries," p. 81.

It should be noted that Fanny's environmental concern is immediately met with Mary Crawford's viewing of the parsonage as socially inferior. She sees its shrubberies as unworthy of such growth. She believes that "one does not think of extent here...I had not imagined a country parson ever aspired to a shrubbery or anything of the kind" (144). Her estimation of a good landscape is one that can be extended by the grandeur of a country house. Austen presents her as a definite proponent of improvement and elegant landscape. While discussing the relatively recent abandonment of regular services in a chapel she comes across during her trip to Sotherton, she observes that "every generation has its improvements," (62) responding to Mr. Rushworth's indifference to improving an old chapel. These scenes suggest that Fanny's and Mary's views place the parsonage's landscape into different dichotomies—one involving a social hierarchy, and the other an environmental hierarchy. While Fanny assumes the impermanency of the flora is due to inconsistent care, Mary deems it as socially inferior because it belongs to people whose rank is at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This reflects the relative uncertainty of how a place is perceived socially and how it is environmentally affected by the precariousness of humans' handling.

Finally, Austen's perfect landscape is the one that includes the gentry, and the farmers as integral to English society. But this view would also look natural to any reader who sees them in a proper ecological integration, free of fractures or incoherence and Austen's pastoral idyll is the one she uses to reveal the moral dimension of the ecological connections between humans, lands, and dwellings.

## V. Northanger Abbey: the Eco-void in the Historical

One of the best valuations of nature is the one that deliberates the preservation of ancient abbeys and the conservation of their landscapes.<sup>62</sup> Whether they are surrounded by thick woods or grassy hills, these landscapes are part of the history of ancient and sacred space. It is known that the preservation of abbeys in the early eighteenth century was limited due to the ratification of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, under the reign of Henry VIII, which permitted the sales of many religious houses. Northanger Abbey, the historic country house in *Northanger Abbey*, is a place with a conquered history and an altered landscape. As I mentioned earlier, Northanger Abbey does not have the sentimental aspects of Pemberley or the original ruralism of Donwell Abbey, but rather a historic and gothic character that makes it rugged and imposing, in addition to having a landscape altered and repurposed to serve the residential needs of its owner.

Indeed, there is no shortage of religious houses in Austen's novels, and each relates a story of an interesting background. In *Emma*, Mr. Knightley lives in "Donwell Abbey," a previously grand monastery that is, "just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was" (290). In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor plans with her sister a possible walk to "Abbeyland" where they might see, "the old ruins of the Priory, and...trace its foundations as far as [they] are told they once reached" (281). In *Mansfield Park*, Mrs. Price attends the Sunday service at the "Garrison chapel" (275), in Portsmouth, a place Roger E. Moore describes as, "a remnant of a medieval hospice closed in 1540 as part of the Dissolution" (57), and in *Northanger Abbey*, General Tilney inhabits and owns Northanger Abbey, "a richly-

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<sup>62</sup> On religious and social commentaries regarding *Northanger Abbey*, see Michael Giffin's "Northanger Abbey and the Economy of Salvation." *Jane Austen and Religion Salvation in Georgian England*, pp. 40-48.



endowed convent” (132).<sup>63</sup> These religious houses have been subjected to exploitation because of the Dissolution, which had a great impact on the existence of many monasteries.<sup>64</sup> Moore draws a powerful proof of such impact from Henry Brinkelow, a devout protestant, who published some pamphlets in which, “he excoriated the government for allowing the sale of the monasteries to unscrupulous individuals who raised farmers' rents, seized revenues of unfilled benefices, and refused the duties of hospitality.” (62). Having bought Northanger Abbey only two years earlier, General Tilney has already altered its ecological and historical identity. He becomes the embodiment of Brinkelow’s “unscrupulous individuals,” who turns the abbey into a country house with a suppressed history.

Austen provides subtle reference to a political system that grants free reign to wealthy landowners and allow them to not just own but alter and modify religious houses. She is quite aware of this system given the fact that she herself grew in a clerical household where she was acquainted with the history and the controversies that surrounded the English church. Her recognition of this truth informed her representations of religious houses, which revealed a great deal of concern over the gentry’s behavior towards the monasteries. In *Mansfield Park*, the chapel located on the premises of Sotherton is

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<sup>63</sup> In the footnotes of *Mansfield Park: Jane Austen*, edited by Claudia L. Johnson, Garrison chapel is identified as a monastery, “Built in 1212 as a hospice. After the Dissolution of monasteries in 1530, it was used as a residence for the military governor of Portsmouth; the chapel was used by military personnel,” p. 277.

<sup>64</sup> During the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the churches of many European countries, most notably England and France, broke away from the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. This dissolution allowed the transferring of ecclesiastical properties into the hands of the gentry. English people learned about the consequences of the large-scale seizure of monastic lands and properties from Edmund Burke. His reflections on the *Revolution in France*, published in 1790, contained a detailed analysis of the suppression of the French monasteries. He mourns the fate of French monasteries and raises public awareness for the economic benefits of the religious houses.

abandoned and left to negligence. Austen is determined to inform the reader that it was established during the reign of King James II thus known to be “a valuable part of former times” (62). Pamela K. Gilbert argues that one of the benefits we can gain from identifying the transformation of religious houses is that it brings awareness to the house’s environmental value. Her discussion of the Parish of St Giles, a place mistreated and mislabeled by its population, explains how the tendency to present an entire parish in its true condition, “even after its destruction, provides an excellent example of the way in which moral environmentalism works with the perception of...topography as a continuous and meaningful place” (87).<sup>65</sup> Austen’s concern is manifested in her perception of the mishandled topography of Northanger Abbey as a place important to England’s history, therefore, worthy of preservation. Further, her representation, which rejects the efforts of individuals to take hold of and alter the environment of religious places, reminds us of how the decision of a larger institution—in this case it is the reformation of the church—sums up a society that is, according to Kolodny, “constituted socially and politically to conquer and transform nature” (171).

In looking at the situation of the ancient abbey, the readers are prompted to contemplate its past during “the time of the Reformation” (132), and its present as subject to the tyranny of the General’s improving hands.<sup>66</sup> Both conditions did not only alienate

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<sup>65</sup> Pamela K. Gilbert discusses how the labeling of St Giles, a parish built 1730-1733 located in the west of London, is associated with a population that struggled with modest means and ill health. It was established as a chapel of a hospital for lepers but became, as Gilbert informs us, the spot for every pandemic that struck London. Although St Giles’ parish is the exact opposite of Donwell Abbey, we are impelled to think of such contrast in terms of how much knowledge and history each place can relay. According to Gilbert, “St Giles’ history is written as the history of the aggregate” (88). And with its history of sickness and mortality it relates a significant part of England’s history. Meanwhile, Northanger Abbey cuts its roots with England’s past, therefore, it stands as an edifice that only speaks for itself.

<sup>66</sup> For more discussions about the dissolution of the church in the early seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, see George William Otway Woodward’s *The Dissolution of The Monasteries*. Hoyle R. W. “The

the abbey but created a new reality to which it can never belong. Austen's valuation of the ancient abbey has a heightened sense of reverence. Moore believes that Northanger Abbey "masks a deeper desire to find some hints about the historical institution upon which the Tilneys have built their country seat" (66). The power of this "seat" is the creation of the monastic Dissolution that destroyed Northanger Abbey and made it an edifice of unidentified grandeur. Alistair Duckworth in the preface of *The Improvement of the Estate*, discusses Austen's discontent with the alteration of ancient houses and argues, "the house's ancient architecture could well have turned Austen's thoughts to...how best to bring the values of the past to the present" (xx). He believes that her novels consistently show a respect and affection for old estates, which have grown naturally over the years without the hand of the improver.

Most of the time, the new owners of what had been abbeys, convents, and monasteries give themselves the leisure to customize their interiors and exteriors to make them more adaptable to a residential life. General Tilney's concept of a domestic life is one that conserves little of the abbey's original features. Everything is altered except for the gothic windows, which the General believes that he conserves, "with reverential care" (152). But Catherine thinks differently, since they are submitted to the tyranny of modern taste, "the pointed arch was preserved—the form of them was Gothic, they might be even casements—but every pane was so large, so clear, so light! To an imagination which had hoped for the smallest divisions, and the heaviest stone-work, for painted glass, dirt and cobwebs, the difference was very distressing" (152). Truly, the cobwebs and the dirt on the

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Origins of the Dissolution of the Monasteries," pp. 275-305. Buckler, F. W. "The Establishment of the Church of England: Its Constitutional and Legal Significance," pp. 299-346.

window are not just the markers of the gothic in Catherine's imagination but the actual indicators of an abbey that has not been altered.

While traveling to visit the abbey for the first time, Catherine is full of anticipation. Her observation of the much-changed abbey and the landscape that surrounds it is equally intense,

every bend of the road was expected with solemn awe to afford a glimpse of its massy walls of grey stone, rising amidst a grove of ancient oaks, with the last beam of the sun playing in beautiful splendor on its high Gothic windows. But so low did the building stand, that she found herself passing through the great gates of the lodge, into the very grounds of Northanger Abbey, without having discerned even an antique chimney...there was something in this mode of approach which she certainly had not expected. To pass between lodges of a modern appearance, to find herself with such ease in the very precincts of the abbey, and driven to rapidly along a smooth, level road of fine gravel, without obstacle, alarm or solemnity of any kind, struck her as odd and inconsistent. (151)

The ancient building that Catherine witnesses emerges as a historical edifice thoroughly modified to be a modern country house. She is disappointed by the abbey's unexpected appearance; it comes out as a modern building "with great gates" a "road of fine gravel," and "massy walls of grey stone," which interrupt its natural surroundings. Her impression goes beyond an unfulfilled "darling wish" (132) to see "damp passages," "narrow cells," and/or a "ruined chapel," instead, she sees a place, "where everything being for daily use pretended only to comfort although the rest was decayed...standing low in a valley, sheltered from the north and east by rising woods of oak" (152). Because General Tilney intends to repurpose the abbey to serve his own daily living, he neglects its historical and religious value and renders a large part for utilization. But despite what he has sacrificed,

the modified part did not add any value to the abbey and, in so doing, Austen defeats the purpose of improvements. The crumbling passages, cells, and chapels did not devalue the abbey as much as the General's modernizing project did.

It is true that Northanger Abbey bears some architectural magnificence that alludes to the greatness of England's religious history, but one cannot imagine an abbey beautifully covered by "rising woods of oak" able to retain its iconic features with an attached modern wing, an altered cloister or "what had once been a cloister" (172) as well as a bustling village of greenhouses. This disturbing image harbors an organic fracture deeper than what appears on the surface. Northanger Abbey is intimately enclosed by, "knolls of old trees or luxuriant plantations, and the steep woody hills residing behind to give it shelter" (166). If left untouched, the abbey will be well-served by the old trees and the woody hills that surround it. They form the natural boundary that preserves its character and keeps it rooted in its inherent greenery. This greenery is what affirms its identity—already recorded in the inner layers of the trees—as a historical abbey that feeds and is fed by its glorious landscape. Stacy Alaimo imagines an alternative vision for the walls of a home/property, that takes the meaning of walls beyond just being "solid, dead walls that demarcate" (22). Her vision makes walls, "a biological architecture," or "the stuff of life" (23). As in the case of the animals' skin being used, "as cave, a naturally occurring shelter for human and nonhuman" (24). Similarly, the trees, the plantation, and the woody hills of Northanger Abbey form the naturally occurring shelter of the abbey and are part of its identity. However, the "massy" stone walls remain the impediment of this natural shelter because they are separating the abbey from the rest of nature.

Within the walls the General instigates the worst of the abbey's suffering. We only need to explore the large and unsettling image of the numerous hothouses identified by Austen as "an entire village," (167) sitting on a ground already encircled by a massy stone wall to understand how this corrosive image suggests something uncanny in the history of human-nature relation. In chapter one, I introduced the hothouses as a technology invented to reproduce plants and an industry inimical to any organic landscape. The hothouses being positioned within the walls of the historic abbey make them antithetical to its solemn character. The kitchen garden, which is an important part of the abbey's outdoors contains numerous hothouses that produce artificial plants while the garden itself is the source of natural cultivation.<sup>67</sup> It is difficult for such a scene to be blissfully viewed with all the evocation of the destruction the hothouses can cause. In fact, the kitchen is as ancient as the abbey; it still bears "the smoke of former days," but it is a place where, "the General's improving hand had not loitered." Therefore, it is ironic for a natural garden, which is supposed to be a source of everything organic, to host a village of greenhouse that cultivates everything that is not organic and a kitchen that no longer bears the cooking legacies of old days.

The Austen family was certainly familiar with a kitchen garden. It was part of every house they moved to. Kim Wilson affirms that at Steventon, where Austen and her sister Cassandra were raised, their kitchen garden contained "espaliereed fruit trees," an "herb garden," and "a rose garden." She also observes that Austen took note of the "bees, which

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<sup>67</sup> Celia Simpson has a comprehensive analysis of the gardens of early nineteenth century England. See her book, *In the Garden with Jane Austen* where she discusses the pleasure grounds and the different types of gardens and how they played an important role in all six of Austen's novels. She states, "for nearly every house mentioned in the novels there is some sort of garden" and for some of her characters, "gardens are more than a source of food or flowers; they are places of refuge and spiritual refreshment," p. 1.

fed on the flowers and fruit trees in their garden, [and] provided honey...and the honey was made into mead, a delicious, fermented beverage that was a staple in the Austen household” (6). Jane Austen’s mother, during her visit to Stoneleigh, the country house of her brother, found pleasure in collecting fruits in its kitchen garden. In a letter dated August 13, 1806, she describes her joy during her daily visits to this garden, “I do not fail to spend some part of every day in the kitchen garden, where the quantity of small fruits exceeds anything you can form an idea of.” (156).<sup>68</sup> Thomas Martyn, writes in his preface to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Letters on the Elements of Botany*, “botany is not to be learned in the closet: you must go forth into the garden or the fields, and there become familiar with Nature herself; with that beauty, order, regularity, and inexhaustible variety” (xi).<sup>69</sup> The General’s hothouses are the closets that reside paradoxically in the heart of the kitchen garden and he modifies all sorts of plants to ensure optimal growth and production.

The hothouse-kitchen garden scene contains all the elements of an eco-void, or to put it differently, nature’s emptiness of authenticity. It articulates a sad narrative of plants’ appropriation, and modification. Lynn Voskuil’s study of plant scaling and investigation of the problems of plants’ “type species” states that these types, “were literally rooted in the soil [and]were tied more closely, to the physical environment, thereby serving as more reliable biographical markers,” but when the study of plants became important, botanists, started to “establish the botanical garden as a center of agricultural improvement in the

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<sup>68</sup> This letter can be found in *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters: A Family Record*, edited by William Austen-Leigh, and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh.

<sup>69</sup> *Letters on the Elements of Botany* (1807) is a work comprising a series of letters written by the Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the subject of botany. They were addressed to Mme Delessert who resides in Lyon to help her daughters learn about botany. They were later translated into English by Thomas Martyn who is a Professor of Botany at Cambridge University.

service of empire” (From Specimen 166).<sup>70</sup> Ironically, what they dub as an “agricultural improvement” does not instill its roots in or grow out of natural soil. What they grow in Northanger Abbey is an occluded nature that seems like an organic narrative, but not entirely so because of a synthetic process that takes over its naturalness.

The General’s actions instigate an odd interweaving of the artificial and the original, thus prompting complex dichotomies not just in the abbey’s landscape, but its identity and architecture as well. The historical value of the ancient abbey is contested by the residential occupancy and contemporary prospect. The convent kitchen garden is compromised by the peculiarities of the hothouses and modern inventions. The inviolability of the ancient cloisters is contrasted by the recreational pursuits of a billiard room. Also, the natural surroundings are challenged by the work of landscape gardening (the massy walls, the gravel road, and the great gates.) The only authentic spot is “the narrow winding path [passing] through a thick grove of old Scotch firs” (168), which no one walks through because of its significant gloominess. Each one of these dichotomies constitutes an ecological void that urges us to both lament and contemplate the ecological collapse that is taking place. The eco-relation between modern and historical architecture, monasteries and country estates, kitchen gardens and hothouses, as well as cloisters and billiard rooms is never in balance. This is made clear when Austen shows concerns about, “the hand which had swept away what must have been beyond the value of the rest, for the

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<sup>70</sup> Lynn Voskuil elaborates on Victorian botanist Joseph Dalton Hooker’s *Himalayan Journals* (1854) and explains how he was keen to transform the practice of botany into a discipline that considers global patterns and distribution of plants. However, Voskuil asserts that his achievements were not separated from imperialist’s motives or environmental effects that propelled England’s “slow violence.” This term is coined by Rob Nixon in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. It means that the violence wrought by climate change, toxic emissions, deforestation, and oil spills is unfolding slowly.



purpose of mere domestic economy” (NA 173). Perhaps nature has to hide in gloomy paths like the path of the Scotch firs and shows itself as unattainable so it can survive.

By contrast, the ecological attributes of Woodston’s parsonage, “a new-built, substantial stone house” (200) also owned by the General, are markedly intact because improving it does not suit his superior ambitions. Woodston is a religious house that has not been victimized by Dissolution. In fact, it is deemed by the General as “a mere parsonage, small and confined” (200). Austen’s description of the parsonage’s nature reveals its advantage as comfortable, simple, and practical. More importantly, it is, “tolerably disengaged from the rest of the village” (200). When the General suggests a moderate upgrade, such as, “a patch-on bow” (201).<sup>71</sup> Austen tells us that such suggestion would pain anyone upon hearing it, but Catherine’s reveling in the natural beauty of the place prevents her from, “hear[ing] enough of this speech to understand or be pained by it” (201). Unlike the odd presence of the billiard room in the ancient abbey, the parsonage contains a

drawing room that asserts a household’s culture of sociability and hospitality; Austen presents it as “a prettily shaped room, the windows reaching to the ground, and the view from them pleasant, though only over green meadows” (201).<sup>72</sup> Unlike Northanger Abbey there are no walls that divide its greeneries but from the windows of its room, Catherine can see “a sweet little cottage among the...apple trees” (201). There is no eco-void in this property; everything is organically harmonious. The parsonage, which cannot be

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<sup>71</sup> In the footnotes of the 2005 Barnes & Noble edition of *Northanger Abbey*, the phrase “a patch-on bow” is identified as a “curved bay window” (201).

<sup>72</sup> For information about the usage and the importance of the drawing rooms, see *The Gentleman’s House; or How to Plan the English Residences*. (1865) By Robert Kerr, pp. 107-114.

compared, “with Fullerton or Northanger” (200), does not struggle with a fractured identity or an unfittingly modern landscape. It did not undergo any dismantling, appropriation, or transformation of any sort. By virtue of its modesty, which exerts itself by being admirable (though not necessarily flamboyant), the parsonage signifies an exemplary unity of nature and history.

To conclude, Austen’s response to the landscape of the country houses is cleverly weighted with moral values than has been recognized in any sustained manner. The social and historical issues implicit in her attention to nature are established by the lack of unity and the fragmentation she portrays in the landscape and the social dynamics of the country houses. Her concerns are represented as a violation of the proper relationship between nature and estate owners. This is manifested in their social attitudes, which tend to be individualistic. Her moral valuation of nature, which incorporates country houses, landscapes, history, and human relationships with nature aligns with Lewis P. Hinchman’s views, which advocate a thorough care of the environment, “nature, ecosystems, or at least living things should have moral standing and deserve to have their interests systematically taken into account” (225). As this chapter suggests, the ecological voids found in Pemberley, Donwell Abbey, and Northanger Abbey are varied and Austen implicates the individualistic attitude of estate owners in the voids that threaten the conformity of nature. The lack of unity in the grounds of Pemberley and the incoherence between its nearest and farthest aspects create a void in the seamlessness of its landscape. The meddling with the historical identity of Northanger Abbey and the infusion of modern innovation into its landscape create a void in its natural and historical integrity. The social and environmental gap that occurs within the Donwell/Abbey Mill enclosure causes a void in its ideal rurality.

By demonstrating how these country houses experience a breakdown in their organic unity, Austen provides basis for environmental ethics; one that promote conservancy, flourishing, and integrity of the natural world.

## Chapter Four: Nature Representations Across the Ocean

By the time settlement began in New England, coal production had started to rise in the field of Durham and Northumberland, and London was beginning its dependence on the fuel that would make it renowned for its terrible fogs. Even if explorers and settlers could not initially ship American timber back home, their awareness of the English wood scarcity colored the way they reacted to New England's forests.

—William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*.

As William Cronon notes above, Americans have always been aware of the imperial exploitation of their natural resources, and this awareness started when the settlers directed their exploitive gaze at New England's forests. In fact, "nature" in early American literature has often been a subject figured abstractly as wilderness, primal landscape, or, according to Scott Sanders, "untrammelled being of nature" (183). It is this configuration that led me to contemplate the response of the early nineteenth century American authors to nature as more than just a veneration of beauty but a concern about something beginning to go wrong. While their writings portray normal forests, lands, ships, towns, and a web of close-knit families, they are also haunted by the colonists' depletion of their resources. In their narratives, nature is not a mere scenery but a natural energy from which their lives emerge and by which their lives are bounded. This is largely true in the novels of Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, which convey a literary legacy relating, most pointedly, to their environmental consciousness. Their perception is grounded in their observations of the excessive manipulation of the land and their moral valuation of nature.

Ecocriticism comes into play when the impact of this exploitation is uncovered, and Child's and Sedgwick's novels reveal what Timothy Sweet describes as, "the nostalgia inherent in...a pure state of nature untouched by mankind" (403). This sense of nostalgia

is felt strongly in Child's *Hobomok* (1824) when Sagamore John is reminiscing and lamenting the loss of the old ways of life:

Look for yesterday's tide, for last year's blossom, and the rainbow that has hid itself in the cloud! Look for the flame that has died away, for the ice that's melted, and for the snow that lights on the waterfall! Among them you will find the children of the Great Spirit. Yes, they will soon be as an arrow that is lost in its flight, and as the song of a bird flown by. (27)

Sagamore John does not just lament the loss of the Great Spirit but the loss of the essence of the Indians' life. He predicts that it will dissipate like "the song of a bird flown by," and in the novel we realize that such dissipation started with exploiting their forests, lands, and rivers. The idea of nature being untouched by man is explained by Bill McKibben in his book *The End of Nature*, where he argues that before the colonists arrived in New England "its previous occupants had treated it fairly well. In many places, it was wilderness" (42). But since the wilderness was trampled, the nature of New England lost its independence. Human manipulation prevents and hinders nature's development and renders it defenseless and often vulnerable. Greg Garrard argues, "The ideal wilderness space is wholly pure by virtue of its independence from humans" (78).<sup>73</sup> There are many incidents in Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* (1822) that refute this notion, and she relays a definite picture of nature as never free from human manipulation. She makes this clear when the narrator wonders sadly at how, "the appeal of nature was unheeded and unnoticed by those who are inflamed by passion or degraded by vice" (147-48).

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<sup>73</sup> Bill McKibben extends the discussion of nature independence in his book *The End of Nature* and observes, "we have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence is its meaning; without it there is only us." See his chapter "The End of Nature," p. 50.

## **I. Child and Sedgwick: Austen's Relevant Authors**

When Child and Sedgwick expressed concerns over their environments, it was at the same time Austen was tracing the anthropogenic effects of deforestation, estate improvement, industrialization, and urban chaos in England. This makes Child and Sedgwick the most relevant authors to Austen not only because they published their novels at the same time-period, but because their novels register environmental exploitations performed by the same system that alters Austen's landscape. We have habitually separated Austen's contemporaries by an ocean, but by thinking through an ecocritical lens we can see that there are deeper connections between Austen and her contemporaries more than we have explored. By investigating their social and environmental impulses we can understand the complexity of a system that is, in every way, inimical to the environment. Bate identifies this system as an anthropogenic evolution known as "industry's tendency to alter the quality of our surroundings" (14). These tendencies are England's colonial ambitions, which altered Sedgwick's and Child's natural surroundings while within its land establishes agrarian capitalism and the Industrial Revolution that transformed Austen's landscape. It is evident that despite the distance, the anthropogenic motivation of a single nation can destroy more than its own environment. Certainly, if England's Industrial Revolution polluted the air of London, Bath, Widsnes, and Runcorn, and the gentry's mercantile motivation encouraged logging and deforestation, its colonial ambition caused major environmental impacts on New England. Kolodny refers to these impacts as:

an inevitable paradox: the success of settlement depended on the ability to master the land, transforming the virgin territories into something else—a farm, a village, a road, a canal, a railway, a mine, a factory, a city, and finally, an urban nation. As a result, those who had initially responded to

the promise inherent in a...landscape were now faced with the consequences of that response: either they recoil in horror from the meaning of their manipulation of a naturally generous world...or they succumbed to a life of easeful regression. (174) <sup>74</sup>

England enjoyed the life of “easeful regression” and consumed much of New England’s natural resources while transforming its landscape into an urban space. When Byerly raises the question of, “whether a tree falling in the forest makes a sound if no one is there to hear it,” she captures the goal of this chapter, which aims to identify the role Sedgwick’s and Child’s novels play in bringing attention to the ecological collapse that virtually no one heard of when it was happening. However, their sense of the ecological collapse extends beyond Byerly’s argument and proves that “a tree standing in the forest is not part of the wilderness unless a civilized observer is there to see it” (58) and this “civilized” person/colonist laid an axe to that tree to ship it to his country so it can be used for fuel.<sup>75</sup>

As I discussed in chapter two, Austen renders many uncertain feelings about the quality of the air of the big cities. Through this concern we learn that polluted air was the result of smoke emanating from the burning wood, which was England’s important energy sources. Meanwhile Austen made apparent references to the potential value of timber sale as calculated by large estate owners. In *Emma*, Mr. Knightley’s estate possesses an “abundance of timber in rows and avenues” (290), which signifies, according to Bate, ‘his willingness to take the long view of profit-potential timber is an investment for future

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<sup>74</sup> For information about the Industrial Revolution see Timothy Morton’s “Realism after Nature: Reading the Greenhouse Effect in Bleak House,” *Ecology Without Nature*, pp. 22-43. Also, see Peter Thorsheim’s “Coal, Smoke, and History,” *Inventing Pollution*, pp. 1-30.

<sup>75</sup> See J. R. Ward’s discussion about the relation between England’s imperial expansion and the Industrial Revolution in his journal article “The Industrial Revolution and British Imperialism, 1750-1850,” pp. 44-65.

generations” (6). Similarly, Marry Berry, Austen’s contemporary, predicted in her book *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence from the Year 1783 to 1852*, published in 1865, that the timber, which enriched the twelve thousand acres of Stoneleigh Abbey, a country house owned by Austen’s uncle, would eventually be cut down since they constituted, “a magnificent possession of real wealth” (433). England’s industrial systems required the utilization of large amounts of timber, and Berry and Austen could not avoid referencing trees as timber or a source generating to wealth.

However, Cronon points out the fuel crisis that England was struggling with when a deforestation took place in the English forests, and the Parliament imposed a restriction on using English timber: “this single and most important source of heating and building materials became increasingly costly throughout the century preceding the English revolution. The Parliament began to restrict the cutting of English timber as early as 1543” (20-21).<sup>76</sup> This restriction is one of the reasons that impelled Englishmen to direct a commercial gaze at New England’s forests. William Wood in his book *New England Prospect*, published in 1637, discussed the potential benefits of New England’s woods and the profits that could be gained from them. As he states, “the next commodity of the land affords, is good store of Wood & that not only such as may be needfull for fewell, but likewise for the building of Ships, and houses, & Mills, and all manner of water-worke about which wood is needfull” (16). When the English government recognized the damaged caused by deforestation, it started to shift its commercial gaze to New England’s

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<sup>76</sup> Francis Higgins provides more historical documentation of the commodification of New England’s forests in his pamphlet *New England Plantation* (1630). Also see John Josselyn’s *An Account of Two Voyages to New England* (1675), and Thomas Morton’s *New English Canaan*. (1632).



timber. What is scarce in England is a cheap commodity in New England and its forests are abundant and free of cost.

It is known that Austen's experience with Bath's atmosphere was rife with smoke, chaos, and shadow, therefore, she extended this experience to her novels where her protagonists experienced air pollution in London, Portsmouth, and Bath. It is possible that the wood, which is the source that fueled the pollution in Bath, is referenced in *Hobomok*, when "the sound of the axe...[are] as busy and strong" (13) cutting and preparing wood to be shipped aboard the English vessel every time it landed at the coast of Salem. The same is true with Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* when the two peach trees that grew "young and beautiful" in the woods did not survive because, "the axe was laid to the root of one" while "the other...perished" (94). The question then to be asked is whether Austen, Sedgwick, and Child had a shared experience of environmentalism given the fact that England's economic ambition—being the common denominator between the two worlds—was the force that triggered the ecological collapse in both countries? It is important to note that like Austen, Sedgwick's and Child's concern for the environment is not expressed through specific environmental jargon, but through keen observations and recordings of the changes that transformed their world. Their novels were rife with their environmental impulses, which created special environmental narratives that permeate the chapters and make strong statements about imperial exploitation.

In addition to her environmental awareness, Child was known for her commitment to racial integration and endorsement of, according to Laura Mielke, the "incorporation of Native Americans within the domestic setting, through familial love and material

consumption” (173).<sup>77</sup> This characteristic relates to the storyline of *Hobomok*, which takes place in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1630 amid controversies of English settlers and native Indians. While there are a lot of beautiful nature scenes, they are always contested by imperialistic exploitation and Indian wars. The heroine, Mary Conant, loves Charles Brown, who is an Episcopalian, but her father opposes the match. Hobomok is a Wampanoag chief who is a friend to the English settlers. The English used him to negotiate peace with the Indians since the colony remains in constant fear of their attacks. Hobomok is madly in love with Mary. When Brown is reported lost in a shipwreck, Mary falls into despair and marries Hobomok. In so doing, she becomes alienated from her own people but still content with her life. She and Hobomok have a son, but when Brown unexpectedly returns, Hobomok gracefully withdraws from her life. Mary and Charles marry and move back to England while the boy receives his education at Harvard.

Mielke affirms that Child allowed details about colonial activities to permeate her nature-reverence narratives and she also reported a disturbance in the cultural stability of an Indian region. In a letter published in Child’s *Letters from New York* (1843) dated June 12, 1842, she records early imperialistic manipulation of the colonies as she describes Staten Island being an appealing piece of land that was also sold to the Dutch in 1657. It was sold for “ten shirts, thirty pairs of stockings, ten guns, thirty bars of lead for balls, thirty pounds of powder...thirty hatches, twenty hoes, and a case of knives and awls.” But when compared with the business transactions conducted between English colonists and the Indians in the nineteenth century, Child notes that it is, “considered a fair compensation for a tract eighteenth miles long and seven broad” and does not “appear illiberal.” An entire

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<sup>77</sup> Other works by Child that attest to her advocacy for native American rights: *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* (1833), and *A Romance of the Republic* (1867).

town was commodified and deemed reasonably reimbursed, and Child tells us that a large portion of the foreigners who landed on Staten Island judged from its welcoming nature that “they had arrived in paradise” (145). This town, which combines a beautiful variety of land, sea, and ruralism transformed into a property: inhabited, sold, purchased, and finally colonized.

Moreover, Sedgwick’s work is known to be largely invested in narratives of national pride. As Laurel Hankins suggests *A New England Tale*, “selectively blends history and fiction to illustrate her idea of national character” (166). This is evident in Jane Elton, the heroine who is an orphan reared by her aunt in a rural New England town and was as Nancy Sweet argues, the character through which Sedgwick asserts the “abiding concern for social relationships and social justice...thereby becomes a model not only for women, but also for a nation at large as it seeks to develop and define the relationship between individual and community” (109) This environment helps Jane exhibit intelligence, independence, and moral propriety. She is also helped by characters who embody religious and civic virtue throughout the novel: Mary Hall a loyal servant and a pious Methodist; Mr. Lloyd, a kind Quaker; Crazy Bet, a deeply eccentric but sympathetic. At the end, Jane marries Mr. Lloyd, a prosperous Quaker who represents an alternative to the intolerant and rigidly orthodox culture of New England.

Within this densely nationalistic and religious novel, Sedgwick cannot ignore her environmental impulses and continues to celebrate the value of ruralism in her writing. In a letter dated, December 9, 1832, addressed to Miss K. M. Sedgwick expresses her concerns over the rural identity of Lenox, a town that is recently urbanized. Sedgwick feels uncomfortable with its transformation, “It is strange, but true that I never missed a country—

quasi country...as I do this year. I long to have my eyes rest on those mountains. I had rather see the muddy roads, even, than the pavements; rather stumble down to Debby's in the dark than go by lamplight; and the brick walls make my eyes sore" (228).<sup>78</sup> Lenox is six miles away from Stockbridge, and when Sedgwick compares it to "the rich valley of Stockbridge, with its soft and graceful variation of meadows and wood, its gentle river, and its sheltering mountains," Lenox appears to be, "dismally bleak and uncouth" (124).<sup>79</sup> Sedgwick's views of Lenox demonstrate a pastoral nostalgia that aligns with Kolodny's concern over England's colonial intervention and how it changes the identity of a place and transforming it from a village to an "urban nation" (174) with pavements, brick walls, and lamplights.

Characteristically, Sedgwick's and Child's letters revere New England's nature but also expose the way it was manipulated and became damaged by the offences the settlers committed against its inherent features. What their letters reveal is the force of the colonial authority, that pretends to coexist with the Indians but, in reality, diminishes and transforms the regionality and the cultural identity of the colonized. In so doing, their letters introduce us to a new understanding of the colonial power, which it emerges as a force that causes the evolution of one civilization and the demise of another. William Bryant takes heed of this dynamic and argues that in many parts of New England there is an apparent colonial domination that succeeds in changing the character of both the land and the people.

The hardy and sagacious native of the eastern states, settles himself in the wilderness by the side of the emigrant from the British Isles; the pestilence of the marshes is braved and overcome; the bear and wolf and catamount

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<sup>78</sup> This letter is published in Sedgwick's *Life and Letters of Miss Catharine M. Sedgwick*. (1871)

<sup>79</sup> Lenox and Stockbridge are both located in Berkshire County Western Massachusetts, but Stockbridge is Sedgwick's birthplace and summer residence. She considers it as "the dearest spot on all this earth." See her letter "Miss. Sedgwick to Mrs. Channing," *Life and Letters of Miss. Catherine M. Sedgwick*, p. 124.

are chased from their haunts; and then you see cornfields, and roads, and towns springing up as if by enchantment. In the meantime, pleasant Indian villages, situated on the skirts of their hunting-grounds, with their beautiful green plats for dances and martial exercises, are taken into the bosom of our extending population, while new States are settled, and cities founded far beyond them. (359)

The paradox of how farms, roads, and towns emerge magically is illustrated by Bryant's view, which explains how the indigenous people were never displaced but merged into another extending population. This cultural argument asserts the danger inherent in the colonial activities and the perils that threaten the existence of an entire race due to the settlers' progress. Child's and Sedgwick's responses to these activities provide accurate records of this alienation. The ubiquity of the English settlements is noted at the very beginning of *Hobomok* when the narrator gives a collective view of the villages of New England with a prevailing sense of national pride, "I never view the thriving villages of New England, which speak to the heart of happiness and prosperity, without feeling a glow of national pride." The historical beginning of this existence affirms its antiquity, "Two centuries only have elapsed, since our most beautiful villages reposed in the undisturbed grandeur of nature" (4) Also, in Sedgwick's *A New England Tale*, the characters travel to and from many states: Philadelphia, Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, Buffalo, Lake Erie, and Virginia giving a geographical mapping of how widely New England's colonies are spread.<sup>80</sup> In addressing the issues of land, colonial expansion, and Indians'

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<sup>80</sup> For information about the history of New England, see Neal Salisbury's "The Colonizing of Indian New England," pp. 447-60; Daniel Scott Smith's "The Demographic History of Colonial New England," pp. 165-83, and Terry L. Anderson's "Economic Growth in Colonial New England," pp. 243-57.

displacement, Sedgwick and Child manage to expose the ramification of colonial activities in what seems to be an ideal coexistence in an intact wilderness. Laura Hankins argues, “If American values are rooted in the frontier’s untouched wilderness, then the woman author’s responsive relationship to nature makes her uniquely qualified to represent these values” (165). Sedgwick’s and Child’s hypersensitivity to their natural surrounding does qualify them to represent these American values.

Additionally, Sedgwick’s and Child’s work is distinguished by their employment of environmental narratives that target ecological interruption in ways that are never subtle. Sedgwick’s discontent with the urbanization of rural towns is expressed in a pastoral nostalgia; one that laments the absence of wilderness as pure and pristine. Her widespread map of New England’s colonies, along with Child’s view of New England’s villages laid down “in the undisturbed grandeur of nature,” asserts a common disruption to the natural developing of the Indian villages, thus shedding light on the awkward naturalization of the settlers’ expansion. Austen follows the same strategy, when she talks about England’s environmental problems in ways that are by no means subtle. She refers to air pollution as “bad air,” “fog,” and “smoke.” She talks about deforestation by expressing a clear discontent with estate improvements and hothouses. She talks about nature’s alteration by plainly referencing the transformative power of picturesque landscape gardening. These authors’ responses are the outcome of a defective environmental backgrounds; one that shaped their writings and what they wrote challenged the forces that led to the tension between humans and nature.

## II. England and the Imperial Ecocide of New England

Whether it is in their novels, letters, or biographies, the way Sedgwick and Child describe nature is always imbued with keen environmental impulses. As English settlers themselves, their writings indicate a consciousness of a systemic destruction of New England's wilderness. What makes this destruction systemic is the imperial domination that lasted for centuries and culminated in a regular depletion of their resources. Sedgwick's and Child's narratives, though seeming to be torn between their loyalty to the motherland and their love for nature, still critique a pattern of behavior that overexploits their American towns. By bringing together England's imperial domination and its environmental manipulation of the colonies, we are rereading their novels through an ecocritical lens; one that targets the imperial ecocide of New England. Vishwas Satgar attributes the consequences of such imperial ecocide to the destructive practices of capitalist expansion and imperialism, which is not only about economic and political domination but also about "eco-system destruction, the destruction of biodiversity, annihilation of various human and non-human species and ultimately conquering of nature" (56). England's imperial practices fit perfectly into Satgar's definition because, as I will explain later, their depletion of New England's resources disrupts its ecosystem in various ways.

Before the settlers arrived, New England was a land of raw wilderness, pure rivers, and free-range animals. In *Hobomok*, Child introduces the untraditional ways the settlers treat the land and animals. The way they commanded animals is never understood by the Indians. She portrays them as people for whom it "exceeded their comprehension how buffaloes...could be led about by the horns and be compelled to stand or move at the

command of men;” the animals were never commanded, and the land was never possessed. But the settlers’ behavior, which they deem as masterful, led them to believe that those who appear dominant must be “the favorite children of the great spirit” (26). This perceived mastery gained more momentum when, in every passing year, the settlers instilled their foot in the American soil owning more lands and building more towns. The narrator declares that while the nation is growing “every succeeding year has left its footsteps distinct upon the soil” (4).

The history of those years can also be traced in *A New England Tale* when Old John, a wise and hardworking farmer, leases a large lot of land from a wealthy family and subleases it to another farmer. Sedgwick tells us that this land changed hands many times. It has “come into the hands of...two hard-favoured, hard-hearted, wild young chaps” (131) who inherited it from their father who was its original owner; then it is sold to a wealthy businessman, and finally a small portion of it is given as a gift to Old John who later subleases a part of it to another farmer. The convenience with which the land is owned, leased, subleased, sold, and endowed speaks to Sedgwick’s exploration of issues of land ownership at a time when the concept of possessing a land was not comprehended by the Indian people. Cronon argues that what Indians own in their fields is the use of them and the crop that they produce, not the land. To assert his argument, he refers to the native Indian families of southern New England explaining how they treated it with no territorial attitudes:

New England Indian families enjoyed exclusive use of their planting fields and of the land on which their wigwams stood, and so might be said to have owned them. But neither of these were permanent possessions. Wigwams were moved every few months, and planting fields were abandoned after a



number of years. Once abandoned, a field returned to brush until it was recleared by someone else, and no effort was made to set permanent boundaries around it that would hold it indefinitely for a single person. (62)

The English settlers were more possessive and more territorial. Their relationship with the land was shaped by the imperial planning of England. Therefore, it was not unusual for them to constantly estimate how much of its resources they could ship back to England. In 1584, Richard Hakluyt, an English writer, known for his advocacy for the colonization of North America, provided a list, which he assembled from the testimonies of other credible visitors, of the multiple resources that could be useful to England. In his *Discourse of Western Planting*, published in 1584 he records:

millions of all kinds of fowles for foode and fethers; Salt for fisshinge; excellent vines in many places for wine; the soile apt to beare olyves for oile...all kinde of odoriferous trees and date trees, cipresses trees, cedars, payes, sapines, hony and waxe; and in New founde land aboundaunce of pynes and firr trees.” (34)

Hakluyt’s observations reveal how New England was able to furnish England with large quantities of every imaginable resource and how long its natural supplies had been easily sourced out. Yasuhide Kawashima and Ruth Tone describe the impact of this sourcing on the ecology of many colonies, “The rich soils of Virginia were exhausted; the forests of New Hampshire and Maine were denuded of their fabulous white pine; several species of fur-bearing animals were all but exterminated” (168). Environmental historians, like Wilbur Jacobs, register incidents of wasteful consumption in many colonies while setting in motion drastic changes to the natural world of New England. Also, in following the observation of prominent traveler writer like Peter Kalm, a Swedish scientist who was touring the colonies in 1750 and recorded the destructive “habits of settlers,” we learn about

the way the settlers cleared the land and used it for crops, then for pastures, and later moved on to repeat the process in a new land:

After the inhabitants have converted a tract of land into fields, which had been a forest for many centuries together, and which consequently had a very fine soil, they use it as such, as long as it will bear any corn; and when it ceases to bear any, they turn into pasture for the cattle, and take new corn-fields in another field, where a fine soil can be met with, and where it has never been made use of for this purpose...the English in general have carried agriculture to a higher degree of perfection than any other nation. But the depth and richness of the soil, which those found here who came over from *England*, (as they were preparing land for ploughing, which had been covered with woods from times immemorial) misled them and made them careless husbandmen. (191-92)

To this random and unorganized treatment of land, Jacobs adds more interesting observations when he maintains that “In New Jersey in the 1790s there was ‘stupid indifference’ to the land and ‘in order to save themselves the work of shaking or pulling off the nuts, they find it simpler to cut the tree and gather the nuts from it, while it lies on the ground’” (8).<sup>81</sup> But what makes Kalm’s description different is his portrayal of nature as primarily connected to its economic and ecological order and his intention not to present nature as wistfully unaltered but to identify the English settlers as careless farmers who will understand the depth and the richness of the soil.

One of the most influential texts is the 1854 speech of Chief Seattle, or Sealth, a leading figure among native Indians who spoke in favor of ecological responsibility. When

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<sup>81</sup> For discussions about wasteful consumption, see Alfred W. Crosby Jr. *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* and Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind*.

asked to concede more land to the settlers, he made sure that his speech chastised their acquisitive tendencies, “one portion of land is the same to him as the next. For he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs.” His reference to the act of seizing the land in the dark by a stranger while affirming that the Indians “are part of this earth and it is part of [them]” (np), highlights an emotional and spiritual connection to the land which prevents them from treating it as exchangeable commodity or ordinary object where one lot is the same as the next.

Nature’s destruction and exploitation are given a deeper meaning in England’s colonial narrative when Kolodny refers to the imperial manipulation of the land as “despoliation,” (174). Child has her own documentation of this “despoliation” in *Hobomok*, which is recounted in the list of goods requested by governor Graddock to be sent to England. The goods, which includes large quantities of wood as I mentioned earlier, are to be prepared, stacked, and loaded aboard an English vessel when it lands on the coast of Salem:

We do desire whatever bever or fish can be gotten readie. There hath nott bine a tyme for sale of tymber, these twoe seven years, like unto the present; therefore, pittie the shippes should come backe emptye. I wish alsoe that there bee some sassafras and sassaparilla sent us, also goode store of shoemacke, silke grasse, and aught else that may bee useful for dyinge or physicke.” (12-13)

Sedgwick mentions that the arrival and the departure of the vessel is considered a matter of great importance to the entire colony. Most of the white people from the neighboring colonies gather to observe the ship and pay a final farewell along with “an equal number of the dark children of the forest” (13). Whether the children share in the work of loading the ship or gather for the final farewell, their position shows how they are acculturated by

a foreign system that slowly erodes their identity. This system makes the process of watching their resources given away seem like a respectful valediction to the sovereign country. One can only imagine how easy it is for an entire culture to be diminished when its children are slowly synthesized to the normalcy of imperial acquisition and along with it a depleted land and an altered identity.

Margaret Fuller, an American author and Sedgwick's and Child's contemporary, documented in her travel book *Summer on the Lakes* (1843) her observations of the diminishing of the Indian population during her tour of the Great Lakes<sup>82</sup>. On her tour, she was preoccupied with the concept of "the mushroom growth," a label she coins to describe the rapid increase of frontier settlement when it makes, "the old landmarks...broken down, and the land, for a season, bear none, except for the rudeness of the conquest and the needs of the day, whose bivouac fire blacken the sweetest forest glades" (18). She is moved by their "speedy extinction" and blames it on the false ethics of the settlers. She writes, "I know that the Europeans who took possession of this country, felt themselves justified by their superior civilization and religious ideas. Had they been civilized or Christianized, the conflict which sprang from the collision of the two races, might have been avoided" (234). She is also occupied by the idea of how human communities can treat and preserve the landscape they inhabit in the most proper way; though not always consistent. Tina Gianquitto analyzes Fuller's idea as the response of an author who "saw nature as full of possibility, ready to be cultivated but still at risk from 'sordid' forces" (59). We can

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<sup>82</sup> Robert C. Bredeson discusses the various ways travel writers respond to the natural scenarios, especially when it is defined by the conflict between primitive nature and industrialization/civilization, as well as humans' constant attempt to conquer nature. See his article, "Landscape Description in Nineteenth-Century American Travel Literature," pp. 86-94.

understand the underlying meaning of Fuller's "sordid forces" when we consider her description of Niagara Falls as her wish for it to be minimally inhabited by the settlers and hardly exploited by their manipulative ambitions. Certainly, her admiration of the poem: *Francis Abbot, The Recluse of Niagara: and Metropolitan Sketches* (1837),<sup>83</sup> in which Abbot lived like a hermit in one of its islands exploring the glory of its nature, testifies to this wish, "It is wonderful that men do not oftener attach themselves to localities of great beauty—that when once deeply penetrated, they let themselves be easily borne away by the general stream of things, to live anywhere and anyhow" (9).

While Fuller's response draws our attention to how acceptable and tolerable the destructive use of land had become, Sedgwick's and Child's observations illustrate the disruption of the Indian villages as aggressive treatment of the land. Their reflections reveal a complex environmental situation where we encounter a chain reaction of a disturbed ecosystem; one which starts with the felling of the trees and ends with the speedy extinction of the Indians. Levi Bryant argues in "Black Ecology" that wilderness is "as prone to disequilibrium as it is to balance" (301). Environmental balance can happen when nature is sustained by a good ecosystem, but when one organism is destroyed, its reverberating effect causes the rest of the ecosystem to fall apart. Therefore, when we read these author's works what we come across is not just the depletion of the natural resources of Salem or the exhaustion of the rich soil of Virginia and New Hampshire, nor do we just read about the extermination of the fur-bearing animals of Maine, but also the displacement and the

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<sup>83</sup>James Bird edited *Francis Abbot: The Recluse of Niagara and Metropolitan Sketches* (1837), which was published by Baldwin and Cradock. It is a narrative poem based on the facts found in the sketches of Captain Alexander's *Transatlantic Sketches*. In the preface, Bird informs the readers that he made minor changes to the account given by Captain Alexander of the last scene of Abbot's life to make it less painful.

reduction of the Indian population. The ironic situation of Hobomok bears witness to the unjust treatment of the Indians' life. He has lived all his life as an outcast among his people. He dedicated his life to serve the Englishman. His position as the messenger and the mediator of the English settlers annihilated him socially and culturally. He was constantly threatened by his people's rage and their unwillingness to spare his life. Meanwhile, there was no guarantee that the Englishman would protect him when a situation calls for it. He was an Indian man who would be easily discarded once his services were exhausted. This scenario changes dramatically for his wife and his son who are privileged by the English blood and deemed as a more valued race.

The settlers did not just destroy plants and wildlife but endeavored to reduce an entire human race. Cronon points out this sad reality by stating, "by 1800 Indians who had been its first human inhabitants were reduced to a small fraction of their former numbers and had been forced onto less and less desirable agricultural lands" (160). This population belongs to a culture that understands the importance of all organisms. Jacobs argues that what makes the Indians different is that they thrive on the fact that humans must coexist with other forms of life and not destroy it:

Indians, as well as plants, animals, insects, and other forms of life, were integral parts of an ecological niche. Modern Americans...have altered or destroyed ninety- eight percent of these original North American ecosystems. Indian people, on the other hand, had lived within them for centuries by developing a land ethic tuned to the carrying capacity of each ecozone. Indians today know these facts, though they are couched in a

different kind of language, handed down through centuries by oral recall.

(6)<sup>84</sup>

The Indians are part of the organic ecological cycle of New England. Their way of life reflects their understanding of the ecological rhythm of the environment because they are always in touch with the source of their sustenance. When it is noted that they hunt animals and cut trees, they do it for provisions not financial profits. Kalm indicates that when they clear a land, they do it on a very small scale, “such little pieces as they made use of were very inconsiderable, when compared to the vast forest which remained.” They did not systematically pillage their environment in the way the English settlers did. On the other hand, the settlers persisted in their manner of over consumption and commodification. Kalm again points out how they rushed in making the land ready for consumption, “they had nothing to do but to cutdown the woods, put it up in heaps, and to clear the dead leaves away” so it is ready for consumption. Kalm also laments the fact that this land “has been covered with woods from times immemorial.” (192) He often wonders at the Englishman’s carelessness though he is known for his agricultural skills, “the corn-field, the meadows, the forests, the cattle &c. are treated with equal carelessness; and the English nation, so well skilled in these branches of husbandry hardly found here.” (191-92). This skill is never lost in him it just follows the imperial mindset that inclines to wasteful consumption even if it means a change in New England’s system of agriculture.

F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson discuss the fact that the world runs on change and history always proves that one system will always obliterate another. As they argue,

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<sup>84</sup> For discussions about Indian ecology, see Calvin L. Martin’s “The European Impact on the Culture of a Northeastern Algonquian Tribe: An Ecological Interpretation,” pp. 4–26. Also, see Vine Deloria, Jr., *We Talk, You Listen: New Tribes, New Turf*.

“The industrial England blots out the agricultural England,” but also this change, which is considered a form of progress, as they suggest, is “not organic, but mechanical” (75). The English dominance of New England makes evident the hollowness of this “continuity,” because it causes a big shift in its agrarian aspects. Cronon suggests that New England’s system of agriculture was replaced by another system that cultivates crops in “household production units [that] were contained within fixed property boundaries and linked with commercial markets” (160-61). This new system is referenced by Brian Donohue as a sort of farming that is more productive, but its intensification and specialization obliterate its communal relationship with nature. Therefore, it becomes “more alienated from nature and destructive for the environment” (235) because it mainly responds to the market economy.<sup>85</sup> Cronon further argues that when the English property system considers the production of the land as a commodity, New England was devoid of its identity as an independent and “untouched wilderness,” but remained a colonial space closely connected to the commercial markets of its colonizer. In other words, New England is no longer, as William Howarth names it, “the Old World” or the “virgin land” with its earlier village system, but a business platform for the colonizer’s commercial economy.

Christopher Pastore seizes on this notion and takes it a step further when he discusses the impact of commercial economy on sea spaces like Narragansett Bay. Earlier in Child’s *Hobomok*, Sagamore John laments the submission of the Narragansett people to the

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<sup>85</sup> Donahue’s main argument is that pristine nature is usually overturned by frontier exploitation; the matter that led to the impoverishment of natural resources and causes, “an ongoing struggle (and symbiosis) between mature capitalism and rising conservation consciousness,” p. 235. He notes that this struggle led to an environmental counter movement that can be found in the works of Thoreau, Pinchot, and Muir as well as George Perkins March.



English colonizer and Hobomok's cooperation with the English soldiers. Meanwhile, Hobomok tries to convince them that this submission is for their best interest, since they cannot compete with the overwhelming power of the Englishman, "if the quiver of the Narragansett be filled against the Yengees...they themselves [would] be trodden down, like snow, in the warpath of the Pequods?" (28). The strength of the "Yengees" or the "Englishmen" did not just maintain a strong grip on the villages of the Indian people but also on the treasures of Narragansett Bay, as it is distinctively located on rich waters. As Pastore explains, it was an important source of shell beads, (called wampum) and thousands of these hard-shell clams, were excavated from the sea and used to create belts to be traded later for money. He illustrates the ecological effect of commercializing the bay's resources by stating:

It hastened the extirpation of beaver. As beavers were killed, their dams were destroyed, and water that had once been impounded on the landscape rushed into the estuaries. In short, wampum much of which was produced on the shores of Narragansett Bay, drove a trade that made the Northeast a drier place and, at least in small ways, affected the estuary in return. (7)

Ironically, this process of commercialization led the Indians to contribute unknowingly to land degradation. They participated in beaver hunting and hard-shell fishing as a response to a trading system that consumed beavers for mink and hard-shell clams for wampum. They become dependent on the fishing and hunting economy adding more to the bay's ecological collapse. Cronon sheds light on how the large numbers of beavers being hunted for fur trade caused a transformation in the land's ecology. He believes that beaver dams provided a natural alteration of the ecosystem, and the reduced numbers of beavers caused a reduction in these dams, which meant dry lands are replacing what once were marshes

and lakes. This reminds us of Neil Evernden's argument about the interconnection of all organisms, "All of nature has utility, all is important," and we become conscious of the interrelatedness between organisms when "a change in one affect the other" (93). The extinction of a certain species is the perfect indication of a disturbed ecosystem and as Henry David Thoreau suggests, nature "informs us when her wild animals, but not when the wild man in her, became extinct" (23).

Pastures and meadows did not escape the exploitation of the Englishman.<sup>86</sup> The provisions needed for the Royal Navy and the English merchants who constantly land on the bay for business or replenishments consume many of Narragansett's flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. The effect of this consumption resulted in heavy meat intakes, which, in turn, led to general pollution of many of the Bay's regions. Rhode Island is one of the regions that Pastore pinpoints to unveil the harmful effect of this dependence:

Rhode Island livestock had changed the Bay and nearby tidal lagoon. Animal waste led to algal blooms that, when combined with silts and sawdust, clogged waterways. In response to environmental issues, the colony, which had once been only a loose association of towns, began to pool resources toward large public works projects, many of which affected the Bay and its harbor either directly or indirectly. (7)

The economic potentials of the bay triggered various forms of environmental manipulation. The implications of this exploitation go well beyond making the bay's regions part of England's global economy or transforming the inherent properties of its pasture. The lands were gradually appropriated by the English government and large lots

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<sup>86</sup> For discussions about the history of Narragansett Bay, see William S. Simmons's *Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620-1984* and James Axtell's *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*, p. 19.

were sold to the English people. Anne Keary delves into the history of this acquisition and contends that the economic powers of the Englishman go as far back as the early seventeenth century when the English government attempted to appropriate the Indian lands. She asserts that this appropriation “considerably diminished the economic and political autonomy of the Narragansetts and their tributaries. The loss of game combined with the loss of land for hunting and food gathering made the Indians increasingly dependent on trade with the English for clothing and other goods” (275). But the Narragansetts’ loss of social and economic autonomy was marked as being resisted in *Hobomok*. Child narrates that the Indians were approached many times by Hobomok to negotiate a partnership with the Englishmen who were seeking their protection in case they were attacked by other Indians. These repeated attempts indicate frequently resisted trials. When they eventually accepted, it was natural for the rest of the villages to follow and step more into the business of trading and becoming more dependent on the English revenues.

It is not surprising that the Narragansett’s loss of political and economic autonomy assisted in giving the Englishman easy access to land ownership. William Harris is an Englishman who defines himself as “a property-owning individual” (279), and who would buy land using a deed with terms and conditions that enabled him to muster all the benefits he could get. Keary points out the clever language he uses in the deeds as it increases the new owners’ rural activities. These terms would go as far as building numerous farms, using extensive plowing, or giving unlimited use of cattle, to claim ownership of more acreages. Keary believes that these twisted terms “greatly increased the territory claimed for the English settlement” (280). Harris is not a statesman, or a government official but

an English citizen who gave himself the right to own, buy, and write contracts that served the imperial ambitions of his country.

The more we study New England's environmental history the more we realize how quickly it is transformed from being naturally wild to being unnaturally manipulated. This idea is presented in Cronon's illustration of the pond that suddenly receded because of the massive reduction of the beaver's population. The long-term effect of this reduction resulted in the erosion of lakes, "When the pond disappeared with the breaching of its dam, the rich black soil was suddenly exposed to the sun and rapidly became covered with grass that grew 'as high as a man's shoulders.'" (106). A similar incident can be found in Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* where she describes a dryness of a river when Jane was walking alongside "the low browed hill." This hill "had formerly been the banks of the river...from which it had receded and left an interval of...meadow between the hill and its present bed" (91). It is rare for a river to recede naturally while its banks turn into a hill. This is a likely manipulation wrought by some human intervention and Sedgwick's portrayal of the dried river indicates that it is a product of some ecological change.

Earlier in *A New England Tale*, we were told that there is a stream located in the middle of the wilderness facing a house owned by Old John, "a hardy-looking mountaineer" (29) and a farmer standing as a symbol of hard work and diligence. Whenever it rains the stream, located in front of his house, becomes "swollen so much that it seemed to threaten an inundation of [his] house." This condition is threatening his everyday life. when Mr. Lloyd suggests to him to "contrive...some mode of turning the stream," he maintains that it is easily done. Changing the direction of the stream does not seem to be a complicated matter since he has, "a book that treats upon hydrostatics" (32).

This book is part of an agriculture science that guides people to manage the land and in pondering the power of this science, we should consider whether it is part of the colonial control that changed New England's agriculture and educated people, as Cronon mentions, to restructure the land into units contained within fixed boundaries to be later linked with commercial markets. It is also likely that it is part of the shift in the agrarian system that Donohue refers to as a more productive farming in which specialization obliterated the farmers' communal relationship with nature.

In this context, it is not rare for a tree with "a tenacity of...roots" to be "in part, uprooted by a freshet, and...laid across the river...supply[ing] a rude passage to the adventurous" (91). Sedgwick is not certain of what has caused the tree to be tumbled down. She believes that it is "in part" the work of a flooding stream. We can always assume that there was an oppressive hand that laid this tree across the river and turned it into a passageway to the daring and the bold. It is, however, ironic how these two scenes take place in the wilderness of a small village; Jane is walking through an area "that none knows but the wild birds" (94), an area so isolated that only "the adventurous spirits" (95) can enter. Yet, it is trampled by careless hands and cause a river to dry up and a tree to be tumbled down. These scenes are pointed out as unavoidable when the author invests deeply in the mistreatment of nature. Kolodny argues that an author's response to nature does "not obviate the fact that the despoliation of the land appeared more and more an inevitable consequence of human habitation—any more than it terminated the pastoral impulse itself" (174). Certainly, Sedgwick's response is drawn from a compassionate pastoral impulse, which is immediately terminated when she becomes aware of the oppressive hands that instigate an extermination of its existence.

In *Hobomok*, Child is similarly aware of the same oppressive hands, but she takes a different direction in illustrating their impact on the land. She indicates the imperial expansion and the changing identity of New England as part of this impact. She informs us that Salem, which, in the past, consisted of six small shakes is now a populous settlement busy with working axes and diligent industry. By tracing the settlers' earliest beginning, Child offers a glimpse at the enduring progress of colonization,

Such a settlement as Salem during the summer of 1629, would seem insignificant enough to modern eyes; but compared with what it had been, it seemed rich and populous. Instead of the six miserable hovels, which it presented in June, there were now to be seen a number of comfortable swellings, and a respectable edifice which served for various public uses...And the place which a few months before had only echoed the occasional sound of the axe, or the shrill whoop of the hunter, was now busy with the hum of industry, and the clear, loud laughter of youth. (55)

As such, the feelings of happiness and contentment that we sense in the laughter of the youth/the colonizer, along with the sound of the axe and the screams of the hunters, are the grounds upon which Salem is developed. To the narrator, the "sound of the axe," and the hunter's "shrill whoop," which identify Salem's humble beginning, were insignificant compared to the sound of industry that marked its modern development. The trees that are cutdown and the animals that are hunted are part of the goods that fill the English vessel before it sets out to England. These are also the materials that provide the settlers with food and shelter. We can envision the impact of this use on wildlife, vegetation, and the soil over two hundred years and how it decisively led to environmental degradation. Like Jane's village in *A New England Tale*, where the vast wilderness is occasionally penetrated by man, Salem's wilderness is also penetrated and depleted. The narrator tells us that Salem

was once “a poor, despised, and almost a discouraged remnant in this western wilderness,” but now it is “the populous emporium of six flourishing states” (88). It is not unusual for a region that becomes the center or the capital of a larger political body to be consumed by the political and economic demands of that body.

### III. Narratives of Eco-nationalism: the Void and the Broken

As it has been established, Child’s and Sedgwick’s novels portray forests, lands, and people as they are haunted by England’s imperial violence. It is also true that they are the keen observers of the social and the cultural transformation of New England while it develops into a cluster of colonies detached from Indian land and full of pride and prosperity. This awareness impels them to write novels in a narrative swerving between their loyalty to the mother land and their love for the “now new homeland.” This narrative reveals the difficult task an American author, living in colonial New England, has to face when writing about her beloved America and her more beloved England. In *Hobomok*, Child describes England as a superior country, “matured,” “majestic,” “wise,” and “wealthy,” but also a nation that outspreads its governance to New England and makes Massachusetts the capital of its political body or, “the embryo of political powers, which were so soon to be developed before the gaze of anxious and astonished Europe” (88). In *A New England Tale*, Sedgwick draws our attention to the benevolence of William Penn,<sup>87</sup> “the only one of all the colonial leaders” who if people, “follow him and his colony to the wilderness,” can be said to have “treated the native of the land with justice and mercy.”

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<sup>87</sup> In the introduction of *The World of William Penn*, Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn state that, “William Penn was incontestably one of the seminal figures of the seventeenth century. He played a crucial role in protecting the Quaker movement during its persecution. He was a major writer in religious, political, and didactic treatises. He championed religious toleration, civil rights, participatory government, international brotherhood, and international peace...He founded a thriving colony, arguably the most thriving colony in America,” p. xix.

Jane maintains that her ancestors “refused to acknowledge the image of God in the poor Indians. They affected to believe they were the children of the evil one and hunted them like beasts of prey calling them worse than Scythian wolves” (127). These critical views reveal Sedgwick’s hesitant feelings toward England’s political virtue. Every ideal image is contrasted by a flawed one and every ideal attitude is opposed by a materialistic one. For that reason, Child and Sedgwick betray an uncertain form of nationalism.

The ironies noted in Child’s and Sedgwick’s narratives capture a national pride struggling to be integral. The incidents discussed in both novels reveal cultural and political actions that disassociate the Indians from the land. Whether they are never acknowledged by the older settlers as normal humans or are not recognized by the colonial leaders as part of the new society that “astonishes Europe,” Their displacement is justified by England’s policies as a necessary action since the land needs to be reformed socially and politically. Laura V. Hankins follows up on this notion and asserts that, “a correspondence between the moral and natural worlds worked to naturalize expansion as an involuntary democratic impulse” (161). But this correspondence is not always straightforward for Sedgwick and Child. The conflict between nature manipulation and England’s deficient morality generates the void in their national pride. Their experience with the environmental damage the motherland inflicts upon the colonies (their now homeland) does not coincide with the national pride they try to draw from and attribute to England. Morgan Margulies suggests that ecological nationalism can be found in, “the very process by which nations were historically constructed.” She believes that the role of land and ecology are necessary in the development of any national culture. New England’s lands are historically constructed as, “untouched wilderness,” rich and pristine but also, according to Cronon, “useful to those



who can possess them” (165). The land is independent but colonized; nature is rich but depleted, and England is sovereign but imperially authoritative.

These environmental and political dichotomies come across poignantly in a pivotal scene in *Hobomok* when Child reflects on the variability of humans’ pursuits and their underlying decay. She describes a still and bright night when Mary marvels at “the unvaried radiance of the moon” (43) stretching upon the many edifices and the busy workings of individuals. But when she wishes to have the same vision of the moon, she knows that what she will see is going to be strikingly different:

How various are the scenes thou passest over in thy shining course. The solitary nun, in the recesses of her cloister, looks on thee as I do now; mayhap too, the courtly circle of king Charles are watching the motion of thy silver chariot. The standard of war is fluttering in thy beams, and the busy merchantman breaks thy radiance on the ocean...Thou has smiled on distant mosques and temples, and now thou art shedding the same light on the sacrifice heap of the Indians ...would that my vision, like thine, could extend through the universe, I might look down unmoved on the birth and decay of human passions, hope and prejudice. (43)

Mary contemplates the scene, which the moon will pass over “the lordly palaces and blooming gardens of good old England” and when she wishes to have a broad visualization like that of the moon, she knows that she will not see the same glorious scenes but “the birth and decay” of humans’ nature and attitudes. In fact, between the birth and decay of humans’ passion, hope, and prejudice rise human actions and those action will decide for either the destruction or the welfare of all forms of life. This is the realistic vision that Mary is pre-emptively anticipating. Also, the many scenes over which the moon passes relay a global picture about different regions of the world, but Mary’s specific mention of “the courtly circle of King Charles” and “the sacrifice heap of the Indians” relays an especially

ironic picture about the pleasant scene in England and the opposing one in the colonies. When this picture is positioned within Mary's realistic understanding of human nature, we realize that she tries to see beauty in both regions, but she is aware that this beauty is not enduring. She lives in a world where England's greed will eventually cause harm and spread injustice on the colonies.

In *A New England Tale*, Sedgwick presents another pivotal scene where she introduces Old John, a symbol of a "glorious privilege of every New England man" who is "being independent." Ironically, he lacks an appearance of "neatness and order" and this appearance is essential for "being a Quaker" (32) and for representing the English family. The English government does not just grant the English settlers' access to own and sell Indian lands but expects them to stand as proud symbols of nationalism. The idea of a farmer dirtying his hands in the works of cultivation while looking neat and ordered is an odd dichotomy of pride and humility. The glorious scene of England contrasted with the Indian sacrifice heap, and the farmer's dirty hand contrasted with the expected appearance of neatness are opposite images with a bitter undertone. They do, however, help us understand the various situations England manifests its political deficiency and the complex ways Sedgwick and Child have to use to reflect on their nationalism.

Alexander Hamilton, an American statesman, legal scholar, and economist, had his share in this irony. Unlike the statemen of the time, he was more blunt about his rejection to England's imperial domination. In 1775, he published a pamphlet titled *The Farmer Refuted*, where he documents England's easy accession to land and attainment of New England's resources. The following passage is part of a detailed document about the establishment of New Plymouth colony in 1620. He mentions that after buying the land

from its natural owners, the Indians, King James built a council at Plymouth in the county of Devon for governing New England in America and this entire area will be later granted to his successors:

All the main land, from sea to sea; together with all the firm land, soil, ground, havens, ports, rivers, waters, fishings, mines, minerals, quarries, precious stones, and all and singular other commodities...[are]to be held of his Majesty, his heirs and successors, in free and common soccage: and the only consideration to be the fifth part of all gold and silver ore, for in respect *of all and all manner of duties, demands, and services.* (73)

In the same pamphlet, Hamilton explores the reasons for England's strong domination defeating the notion that it is a civil nation because the abundance of New England's resources inflames its greed and make the Americans' hope for independence a distant dream:

There seem to be already a jealousy of our dawning splendor...the boundless extent of territory we possess; the wholesome temperament of our climate; the luxuriance and fertility of our soil; the variety of our product; the rapidity of our population; the industry of our countrymen; and the commodiousness of our ports; naturally lead to a suspicion of independence and will always have an influence pernicious to us. Jealously is a predominant passion of human nature and is the source of the greatest evils. Whenever it takes place between rulers and their subjects, it proves the bane of civil society. (50-51)

This pamphlet expresses not just an opinion of an eloquent citizen at the time, but the mindset and attitude of a region Sedgwick and Child long inherited<sup>88</sup>. When we look back

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<sup>88</sup> For more discussions about the political and literary movements during the American Revolution, see Philp Gould's "Response: 'Defamiliarizing the Revolution,' *Early American Literature*," pp. 619–22, and John Mac Kilgore's "Rites of Dissent: Literatures of Enthusiasm and The American Revolution." *Early American Literature*, pp. 367–98.

at their ecological narratives, we recognize their contradicting emotions, which challenges their loyalty to the mother land or the “oppressor” (87) as Hamilton calls it.

In *Hobomok*, Child describes New England’s wilderness as nature of unrivaled beauty, but this beauty is frequently spoiled by the violence and the cruelty of the Englishman. A deer hunting scene, set in an exceptionally beautiful forest and on a particularly beautiful night, combines contradicting modes of beauty and violence, “The mellow light of moon and stars looked down upon the woods, and as the trees danced to the shrill music of the winds, their light was reflected by ten thousand undulating motions in all the rich varieties of forest work. It seemed as if the sylphs and fairies, with which imagination of old, peopled the mountain and the stream, had all assembled to lay their diamond offerings on the great altar of nature” (77). Oddly enough, the “shrill music” of the wind, which invites the trees to dance to its tune is accompanied by “a faint mournful sound” of deer struck by the arrows of the hunters. It is a hunting game for the Indians; they are the ones who draw the arrows. But it is also an entertaining game for the Englishmen; they are the ones contently watching. After the first deer is struck, the Englishmen watch the Indians as they prepare “a new set of flambeaux for a fresh attack.” Meanwhile, Mr. Conan guides his daughter to the road back home and immediately, “return[s] to the plain” (79) to watch the rest of the game.

We may think that deer can escape human manipulations because they are not fur-bearing animals or not exactly valuable to be part of trades, manufacturing, or national economy; in fact, they have nothing to offer the colonizer other than being a source of food. But as it is apparent in the hunting scene, deer are used as means of entertainment. The

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hunters intrude on the natural environment hunting and killing animals to proudly display their hunting skills and use the bodies of the hunted animals as precious trophies. They catch many deer, but when Hobomok offers the first one to Mary as a gift, he invokes the familiar metaphor of England, represented by Mary, as the sovereign nation worthy of all treasures. On the other hand, the colonies, represented by Hobomok, are the loyal subjects of anticipated submission. To put it differently, Hobomok's bestowal position signifies the colonies' binding and submissive relation with England while England remains the entitled nation. Still the position of the Englishmen as inactive participants in the hunt asserts their unaccountability for abusing the animals though their behavior throughout the novel proves the exact opposite. This is one of the incidents where we witness a complex political message bearing contrastingly on the beautiful image of trees dancing on "the shrill music of the wind." In truth, Child and Sedgwick face a difficult task when they try to paint a picture of a colony unable to stand on the cusp of integrity; a task that seems almost impossible when we think of the symbolism embedded in this hunting scene.

Four decades after publishing *Hobomok*, Child sent a letter<sup>89</sup> to Mr. Underwood, the president of the Virginia Constitutional Convention where she urges him to refute the identity of Virginia as "a slave-holding state." In the letter, she describes Virginia as a state with amazing climate, wonderful scenery, and plenty of opportunities to its citizens. All are attributes that contribute to its prominence among the colonies; but it is tainted with a

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<sup>89</sup> This letter is dated July 31, 1860, and it was written in response to the distribution of Child's pamphlet in the southern states. The pamphlet is titled *The Right Way, the Safe Way, Proved by Emancipation in the British West Indies and Elsewhere*. It was addressed specifically to white slaveholders. She tries to convince the South that the emancipation of the slaves will increase their safety and their prosperity. See "The Last Appeal: Lydia Maria Child's Antislavery Letters to John C. Underwood: Nancy Slocum Hornick and Lydia Maria Child," pp. 49-50.

vicious labeling. The letter is written with a compelling insight into the irony that bears negatively on the beauty of nature. She not only reveals the historical persistence of this offensive characterization but makes the wellbeing of Virginia's nature contingent on refuting this identity. In the letter she states,

With regard to taking up the wastelands of Virginia, I believe there would be a rush of emigration if slavery were abolished. I have myself always supposed the scenery of that State to be more beautiful, the climate more desirable, and the resources for acquiring wealth more abundant, than in any other state of this Union. Years and years ago, I had a great desire to remove thither; and this feeling I have often heard expressed by intelligent farmers and enterprising mechanics; but always it is accompanied with the remark, "But there can be no feeling of security in a slave State." (52)

Child's advocacy picks up an ecological hue when she makes humans' welfare essential to nature's wellbeing. How can the scenery be beautiful, and the climate be desirable when people are anxious about their prosperity in a state that lacks social justice? The way humans create and recreate their livelihood depends on their relations with society and its various institutions and on their relations with the natural world with its various abundance. If a rupture happens in either, the other will collapse. This is especially true with the native Indians whose population is diminished and along with it their agrarian culture. They know how to cultivate and not uproot, how to care and not exploit. To reiterate, Child and Sedgwick are aware of the fragility of England's claim to greatness, and as the fracture deepens, it is difficult for them to establish uniformity between beautiful nature and a sense of nationalism.

#### IV. Narratives of Eco-nationalism: the Solid and the Resolute

Across the ocean England sees itself as a just nation with a lawful constitution. The English people take pride in establishing the fair amendments of the constitution. Many pamphlets, political reports, and biographies testify to this pride. The best expression of this nationalism can be found in Cotton Mather's<sup>90</sup> *A Pillar of Gratitude*, published in 1661, where he declares, "It is no Little Blessing of God, that we are a part of the English Nation." Mather adds, "There is no English man, but what has for his Birthright those Liberties, which are a rich Inheritance: When all the Nations of North- ern Europe of late years foolishly Lost their Liberties, the brave English (tho' with struggle enough, against the Unnatural Conspiracies of the Late Reigns) have still preserved theirs" (39).<sup>91</sup> Not only does Mather's speech present the Englishman as a citizen privileged by living in a nation of liberty, but he believes that being part of the English nation is a mere blessing of God . The situation, however, changes with New England's subjects—the settlers. The constitution is as distant from their lives as the ocean that separates the two worlds. Reading through the discrepancy that underlines Sedgwick's and Child's ecological/patriotic narratives, we realize that what is being promoted in the English soil is not exactly what England's subjects experience in the colonies. Sedgwick and Child are themselves English

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<sup>90</sup> Cotton Mather was a puritan minister and a prominent intellectual figure in colonial America. His most influential books are *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), *Luctuosom: a History of the Long War* (1699), *The Biblia Americana* (1693–1728), and *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702). For information about his biography see Michael G. Hall's "Genius in America: a New Biography of Cotton Mather," pp. 494-498.

<sup>91</sup> This is part of Mather's speech to the governor, the Council, and the Assembly of Boston in 1700. Mark Valeri in his book, *How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America*, observes that Mather is urging them to maintain their, "loyalty to the Crown and continue their investments in military ventures against England's Catholic enemy in Canada: reasonable cost to pay for the economic benefits and political freedom of being English," pp. 130-31.

citizens who no longer reside in England and who witness firsthand the colonial suppression of their environment. But because of the freedom mantras that have been frequently pronounced within and outside the English parliament, New England's subjects are somewhat captivated by the political appeal of the constitution. Paul A. Varg, believes that what naturalizes England's imperial dominance is "the constant appeal to the British Constitution and to the charters in all colonial disputes." It is also the belief that the constitution "offered firm guarantees of personal liberties." The tension that Sedgwick and Child experience—the promises of the constitution and England's overconsumption of the colonies—is reflected in their depictions. This is evident when their nature scenes are infused with human prejudice, animal killing, a dried river, and a falling tree is a narrative that evolve out of suppressed nature and disturbed nationalism.

Paradoxically, the eco-nationalism of English authors, like Jane Austen and Wordsworth, is consistent, solid, and stable. There are, indeed, many examples in their works that reveal a strident nationalistic tone positively developing as part of their conceptualization of nature. In Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*, published in 1810, he invites the readers to view the mountains of Lake District and its meadows as national treasures that exceed in beauty and value any natural scene in all of Europe.

Deeming the points in which alpine imagery is superior to British too obvious to be insisted upon, I will observe that the deciduous woods, though in many places unapproachable and triumphing in the pomp and prodigality of Nature, have in general neither the variety nor beauty which would exist in those of the mountains of Britain if left to themselves. Magnificent walnut trees grow upon the plains of Switzerland and fine trees of that species are found scattered over the hill-sides: birches also grow here and there in luxuriant beauty: but neither these nor oaks are ever a prevailing tree nor



can even be said to be common: and the oaks as far as I had an opportunity of observing are greatly inferior to those of Britain. (104)

Wordsworth consciously devises a descriptive narrative about the exquisiteness of the English plants<sup>92</sup> and the mountains of Lake District. He makes any other natural site look inferior to the English flora. When he suggests that these plants can only be found in England, he promotes an image of nature deriving its uniqueness from the energy of the country in which it is growing. His narrative is intimately close to eco-nationalism, when it represents, in an allegorical way, the soul of the English society. Andrew Hazucha weighs in on Wordsworth's underlying assumption and observes that, for "Wordsworth, the Lake District bioregion - which he construed as subtle, nuanced, and a harmonious blend of diverse features - was the perfect metaphor for the English national character" (63). It is interesting how his nationalistic tone develops nicely in his perception of nature. Unlike Sedgwick and Child, Wordsworth's narrative, does not register the inert irregularities of nature sitting against a backdrop of an environmentally abusive government or mention the wrongs of a constitution that treats its colonial citizens as sub-citizens.

Equally significant, eco-nationalism has a strong presence in Austen's novels. In *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, Englishness or English national identity, is often endorsed by the beauty, order, and elegance of England's nature. Like Wordsworth, Austen mixes the words "England" and "English" and uses it as a metaphor for the English nation and character. Austen's description of Donwell Abbey, the country house in *Emma*, elevates

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<sup>92</sup> For vivid description of the English countryside and its nationalistic value, see Dorothy Wordsworth's *The Grasmere Journal*, in *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, volume / edited by E. de Selincourt, p. 38. For discussions about Austen's nationalism, see Anne Frey's "A Nation without Nationalism: The Reorganization of Feeling in Austen's 'Persuasion,'" pp. 214-34.

its idyllic appeal to a nationalistic state, “It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive.” (292). The English verdure/ English/country house image is a formula representing the nation in an ecologically interconnected manner. Mary Gibson identifies ruralism as central to the intertwining formula of nation and nature, “The suture between home and nation is made by evoking the rural scene; at the same time, the scenes themselves claim implicitly that nature can be identified with nation” (341). This visual ecology is further enhanced when Austen introduces John Knightly, its owner, as a member of, “a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding,”<sup>93</sup> (291) to celebrate the nation through the civility of a prominent English character. Anthony Mandal analyzes Austen connecting the English character with the concept of a nation as a higher vision of Englishness, “Knightley and Donwell are both synecdochic of a larger national conception of Englishness, which itself carries an overtone of provincialism, honesty, and integrity” (26).

In essence, the English authority that damages the environments of the colonies is usually represented in positive ideas of home, nation, and moral values. A life of luxury and affluence afforded to the Englishman is an already established characteristic of successful English government. The citizens enjoy an abundance of freedom, justice, and economic success. The matter that was affirmed repeatedly in Austen’s novels. In *Emma*, Frank Churchill considers going abroad to change his way of life for no apparent reason and Emma accuses him of being sick of “prosperity and indulgence.” This statement makes

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<sup>93</sup> On the topic of Englishness as an identity that characterizes Donwell Abbey and its owner, John Knightley, see Brian Southam’s “Jane Austen’s Englishness: Emma as National Tale,” pp. 195-96.

England emerges as a land of wealth and welfare. Emma sarcastically adds, “Cannot you invent a few hardships for yourself, and be contented to stay (296). Edward Said, in his discussion of England’s imperialism and nationalism, reminds us that these ideas “tend to devalue other worlds and, perhaps more significantly...they do not prevent or inhibit or give resistance to horrendously unattractive imperialist practices”<sup>94</sup> (81). This is particularly true in Wordsworth’s and Austen’s vision as they often tend to ignore the government’s behavior outside England.

While Sedgwick and Child engage in descriptive narratives of imperial ecocide, Austen rhapsodizes England’s prosperity under a sun bright and not too oppressive. Bate refers to this tone as another type of nationalism. He gives it an environmental aspect when he associates Austen’s description of England’s climate with “a long tradition of European thought, which associated a temperate climate with a liberal society and excessive heat with oriental despotism.” This political/climate context is unique to Austen; she derives a national identity from a bright sun that represents England’s political virtue and from rich greenery naturally cultivated by a temperate climate. Bate delves into the Englishness of the verdure and the culture and maintains that “verdure is natural greenness, the product of England’s wet weather,” while locating idyllic agrarianism in English culture or, “mixed farmland” (6), indicating, in the process, that both are crucial for representing a nationalism that germinates from free meadows and ideal ruralism.

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<sup>94</sup> For Said’s discussions about Austen’s subtle handling of imperialism and the early nineteenth century writers, see “Jane Austen and Empire,” *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 80-97.

*Mansfield Park* has its share in narratives of eco-nationalism. Austen weaves a heightened sense of patriotism in the landscape of the Grant's parsonage<sup>95</sup> when she attributes the multiplicity of its plants to the quality of the English soil. Fanny admires the ability of the soil, solid in texture and content, to cultivate plants different in the first rule of existence, "when one thinks of it, how astonishing a variety of nature!—In some countries we know the tree that sheds its leaf is the variety, but that does not make it less amazing, that the same soil and the same sun should nurture plants differing in the first rule and law of their existence." (144) Her perception presents an idyllic national landscape that associates the ecological prowess of both the soil and the sun with the rich variety of the plants: an advantage that makes the greenery of the English countryside superior to that of other countries. Jon Mee unravels the metaphorical underpinning of Fanny's extravagant fondness of the plants and claims that it is her enthusiastic nationalism, "Fanny has a feeling for what she thinks of as distinctive beauties such as the evergreen of the English countryside, which she only praises in comparison to the flora of other countries" (81). However, the thriving greenery of the countryside is the trophy of the imperial ambitions that brought these plants from overseas and planted them in the English soil. In fact, the English vegetation do not flourish because of the richness of the soil, but because of the exotic plants that are brought from the colonized countries. Deidre Shauna Lynch comments on "Austen's sharp-eyed documentation of how nature gets improved...in Northamptonshire." While her knowledge of this development proves her to be "cognizant of how the same enterprise that had, through the eighteenth century, brought roots and

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<sup>95</sup> Large estates are often perceived as extensions of England's imperial ambition. For this topic, see Lynn Voskuil's "Sotherton and the Geography of Empire: The Landscapes of *Mansfield Park*," pp. 591–615.

shoots of the geranium from South Africa to Britain” (713). Austen makes Fanny believe in the Englishness of the verdure as diverse and self-proliferating thus worthy of national acknowledgment. This certainly is emblematic of an eco-nationalistic tone that insists on England’s political and environmental integrity.

To circle back to the void in Sedgwick’s and Child’s eco-nationalism, it is important to consider Barbara Seeber’s counterargument of England’s environmental and political integrity and ponder her suggestion of not aligning Fanny’s celebration of the greenery with a supposedly innocent England. Instead, she wants us to think of England’s imperial policies as not quite distinct from its environmental violence, “Fanny Price’s rejoicing in the evergreen is not to be taken synonymously with ‘Green England,’ but rather in opposition to the nation” (13-14). We may argue that Fanny’s wondering at the disparities of the plants makes a direct reference to what Seeber calls, “England’s imperial might” (13). This might affect the uniqueness and individualism of the English verdure causing its greenery to be idiosyncratic, non-native, and eccentric. By contemplating nature in the age of empire, we are increasingly confronted with an unwavering eco-nationalistic narrative in Austen’s novels. The wealth, the power, and the dominating authority of England reinforce Austen’s attempt to contextualize nature in the national doctrines of her country and weave a unique storyline about the representation of nature in colonial politics.

To summarize, this chapter crosses the ocean and extends the discussion of nature representations beyond England. It considers Child’s *Hobomok* and Sedgwick’s *A New England Tale* as novels equally involved in nature and environmentalism. This transatlantic method speaks to the environmental concern of Anglo-American female authors whose sense of the anthropogenic impact on their environments is recorded in intense narratives

of imperial ecocide and eco-nationalism. Child and Sedgwick are the most relevant authors to Austen because they published their novels in the same time period in which she published hers. Their novels also register environmental exploitations performed by the same system that alters Austen's landscape. England's environmental practices are the common denominator that shapes Child's, Sedgwick's, and Austen's views of a collapsing nature. In this chapter, I am drawing on the biographies, pamphlets, and letters of Sedgwick and Child to gain an insight into the imperial ecocide the way they experience it in their everyday life. What they register is a systemic destruction of New England's wilderness under the resolution of supporting the economic prosperity of England, "the motherland." In so doing, they emphasize aspects of destruction and depletion of their regions and affirm an eco-collapse of the American wilderness.

Sedgwick's and Child's uncertain feelings towards England's political virtue renders their sense of nationalism as deeply ambivalent. The ironies noted in their narratives capture a national pride that struggles with conflicts and dualities. Oftentimes, they describe New England's wilderness as nature of extraordinary beauty but always spoiled by the violence of the Englishman. Their contradicting emotions swerve between their loyalty to the mother land and their dissatisfaction with the changes that take over New England's woods, soil, and wildlife. They take on the difficult task of establishing a uniformity between beautiful nature and a just nation, which they often fail to achieve. Conversely, Austen situates England in the heart of nature and draws on its power to create a solid and consistent narrative of eco-nationalism. The soil, the climate, the country houses, and the male gentry are associated with the term "Englishness," and all established a national identity that elevates England to a status higher than the rest of Europe.

Finally, the Englishman was not the only colonizer of New England; there were indeed many others, and they were collectively called, according to Cronon, “the European colonizers” (6). I am focusing on the English colonizer for the purpose of this chapter and sustains its argument about England as the prompter of the eco-collapse in two worlds: New England and England itself. The impact of England’s imperial practices renders the American wilderness as “nature” slowly converted into English settlements and gradually depleted of its resources, while England’s wealth, capital strengthen, and nationalism thrive. This ironic situation compels authors like Austen, Sedgwick, and Child to narrate the history of their environment as deprived of its normal ecology proving, in the process, that across time and boundaries environmental degradation and imperial domination go hand in hand.

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