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“Radical Overlap of Outrage”  
Oppression and Exploitation in Jane Austen’s Works

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Abstract: "Radical Overlap of Outrage"  
Oppression and Exploitation in Jane Austen's Works

Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* has opened up a channel to *Mansfield Park* for postcolonial critics. *Pride and Prejudice*, written just one year later, can be approached through the same postcolonial lens. As a woman living in nineteenth-century England, Austen was subjected to and consequently rebelled against the unfair restrictions of a patriarchal colonial society. Thus a feminist-postcolonial reading of her work will underscore her critique of English colonial oppression.

George E. Boulukos, Moira Ferguson, John Mee, Ruth Perry, Maaja A. Stewart, and John Wiltshire are a few of the critics who sound off on the issue of colonialism in *Mansfield Park*. Although indicative of the Mansfield judgment of 1772 which many of these critics cite, the title of the novel also conveys the idea of the unyielding patriarchal power which Sir Thomas wields at the Park. Fanny's apprehension about speaking out against her abusers establishes her as what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak dubs the "subaltern." Sir Thomas's silence is indicative of his indomitable patriarchal power which invokes fear in his children and niece. In *Pride and Prejudice*, George Wickham is Austen's means of critiquing the English military which was complicit in the country's mission to colonize and exploit other lands.

Many postcolonial critics quote Jane Fairfax's statement regarding the parallel between the occupation of governesses and the slave trade in *Emma* as proof that Austen condemned the subjugation of women. Austen indeed noticed how English colonialism oppressed and exploited not only its colonies, but also its female subjects. Said's work was important in opening a postcolonial avenue to Austen's work but incomplete in its inattention to gender roles.

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Yet I would venture to say that if one began to look for something like an imperial map of the world in English literature it would turn up with amazing centrality and frequency well before the middle of the nineteenth century. And not only turn up with an inert regularity...but...threaded through, forming a vital part of the texture of linguistic and cultural practice. (Said 100)

Although, according to Edward Said, nineteenth-century British literature is inherently bound to a colonialist program, the messages that these authors convey regarding this program are divergent. Edward Said claimed that a silent moment in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* denoted a guilty English conscience and thus sparked a debate regarding the influence of colonialism on the novel. His essay, however, is also significant because it demonstrates that a postcolonial approach to Austen offers new insights into her agenda -- an approach which can be applied to her other novels such as *Pride and Prejudice*, written just one year before *Mansfield Park*. Postcolonial critics John Mee, Moira Ferguson, and Ruth Perry have responded to Said’s insights on Austen by incorporating a discussion of gender roles during the early nineteenth century which underscores an important aspect of her work which Said omitted. As a woman who was denied any right to own property, Austen associated the ubiquitous oppression of women with the subjugation of English colonists and her message regarding this injustice is apparent in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*. Her personal

experiences revealed to Austen the connection between women and colonists under the English imperial project and this theme of feminine and colonial oppression lies at the heart of Austen's work creating what Susan Fraiman identifies as the "radical overlap of outrage" ("Jane Austen and Edward Said" 813). Austen weaves these ideas into her work in order to critique England's colonialist agenda which was rife with injustice.

A feminist reading of Austen's work which is faithful to the initial concept advocated by first-wave writers such as Virginia Woolf is most applicable to Austen's style – particularly the first wave's emphasis on the unjust inequality of the sexes. Many aspects of Austen's work are strikingly progressive including her criticism of an oppressive patriarchal society. During the nineteenth century in England, women were treated as "second-class citizens" (Altick 57). Only working-class women were allowed to hold jobs and these vocations were viewed as common or vulgar; women in general were not allowed to own property and were thus deprived of wealth and power. Maaja A. Stewart quotes Karl Polanyi's important explanation of this system, "Land, the pivotal element in the feudal order, was the basis of military, judicial, administrative, and political system" (13). Without property, women were entirely dependent on men. Thus, Stewart relates how women relied on marriage as a means of subsistence: "Retirement to a country estate – pictured as an escape from the market economy – constitutes the expected reward for successful trade exchanges or credit speculations. For women, the not-so-hidden name for such successful transactions is marriage" (13). This idea of women's dependence on marriage and thus men is evident in Mrs. Bennet's desire for her five daughters to marry well since Longbourn is entailed to Mr. Collins. Women were commonly viewed as substandard members of Victorian society; Richard

D. Altick explains that "...there was the wider implication that woman was inferior to man in all ways except the unique one that counted most (to man): her femininity. Her place was in the home, on a veritable pedestal if one could be afforded, and emphatically not in the world of affairs" (54). Austen rebels against this idea in novels like *Pride and Prejudice* in which her heroine Elizabeth Bennett is strong-willed, independent, and, in many ways, Mr. Darcy's equal.

Furthermore, the term "colonialism" involves a spectrum of ideas from imperialism to slavery. The theory of postcolonialism, which highlighted the impact of colonialism on its subjects, was not conceived as an intellectual movement until the 1940's and 50's. Postcolonialism originally began as a movement to recognize the plight of underdeveloped countries as well as the struggle for Indian independence. An Arab-American, Edward Said was one of the pioneers of the theory and wrote several books about postcolonialism. Notably, his representation of the Orient as "the Other" and his discussion of power relations between developed and underdeveloped countries have been important to postcolonial studies. To simplify, postcolonialism can be approached in terms of power relations between powerful colonizer and disenfranchised colonist or "Other;" postcolonial studies are thus, "...the slow, painful, and highly complex means of fighting one's way into European-made history" (Gugelberger 1). George E. Boulukos describes the post-colonial approach to a text as "contrapuntal," or in other words, "a method that requires extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded" (364). For example, Said's postcolonial work *Culture and Imperialism* reviewed significant texts from the literary canon and rewrote the silences and gaps which he saw as indicative of English colonialism. To further qualify

the term, colonialism is not to be confused with imperialism which has a different connotation, “[Imperialism] carries with it a history of nationalism, statism, and institutionalized racism and repression that is not coextensive with [colonialism], and that requires its own specific analysis” (Hays 71). Thus, a postcolonial discussion of Austen will revolve around power relationships. England consolidated its colonization of the Caribbean, Canada, Ireland, India and portions of Africa while Austen was writing. In particular, England’s exploitation of the Caribbean sugar crop had a significant impact on the Victorian economy and everyday life. Nineteenth-century England relied heavily on its colonial properties for its economic power.

The theory of postcolonialism has grown increasingly inclusive since Said’s initial work. Other influences on postcolonial theory include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who tied feminist theory to postcolonialism. She coined the term “subaltern” based on the work of Antonio Gramsci to denote the disenfranchised. More recently, Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of the “mimic man” is tied to Jacques Derrida’s idea of *différance* and revolves around interactions between different cultures. Postcolonialism is now linked to a variety of literary theories which include issues of race, class, gender, and even sexuality; thus, the doubly-oppressed woman who Spivak recognizes is relevant to Austen. Although Said contends that Austen omits colonialism through silence, Austen was actually writing to draw attention to colonial oppression – she was not silencing the plight of Caribbean colonists but rather drawing connections between the unfair treatment of women and England’s colonial subjects. The topic was not omitted from Austen’s work, but was presented in a subtly subversive manner through

her ironic narration. Therefore, the disenfranchisement of women is also significant to a postcolonial approach to Austen's work.

Said's "Jane Austen and Empire" has generated a variety of reactions from critics on the topic of colonialism in *Mansfield Park*. Said's reading, supported by later scholars including Ferguson, Perry, and Clara Tuite focuses on Fanny Price and a pregnant silence which Said reads as an acknowledgement of guilt on Sir Thomas's part for his complicity in the slave trade. Ferguson and Perry see Fanny as saleable property while Tuite, like Said, regards Fanny as an indentured servant to the Bertrams. When she arrives at Mansfield, Fanny is placed in the room next to the governess and is constantly relied upon to carry messages and go on errands, which establishes her in a servile role (*Mansfield Park* 8, 74, 211).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Fanny is deported to Mansfield as so much property (*MP* 10). Said describes Fanny as a "transported commodity" and her mother does, in fact, send her off "thankfully" (Said 106; Austen *MP* 9).<sup>2</sup> Moira Ferguson argues that it is Mrs. Norris's "need to appear charitable" that drives the exportation of Fanny but Austen makes it clear that it is Mrs. Price's surplus of children that compels her to send one of her own from her home (*MP* 3). Mrs. Price is thus implicated as the trader of human flesh instead of Mrs. Norris. As Stewart points out, Fanny's surname is evocative of the market place and Fanny is initially established as a commodity bereft of any family interest. Additionally, Stewart notes that Fanny's first name is a reference to the "derriere" and also the Renaissance word for "whore" which would further implicate her as a pathetic character (17).

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<sup>1</sup> *Mansfield Park* will hereafter be abbreviated *MP*.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Perry describes Fanny as being "torn from her family" (100).

Said's discussion is incomplete without a reference to the politics of gender in colonial England which Ferguson, Tuite, Perry, and Susan Fraiman have correctly identified. Correcting his oversight, Perry writes, "Because Said is unable to imagine the dependent status of women, despite his use of terms like 'gender' and 'feminism,' he does not notice that in all the late novels colonialism is associated with women" ("Austen and Empire" 100). Diane Capitani supports this reading by noting that according to Said, "Colonizing 'softens' and makes womanly" thus linking the colonized directly to the nineteenth-century British woman (6). Fanny Price's oppression is just one method which Austen utilizes to tie the dangers of English colonialism to women.

In their discussions of Austen, postcolonial critics primarily have concentrated on *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* because both texts make reference to British colonial properties. Kuldip Kaur Kuwahara and Ruth Perry note the association between Mrs. Smith and Antigua and the widow's apparent powerlessness in *Persuasion*. Austen, however, did not gloss over British colonialism by casually referring to British colonial properties, but addressed it directly through her ironic narration. Although *Pride and Prejudice* has been overlooked by postcolonial critics, it incorporates the same themes of unjust oppression and exploitation which are evident in *Mansfield Park*. Although the tone and characters in the novels are very different, both works tackle the same ideas. The characters in the two novels are the key to Austen's message regarding her indignation over the unjust domination of women which echoes England's colonialist agenda.

Some postcolonial critics have agreed with Said's accusation that Austen condoned or even aided English colonialism. Tuite, Perry, and Kuwahara argue that Austen conveys a nationalist agenda in the novel. Tuite sees Austen's gender as further implicating her in England's colonial enterprise rather than distancing or even turning her against her own country. Mee indicts Austen as a "female patriot" insofar as she believed that women should be recognized as part of the nation and not viewed as slaves. In contrast to those critics who support Said's reading of Austen, Boulukos takes a historical approach in debunking Said's argument via the topic of amelioration – a stance which he claims Austen would have advocated and which exonerates her of any indifference toward England's colonialist agenda. Capitani also stakes out middle ground arguing that Austen was neutral about colonialism. However, Laura Mooneyham White and Perry correctly recognize Austen's use of slavery as a trope for female oppression and Austen's concern with the subjugation of English women. As Susan Kneeder notes, "Austen is usually dubbed simultaneously subversive and reactionary" (155). In her typically ironic style, Austen sought a subtle route in attacking English colonialism.<sup>3</sup> Citing Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, John Wiltshire points out, "The parallel between women as commodities and the position of slaves was in fact commonplace in the era of *Mansfield Park*" ("Decolonizing" 308). More recently, critic Eileen Cleere has devoted an entire essay to a discussion of the Bertram girls and Fanny Price as commodities. Rather than condoning colonization or even encouraging it, Austen exposed the folly of England's colonial enterprise in *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice* through her ironic narration. Since, according

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<sup>3</sup> John Wiltshire also notes Austen's irony.

to John Breihan and Clive Caplan, women in nineteenth-century polite society typically did not comment on public affairs, not even in writing, Austen reverted to a subversive narration to convey her resentment regarding the oppression of women. As a single, English woman, Austen herself was subject to the hypocrisies of her society. She was dependent on her brothers' charity and limited in her prospects to earn a wage to support herself and her sister – aside from writing, Edward Copeland claims that only two occupations were available to women of a certain class: governess or companion to a lady. Both were viewed as undesirable (39). Thus, Austen's writing was the vehicle in which she portrayed the limited options for women to earn their own income and highlighted their exploitation in patriarchal English society.

Edward Said rightly noted the significant silence in the parlor upon Sir Thomas's return, but he misconstrued this silence to refer to the plantation owner's guilt regarding the slaves who worked on his Antiguan plantation. The silence in this scene actually indicates Sir Thomas's oppressive reign at Mansfield. Ferguson, Tuite, and Christopher Flynn associate the silence with Sir Thomas while Boulukos and Mee attribute it to the Bertram children and Wiltshire ascribes the silence to Austen's artful writing. Tuite actually argues that Fanny rescues Sir Thomas by remaining silent herself. Fraiman, however, accurately attributes the silence to the brutality at Mansfield, contending that, "...Austen deliberately invokes the dumbness of Mansfield Park concerning its own barbarity precisely because she means to rebuke it. The barbarity she has in mind is not literal slavery in the West Indies but a paternal practice she depicts as possibly analogous to it: Sir Thomas's bid...to put female flesh on the auction block" ("Jane Austen and Edward Said" 812). Despite what other critics have argued, the instant of

silence following Fanny's question regarding the slave trade is actually indicative of Sir Thomas's misogynistic oppression. Fanny's fear of Sir Thomas is highlighted throughout the novel – Fanny is terrified at Edmund's benign mention of her uncle (*MP* 15). When she learns that Sir Thomas has returned from Antigua “She was nearly fainting: all her former habitual dread of her uncle was returning” (*MP* 181). Aside from the instance Said notes, there are actually two additional silences upon Sir Thomas's return: one following his communication regarding his adventures abroad and another when he leaves to discover the “theater” which has been built in his billiard room. Austen utilizes these silences to convey Sir Thomas's indomitable patriarchal power. In fact, the final silence is the most ominous of all: “He was gone before any thing had been said to prepare him for the change he must find [in the billiard room]; and a pause of alarm followed his disappearance” (*MP* 187). This scene clearly conveys the paternal power which Sir Thomas wields as proven by his children's fear of his displeasure.

Postcolonial critics have proposed that Austen was an abolitionist; largely based on the title of her novel, *Mansfield Park*. Ferguson, Flynn, Mee, and Perry cite Lord Mansfield's judgment of 1772 which prohibited slavery on English soil as irrefutable evidence of Austen's belief in the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>4</sup> The title of the novel, however, is important in understanding Austen's association of women and colonists – the title is not only a reference to the Mansfield judgment, but is also indicative of patriarchal power. Maaja Stewart describes the property as, “...the patriarchal

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<sup>4</sup> John Wiltshire hypothesizes that the title is actually a reference to Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* which he claims Austen would have known thoroughly. The widower uncle in the novel meets a Lady Mansfield and stays at Mansfield-house.

Mansfield Park, with its exclusive fields of men” (17). Clearly, Austen was reinforcing Fanny and the other Bertram women’s domination at the hands of the authoritative Sir Thomas who was also a colonial landowner. The title of the novel recognizes the inherent subordination of the women who reside there whom Austen ties to the disempowered colonist.

Austen utilizes her notoriously happy endings in order to reward characters who refuse to participate in colonial oppression and cast out those who have been corrupted by a desire to exploit or subjugate another.<sup>5</sup> Austen’s heroine Elizabeth Bennet repeatedly resists attempts by other characters to oppress her. As Paula Marantz Cohen explains, “In *Pride and Prejudice* we are presented with an entirely different context of behavior and set of expectations for the heroine. Elizabeth Bennett is her father’s closest companion and the moral center of her family; she is at home with opinions and comfortable making judgments about character” (*Pride and Prejudice* 226).<sup>6</sup> When she is snubbed by Mr. Darcy at the Netherfield ball she quickly retells the story “for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous” thus inverting Darcy’s rejection and demonstrating her resistance to oppression (*P&P* 9). Her strength of body and mind is particularly apparent when she treks three miles to see the ailing Jane at Pemberly – the mud and surprised faces of the residents of the house were nothing to her: “Elizabeth was convinced that they held her in contempt for it” (*P&P* 23). Their poorly hidden disdain, however, is of no consequence to the heroine who is anxious to nurse her sister. When the austere, intimidating Lady Catherine demands that

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<sup>5</sup> Marcia McClintock-Folsom writes, “A love story with the happy ending of desire fulfilled and legitimized in marriage is, for many [students] the quintessential novel” (8).

<sup>6</sup> *Pride and Prejudice* will hereafter be abbreviated *P&P*.

she refrain from marrying Darcy, Elizabeth has the audacity to respond, “Neither duty, nor honour, nor gratitude...have any possible claim on me, in the present instance. No principle of either, would be violated by my marriage with Mr. Darcy” (*P&P* 234).

This is particularly bold considering that Lady Catherine is a member of the aristocracy and – although Mr. Bennet is a gentleman – Elizabeth’s mother is merely the daughter of a lawyer and Elizabeth is entitled to a paltry fortune of one thousand pounds. Elizabeth is thus breaking the social hierarchy in speaking in such a brash manner to Lady Catherine. Austen conveys the message that a woman of Elizabeth’s character is invaluable to her; Elizabeth has won the affections of an important, wealthy man and she is able to think and speak for herself -- all without being overly handsome. Edward Copeland writes, “Among all Austen’s fictional heroes, Darcy is the wealthiest, and among the heroines, Elizabeth is potentially one of the most impoverished” (45). Feminine intelligence, humor, and strength are thus implied to be valuable to Austen. In return, Elizabeth earns a husband who is her intellectual and moral equal and who treats her as such. Elizabeth’s happy ending indicates that a marriage of equals – unfettered by issues of wealth or social status and which values women – is Austen’s new ideal for colonial England.

Although Mr. Darcy wins Elizabeth over, it is not without a metamorphosis of his own. In fact, Austen indicts his belief that Elizabeth will accept his proposal because of his wealth and social status with the heroine’s refusal of Darcy’s proposal. As Cohen writes, “It is Darcy, therefore, whose education is the focus of the novel, and it is Elizabeth who is in the best position to educate him” (226). The narration of his proposal smacks of arrogant entitlement:

He spoke well, but there were feelings beside those of the heart to be detailed, and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority – of its being a degradation – of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit. (*P&P* 125)

Mr. Darcy's condescension is absolutely intolerable; his feelings of superiority to Elizabeth are exactly what Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris, and three of the Bertram siblings felt toward their cousin and Austen shows any such superciliousness to be abominable. Darcy, like Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris, must learn to respect women.

Darcy's transformation is complete as noted not only by Elizabeth's acceptance of his proposal, but also by his own confession of his wrongs. His admission of his own imperfections is a testament to his improved character: "What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased" (*P&P* 241). Here is a relationship of true equity in which each partner can learn from the other. That such a match between people of different social classes is seemingly incredible is of no matter – affection and true compatibility are more important than wealth and power to Austen. *Pride and Prejudice* is a testament to the importance of equality and the very absence of oppression lends the novel a positive tone.

Austen begins her critique of colonial absenteeism in Mr. Bennet, the patriarch of *Pride and Prejudice*. Far from a paragon of fatherhood, Mr. Bennet's desire for

privacy from the ridiculous Mrs. Bennet results in the neglect of his daughters' upbringing and – ultimately – near-destruction of their family name when Lydia elopes. Mr. Bennet, although physically present at Longbourn in that he spends his days reading in the family library, is emotionally absent in daily family life and thus plays the role of the colonial absentee landowner in spirit. Albeit his desire for solitude is understandable to anyone familiar with Mrs. Bennet's character, Austen utilizes Mr. Bennet to convey the notion that a father who is emotionally disengaged from his family is just as guilty of bad parenting as those who rule their home with oppression and fear. Throughout the novel, Mr. Bennet is rarely sought for – and hardly ever seriously gives – his guidance. Aside from granting Bingley and Darcy his daughters' hands, briefly attempting to hunt down Lydia and Wickham, and intervening on Elizabeth's part when Mrs. Bennet encourages her to accept Mr. Collins, Mr. Bennet remains an elusive figure in *Pride and Prejudice* (P&P 246, 225, 178, 76). His effort to find Lydia and Wickham, in particular, serves more to highlight his impotence than to restore him as an authoritative patriarch. It is significant that Darcy is more effective in locating and uniting Lydia and Wickham due to his connections, money, and motivations and his success in this pursuit establishes him as a powerful male figure. After Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth, Mr. Bennet declares, "Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*" (P&P 76; original emphasis). Although his pronouncement is enough to make the reader smile along with Elizabeth, Mr. Bennet's wit does not compensate for his detachment in his daughters' upbringing. If Mr. Bennet had been more involved in familial life he might have prevented Lydia's shameful

elopement. Austen shows that Mr. Bennet's emotional absenteeism is just as dangerous to the upbringing of the Bennet girls as physical absenteeism will be in *Mansfield Park*.

*Pride and Prejudice's* Mrs. Bennet attempts to oversee Longbourn for the emotionally absent Mr. Bennet much as Mrs. Norris does Sir Thomas at Mansfield. Instead of promoting a match, however, Mrs. Bennet's ridiculous conduct almost destroys the two favorable attachments which her daughters have made. Her inability to judge character accurately and her attempts to exert power are clearly displayed when she tries to force Elizabeth to accept Mr. Collins: "She is a very headstrong foolish girl, and does not know her own interest; but I will *make* her know it" (*P&P* 75). Luckily, Elizabeth is too intelligent – and Mr. Bennet similarly so – to concede the point. Although promoting matches for her five daughters appears to be the primary motivation for the majority of her actions, her unchecked tongue actually deters suitors such as Darcy (*P&P* 125). She buys into the long-established societal values in which women were expected to marry for money and her love for her sons-in-law is equal to their fortunes – as the narrator notes, although she originally despised Darcy, her affection for him at the end of the novel is comical in that it is clearly won by his fortune (*P&P* 10 and 247). Along the same lines, her love for her daughters is equal to their value on the marriage market. She favors Jane because she is beautiful; this is particularly obvious after Jane's engagement to Mr. Bingley is secured: "Oh! my dear, dear Jane, I am so happy! I am sure you could not be so beautiful for nothing!" (*P&P* 227). Elizabeth was not a great beauty and was thus less valuable to Mrs. Bennet; Austen's narrator writes "Elizabeth was the least dear to her of all her children; and...[Mr. Collins] and the match were quite good enough for *her*" (*P&P* 71). Mrs. Bennet is more interested in

selling off a daughter whom she saw as having little potential in securing a wealthy, attractive suitor than in obtaining that daughter's happiness as a traditionally caring, maternal figure naturally would. That Elizabeth becomes Mrs. Bennet's "dear Lizzy" after her daughter announces her engagement to Mr. Darcy and his fortune of ten thousand pounds a year demonstrates that Mrs. Bennet's affection hinges on her daughters' success in marriage (*P&P* 247). Much like Jane, Lydia becomes more precious to her mother after her wedding to Wickham. Mrs. Bennet's disappointment in the disgrace of the elopement disintegrates upon hearing the news of their nuptials:

"How I long to see her! and to see dear Wickham too! But the clothes, the wedding clothes! I will write to my sister Gardiner about them directly. Lizzy, my dear, run down to your father, and ask him how much he will give her. Stay, stay, I will go myself. Ring the bell, Kitty, for Hill. I will put on my things in a moment. My dear, dear Lydia! – How merry we shall be together when we meet!" (*P&P* 198-99).

Austen utilizes Mrs. Bennet to convey the dangers of accepting English colonial values which limited women's prospects for success to the men they married. Mrs. Bennet is portrayed as manipulative and vulgar in her attempts to market her daughters and is thus fated to be one of Austen's most dislikable characters.

Unlike the aggressive Mrs. Bennet and the lively Elizabeth Bennet, Austen's heroine Fanny Price passively resigns herself to her subservient role at Mansfield and is concomitantly cast as a tragically comic character because she allows herself to be subjected by her aunt, uncle, and even her cousins. From the first she is established as an outsider at Mansfield and never speaks out against the abuses leveled at her (*MP* 9

and 73). Fanny is what Selden et al would call a “subaltern,” “those of inferior rank without class consciousness...this colonized non-elite, in Spivak’s usage, cannot speak” (224). Fanny preserves her silence despite years of scorn from her cousins and her aunt Norris (*MP* 12 and 81). For example, after Mrs. Norris berates her for her arrogance in accepting a dinner invitation to the parsonage – which Sir Thomas encouraged Fanny to do – Fanny does not even attempt to argue with her aunt: “Mrs. Norris had now so ingeniously done away all Mrs. Grant’s part of the favour, that Fanny, who found herself expected to speak, could only say that she was very much obliged to her aunt Bertram for sparing her, and that she was endeavoring to put her aunt’s evening work in such a state as to prevent her being missed” (*MP* 227). The character of Fanny Price is Austen’s means of conveying the idea of the disenfranchised subaltern.

Postcolonial critics have almost uniformly argued that Fanny occupies a subservient role at Mansfield. Cleere casts her as a replacement for the governess Miss Lee; Fanny is also a companion to Lady Bertram who “cannot do without her” (which she alleges ad nauseam) (*MP* 78 and 225). Fanny plays a role which critics such as Boulukos and Ferguson have dubbed the “grateful slave” or “grateful negro” respectively (Boulukos 362, Ferguson 124). Said calls her an “indentured servant” and truly that title is fitting because it implies that Fanny must repay a debt – similar to the one that Boulukos alleges the English thought was owed to them by their colonists (Said 106, Boulukos 363). Fanny’s subjugation to all of the residents of Mansfield is highlighted throughout the book: “Fanny was up in a moment, expecting some errand, for the habit of employing her in that way was not yet overcome, in spite of all that Edmund could do” (*MP* 151). Fanny feels her obligation to her relatives too deeply;

Capitani writes, “The novel is full of references to gratitude and acceptance; Fanny...finds ingratitude a terrible crime” (6). Indeed, Sir Thomas uses this against Fanny when trying to force her to marry Henry Crawford, since he knows that such an accusation will hit home with his niece because she has always shown her appreciation through her service to the Bertrams and never spoken out against the abuse of Mrs. Norris (*MP* 329). Even her aunt Norris uses it against her when she refuses to play a part in *Lovers’ Vows*: “I am not going to urge her,” – replied Mrs. Norris sharply, ‘but I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her aunt and cousins wish her – very ungrateful indeed, considering who and what she is’” (*MP* 153). This acerbic speech is particularly harsh because Mrs. Norris alludes to Fanny’s lower socioeconomic status in addition to charging her as ungrateful. Fanny is somewhat complicit in this subjugation in that she mostly remains silently during these attacks. Her refusal to play a role in *Lovers’ Vows* as well as her rebuff of Henry Crawford are the only two moments in which she actually speaks out against her aunt and uncle (*MP* 152 and 325). These two instances, however, are not sufficient to remove her from her role as subaltern.

Although Fanny does refuse to marry Henry Crawford when her uncle attempts to persuade her to accept him, her refusal is so pathetic that she remains relatively disenfranchised. Her rejection of Crawford’s offer is emotional but brief and she quickly loses her momentum:

“You are mistaken, Sir,” – cried Fanny, forced by the anxiety of the moment even to tell her uncle that he was wrong – “You are quite mistaken. How could Mr. Crawford say such a thing? I gave him no

encouragement yesterday - On the contrary, I told him – I cannot recollect my exact words – but I am sure I told him that I would not listen to him, that it was very unpleasant to me in every respect, and that I begged him never to talk to me in that manner again. – I am sure I said as much as that and more; and I should have said still more, - if I had been quite certain of his meaning anything seriously, but I did not like to be – I could not bear to be – imputing more than might be intended. I thought it might all pass for nothing with *him*.”

She could say no more; her breath was almost gone...

“This requires explanation. Young as you are, and having seen scarcely any one, it is hardly possible that your affections –“

He paused and eyed her fixedly. He saw her lips formed into a *no*, though the sound was inarticulate, but her face was like scarlet. (*MP* 324-26)

Although her ability to judge character compels her to refuse Henry Crawford and thus displease her uncle, Fanny does not lose her status as disenfranchised Other. She is barely able to voice her refusal and the end of the interview is marked by her voice giving out completely. Her strength similarly leaves her: “In about a quarter of an hour her uncle returned; she was almost ready to faint at the sight of him” (*MP* 331). Fanny accepts her oppression except in the most extreme cases and thus is cast as a pathetic character. Fanny is the vehicle of Austen’s message not only regarding colonialism as an oppressively evil force, but also to convey the idea that those who allow themselves to be subjugated will only enable the cycle to continue.

Edmund Bertram is guilty of “colonizing” Fanny in that he attempts to shape every aspect of her character. Austen writes, “Having formed her mind and gained her affections, he had a good chance of her thinking like him” (*MP* 66). In directing her studies and pursuits (such as horseback riding), Edmund indeed was guilty of forming her in his own image as so many English colonialists were known to do with the people inhabiting their property. Seldon et al write, “For [Homi K.] Bhabha, the ‘rich text’ of the civilizing mission is remarkably split, fissured and flawed. The project of domesticating and civilizing indigenous populations is founded on ideas of repetition, imitation, and resemblance...a project that produces colonial subjects which are ‘*almost the same but not quite*’ (and later, ‘*almost the same but not white*’)” (227; original emphasis). Edmund teaches Fanny on academic subjects such as astronomy and he even directs her reading (*MP* 118 and 21). Although Edmund is Fanny’s most vocal advocate – such as when he procures a horse for Fanny and includes her in the plans to go to Sotherton -- Austen shows that he is complicit in England’s colonial mission through taking it upon himself to improve Fanny (*MP* 35 and 80). This complicity is particularly clear at the end of the novel when Edmund gives her a golden chain, a symbol of enslavement. Mee elaborates, “In *Mansfield Park*, black slavery functions, like Fanny’s gold chain, as a metaphor for female enslavement in Sir Thomas’s household” (85). That Henry Crawford also manages to give Fanny a chain further incriminates Edmund as Henry Crawford has already declared his intentions to enslave Fanny:

“No I will not do her any harm, dear little soul! I only want her to look kindly on me, to give me smiles as well as blushes, to keep a chair for me by herself wherever we are, and be all animation when I take it and talk

to her; *to think as I think*, be interested in all my possessions and pleasures, try to keep me longer at Mansfield and feel when I go away that she shall be never happy again. I want nothing more.” (MP 238; emphasis added)

Edmund is just as guilty as Henry Crawford of colonizing Fanny and shaping her in his own image.

Sir Thomas, unlike the passive Mr. Bennet, is guilty of actively oppressing members of his household. Various postcolonial critics, such as Boulukos, Mee, Tuite, and Ferguson, have placed Sir Thomas in the role of the stereotypical English plantation owner. At best, Boulukos credits Sir Thomas as a heroic, generous landowner who was enthusiastic about his Antiguan property and ameliorating the conditions of the slaves who Boulukos alleges would have worked there. Tuite concedes that Austen subtly critiques Sir Thomas as a West Indian planter but that he is reformed – an argument that Mee supports. Mee and Ferguson are perhaps Sir Thomas’s worst critics – they cite him as cold and indifferent to his family. Mee goes so far as to argue that his physical and emotional absenteeism led to the eventual elopements of Maria and Julia. Sir Thomas’s role as West Indian landowner is undeniable; what is also significant are his oppressive rule of Mansfield Park, his emotional and physical absenteeism, and his eventual reformation. As Ferguson rightly observes, “Sir Thomas’ behaviour on both sides of the Atlantic signals a plantocratic mode of behaviour. Through the trope of his journey to Antigua, his long absence, and his sparing commentary about his experiences when he returns, Austen stresses his planter-like detachment from humanity, or his playing down of the facts, or both” (126). Diane Capitani supports this argument by arguing that

the novel is a “mini-view of life on a slave-run plantation, where humane and Christian values are compromised by worldliness” (5). Sir Thomas runs his home in an oppressive, business-like manner which would support a reading of his character as a colonial plantation owner.

One of Sir Thomas’s worst crimes against his family is his absenteeism during which Mrs. Norris steps in to manage his household. Stewart supports this argument, claiming that “Austen also uses absenteeism to underscore the patriarch’s moral failure” (115). The notion of the absentee plantation owner was a common one during the early 1800’s. Not wanting to make the long, dangerous trip to the West Indies and face the dangers of Yellow fever and other Caribbean illnesses, many plantation owners chose to operate their properties in the West Indies via communications with a resident planter who was designated to oversee the plantation in his absence (Capitani 3). When it becomes necessary for Sir Thomas to travel to Antigua, he takes with him his strict paternal code and leaves the malevolent Mrs. Norris in control of Mansfield.

If Sir Thomas is the colonial landowner, Mrs. Norris becomes the cruel overseer of Mansfield Park in his absence. The dangers of such a “sadistic overseer” – as Ferguson dubs her – are apparent. Ferguson writes:

Power relations within the community of Mansfield Park reenact and refashion plantocratic paradigms; those who work for Sir Thomas and his entourage both at home and abroad are locked into hierarchal abusive patterns of behavior, though under widely different circumstances. The cruel officiousness of protagonist Fanny Price’s aunt, Mrs. Norris, who is effectively Sir Thomas’ overseer and lives in the suggestively named

white house 'across the park' from the Great House underlines his  
 plantocratic style of administration. (121)

Both Ferguson and Perry note that Mrs. Norris's surname is evocative of "a particularly duplicitous pro-slavery advocate described at length in Clarkson's *History of Abolition*, which Austen read" (Perry "Austen and Empire" 99). In his absence, Mrs. Norris approves the production of *Lovers' Vows*, encourages the match between Maria and the pathetic Mr. Rushworth, and abuses Fanny more than ever (*MP* 135, 38, 73). Boulukos notes that plantation owners tended to be more empathetic toward those working on their property: "Also important to understanding the context of slavery in *Mansfield park* was the belief that upper-class absentee plantation owners would ameliorate their slaves' condition simply by putting their humane views to work by directly supervising their overseers, who were often depicted as lower-class ruffians" (367). Mrs. Norris, the "overseer" in this scenario, increases her abuse of Fanny in Sir Thomas's absence. For example, her speech to Fanny in which she reminds her of "who and what" she was draws astonishment even from Mary Crawford (*MP* 151). Sir Thomas's absenteeism thus can be seen as introducing Mrs. Norris to an undue amount of power at Mansfield which she utilizes to nearly destroy the Bertram home. Her role as abusive overseer is thrown into particular relief when Fanny is invited to dine at the parsonage; her speech to her niece clearly portrays the idea that she expected obedience and conformity from those whom she supervised:

"Upon my word, Fanny, you are in high luck to meet with such attention and indulgence! You ought to be very much obliged to Mrs. Grant for thinking of you, and to your aunt for letting you go, and you ought to

look upon it as something extraordinary: for I hope you are aware that there is no real occasion for your going into company in this sort of way, or ever dining out at all; and it is what you must not depend upon ever being repeated. Nor must you be fancying, that the invitation is meant as any particular compliment to *you*; the compliment is intended to your uncle and aunt, and me. Mrs. Grant thinks it a civility due to *us* to take a little notice of you, or else it would never have come into her head, and you may be very certain, that if your cousin Julia had been at home, you would not have been asked at all.” (226-27)

Mrs. Norris clearly takes it upon herself to ensure that Fanny understands her role in the social hierarchy and that she maintains her place in it. This speech, along with her forcing Fanny to “tack on her patterns,” run messages to Nanny, and pick roses from the garden until she is ill, reinforce her role as a more aggressive, brutal version of Sir Thomas (*MP* 23, 333, 73). Mrs. Norris continues to exercise considerable power at the Park even after Sir Thomas’s return. Sir Thomas eventually recognizes that her poor judgment has contributed to his family’s near destruction and he effectually fires her due to this mismanagement and she is banished from the happy family circle at Mansfield (487). Austen writes, “That Julia escaped better than Maria was owing, in some measure, to a favourable difference of disposition and circumstance, but in a greater to her having been less the darling of that very aunt, less flattered, and less spoilt” (*MP* 487-88). Such a condemnation from Austen’s narrator, in addition to Mrs. Norris’s exile at the end of the novel, proves that any person who attempts to oppress another will bring about his/her own destruction.

Sir Thomas's restrictive domestic management is first highlighted by his departure from Mansfield Park. Even the grateful Fanny Price is relieved by his absence: "...they felt themselves immediately at their own disposal, and to have every indulgence within their reach" (*MP* 32). Just as his departure brings relief, his return brings with it a corresponding dread of his domineering management. Although the guilty Bertram children fear his discovery of their playhouse – for them it is "a moment of absolute horror" -- his return also signals a tightening of the family circle which is now cut off from visiting outside of the home or receiving visitors at Mansfield (179). Austen writes, "Under his government, Mansfield was an altered place. Some members of their society sent away and the spirits of many other saddened, it was all sameness and gloom, compared with the past; a somber family-party rarely enlivened" (*MP* 201). Even responsible, obedient Edmund decries this change – albeit partly due to his infatuation with Mary Crawford (*MP* 202). Maria also feels this most severely, since "Independence was more needful than ever; the want of it at Mansfield more sensibly felt. She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed" (*MP* 208). Everything about Sir Thomas's reign at Mansfield bespeaks oppression and restriction.

Additionally, when Sir Thomas returns from Antigua his interest in his niece increases because she has grown into a beautiful young woman who is ready for marriage. Sir Thomas now sees her as marketable and thus invests more of his interest in her. Edmund conveys this idea when he tells Fanny:

...but the truth is, that your uncle never did admire you till now – and now he does. Your complexion is so improved! – and you have gained

so much countenance! – and your figure – Nay, Fanny, do not turn away about it – it is but an uncle. If you cannot bear an uncle’s admiration what is to become of you? You must really begin to harden yourself to the idea of being worth looking at. – You must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman. (*MP* 203)

Cleere supports this reading and even notes a more menacing aspect in Sir Thomas’s attention to Fanny at the ball he throws in her honor (*MP* 285). Cleere quotes an important explanation from Joseph Litvak who writes:

Sir Thomas’s machinations take on a sinister kind of theatricality, as by “displaying Fanny in the role of the obedient young woman, Sir Thomas in effect concocts, for Henry’s [Crawford] benefit, a preview of an invitation to the marriage he seeks to bring about”...Sir Thomas converts his theater into a peep show and stages Fanny as a sexual spectacle. (125)

Although there is no overt sexuality in this scene as Cleere argues, Sir Thomas is certainly trying to show off Fanny’s attributes – as Austen’s narrator states, “he might mean to recommend her as a wife by shewing her persuadableness” (*MP* 291).

Sir Thomas’s oppression of Fanny appears almost violent when he attempts to persuade Fanny to marry Mr. Crawford. John Mee echoes this sentiment and Stewart confirms that “In this part of the novel Austen represents Sir Thomas’s authority as arbitrary and morally suspect” (112). Sir Thomas’s speech reveals a malignant side to his character:

“For I *had*, Fanny, as I think my behavior must have shewn, formed a very favourable opinion of you from the period of my return to England.

I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond common offence. But you have now shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you..." (MP 328)

The charges he levels against Fanny are those of ingratitude and conscious disobedience – accusations which would reinforce Fanny in her role as “grateful slave” and Sir Thomas as plantation owner.

When Sir Thomas accepts Fanny as a pseudo-daughter at the end of the novel, his character changes from one bent on marketing his niece to one that appreciates her honesty and virtue. Kuwahara writes that characters such as Fanny Price “...make a strong, silent commentary on moral questions” (“Jane Austen’s *Emma* and Empire” 2). In her meek, submissive way, she shows Sir Thomas that he has been wrong in his attempts to oppress and exploit her – particularly in her accurate assessment of Henry Crawford’s character which Sir Thomas had misjudged. Sir Thomas’s improvement is a moral one and Fanny is the most ethically stable of the characters in the novel. It is only Fanny, the impeccably honest and upright servant-daughter, who can truly reform her oppressive uncle. The final pages of *Mansfield Park* show Sir Thomas displaying a heartfelt fondness for her; “Fanny was indeed the daughter he wanted...on really knowing each other, their mutual attachment became very strong. After settling her at Thornton Lacey with every kind attention to her comfort, the object of almost every day

was to see her there, or to get her away from it” (*MP* 494). Fanny defends herself against her uncle only once, but it is this instance which proves her reliability and good judgment and wins Sir Thomas over. Their new intimacy replaces the oppressive uncle with a caring, affectionate father.

Austen also condemns Henry Crawford’s conquests because he preys on women’s affections to stoke his own ego. Austen utilizes his facetious seduction of Fanny Price to convey that men should not attempt to manipulate human emotions. Crawford has the gall to pursue three different women in the novel – it is evident in all three cases that his feelings for them are not genuine. His sister, Mary, is perfectly aware of his intentions toward women, saying coldly, “If your Miss Bertrams do not like to have their hearts broke, let them avoid Henry” (*MP* 43). He is so openly flirtatious with the two Bertram sisters that a debate actually arises between Edmund and Fanny as to which sister he is truly interested in – the answer, however, is neither (*MP* 121). His pursuit of Fanny begins as a challenge for Crawford: “Her looks say, ‘I will not like you, I am determined not to like you,’ and I say, she shall” (*MP* 238). His final estrangement from Fanny and Mansfield is a great blow to Crawford and his self-destruction – brought about by his elopement with Maria -- is his punishment for his manipulation of women (*MP* 457). Austen’s narrator describes his remorse at losing Fanny:

...we may fairly consider a man of sense like Henry Crawford, to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret – vexation that must rise sometimes to self-reproach, and regret to wretchedness – in having so requited hospitality, so injured family peace, so forfeited his

best, most estimable and endeared acquaintance, and so lost the woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved. (491)

The loss of Fanny is truly a disappointment to Crawford.

Austen portrays this idea even more clearly in the character of George Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*. Wickham seduced women in order to exploit either their fortunes or their sexuality. Wickham's aggressive pursuit of wealthy women smacks of the kind of colonial agenda that drove Britain's military efforts to seize other nations' lucrative colonies.<sup>7</sup> Lynda A. Hall describes Wickham as one of several "attractive rogues" in Austen's novels; she writes, "Wickham's selfishness can be seen most clearly through money. He is the gambler – the man who can be bought. Every move he has made in his life can be traced to the shilling or the pound" (188). Indeed, Wickham's career in the militia is indicative of his licentious character. Local militias were usually manned by men seeking income, according to Linda Colley (300). Service in the militia was viewed as a respectable occupation and a privilege because these men were guaranteed domestic service and would not have to face dangers abroad in the Napoleonic campaign where men faced bloody battles as well as dysentery and other illnesses (Breihan 18, Rothenberg *The Art of Warfare* 237). His move into the regulars thus further implicates Wickham in England's colonial mission, which was expanding at the time. Although each county typically ordered its own regiment, once this regiment was "embodied" the militia would travel to another part of England to defend that area against threats from the French or put down domestic uprisings (Breihan 18). Thus,

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Perry calculates that four-fifths of England's colonial investments came from the West Indies. Diane Capitani writes, "France and England fought each other for control of the West Indian islands for much of the eighteenth century because the plantation islands of this area created wealth for large numbers of absentee planters" (3).

Wickham could secure an income while escaping the reputation he had likely left behind him in Derbyshire. Also, when the men were in their winter quarters, the soldiers were so scattered among various livery stables, inns, and beer, wine and coffee houses that they typically were unable to train and therefore had a great deal of leisure time – thus leaving Wickham with time to gamble and seduce a sufficiently wealthy woman (Breihan 21). Large militia encampments also frequently attracted another, more disreputable type of encampment with shady characters operating booths for drinking, gambling, and even prostitution (Breihan 22). Wickham knew that he had disgraced himself in his old regiment and thus Darcy is able to bribe him by purchasing his commission in the regular army. Darcy, however, purchases him merely an ensign – the lowest rank of the national army and a rank commonly occupied by boys ages fifteen to eighteen and sometimes even younger. John Breihan and Clive Caplan estimate that for just another 150 pounds Darcy could have purchased him the rank of lieutenant – but not even he would extend him this courtesy, however, and Austen clearly demoted him for his licentious behavior (23). When Wickham elopes with Lydia, Austen sends him into “the regulars” which was viewed as a punishment in comparison to the luxuries afforded by the local militia.

Wickham’s conquests were usually driven by monetary gain but sexual and vindictive motives also fueled his pursuits. His first attempt at winning his fortune was his seduction of Georgiana Darcy. His plot had a double motive: not only would her fortune of thirty thousand pounds grant him a comfortable living but also would award

him the satisfaction of taking revenge upon Darcy whom he erroneously viewed as denying him the living he had been promised by the elder Mr. Darcy.<sup>8</sup> Darcy explains:

...and by [Mrs. Younge's] connivance and aid, he so far recommended himself to Georgiana, whose affectionate heart retained a strong impression of his kindness to her as a child, that she was persuaded to believe herself in love, and to consent to an elopement. She was then but fifteen...Mr. Wickham's chief object was unquestionably my sister's fortune, which is thirty thousand pounds... (*P&P* 133)

That Wickham does not continue to pursue Georgiana after Darcy prevents the elopement implies that his intentions were dishonorable; if he had felt any true affection for Miss Darcy, he would have continued his attentions to her and applied to Darcy for her hand.

Wickham's second attempt at procuring a fortune via a lucrative marriage was in his pursuit of Mary King. The reader learns of his plan via a communication between Elizabeth and her Aunt Gardiner, "[Wickham's] apparent partiality [for Elizabeth] had subsided, his attentions were over, he was the admirer of some one else...The acquisition of ten thousand pounds was the most remarkable charm of the young lady, to whom he was now rendering himself agreeable..." (*P&P* 100). Miss King is a lesser prize than Georgiana Darcy, but ten thousand pounds would afford a living of four or

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Copeland estimates that a fortune of thirty thousand pounds would provide for a carriage and domestic help and an annual income of twelve to fifteen hundred pounds.

five hundred pounds a year.<sup>9</sup> That money was the motive behind his pursuit of Miss King is obvious to observers:

“But he paid [Mary King] not the smallest attention, till her grandfather’s death made her mistress of this fortune.”

“No – why should he? If it was not allowable for him to gain my affections, because I had no money, what occasion could there be for making love to a girl whom he did not care about, and who was equally poor?”

“But there seems indelicacy in directing his attentions toward her so soon after this event.”

“A man in distressed circumstances has not time for all those elegant decorums which other people may observe. If *she* does not object to it, why should *we*?” (*P&P* 102; original emphasis)

Wickham did not even attempt to disguise his motives – his exploitation of women was obvious and Elizabeth’s lack of a fortune compels Wickham to turn his attentions to Mary King. Elizabeth fears for Miss King if the marriage were to go through: “And Mary King is safe!” added Elizabeth; “safe from a connection imprudent as to fortune” (*P&P* 144). The pronouncement by Elizabeth that Miss King was “safe” shows Austen’s critique of an English patriarchal society which only afforded women prosperity through marriage and thus exposed them to predators such as Wickham.

Wickham’s eventual marriage to Lydia Bennett was not excited by the same promise of fortune as his connection to Miss Darcy or Miss King – their elopement was

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<sup>9</sup> Copeland also estimates Mary King’s ten thousand pounds a year would have supplied domestic comfort without the added luxury of a carriage.

motivated by Wickham's sexual appetite and aided by Lydia's loose character. Indeed, none of the Bennet girls expected more than one thousand pounds from their father, a sum that Copeland states would yield a mere forty pounds a year. Wickham's attentions to Lydia were solely driven by sexual gratification. Mr. Darcy united the couple by buying Wickham's vow and essentially purchasing Lydia's -- and thus the Bennets -- respectability. Wickham himself admitted that he wished to marry in order to secure his fortune -- albeit in another country due to his ill repute in England (*P&P* 210). Hall supports this vision of Wickham; noting that "George Wickham is also a seducer. He has tried to elope with Georgiana, he eventually elopes with Lydia with no clear intention of marriage, and we have every indication that without Darcy's intervention, he would have continued his pattern of seduction" (187). Wickham's exploitation of women is shown to be dangerously compliant with an English society which similarly takes advantage of its colonies and Wickham is thus punished for his complicity in such a system.

In *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen condemns the practice of colonialism and the unfair treatment of women in nineteenth-century England. Rather than unconsciously referring to the taboo topic of the slave trade, Austen's characters are actually the vehicle of her message regarding the evils of feminine oppression at the hands of a colonial society. George Wickham, complicit with English colonialism, and Henry Crawford, shallow seducer of women, are eventually cast out of their respective plots as part of Austen's commentary on the evils of the manipulation and exploitation of women. Austen's critiques of Sir Thomas and Mr. Bennet further portray her condemnation of emotional and physical paternal absenteeism which was

commonly seen during British colonialism. Austen's heroines convey, although in different ways, her opinion that women should resist oppression and speak out against injustice. Austen clearly associated colonialism with female oppression and many post-colonial critics, such as John Mee and Susan Fraiman, support this reading of her work and have cited Jane Fairfax in *Emma* as conveying this idea directly, "There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would soon produce something – offices for the sale, not quite of human flesh, but of human intellect" (*Emma* 259). Indeed, Austen ties colonial oppression to nineteenth-century English women in order to highlight their marginalization. Said was correct in suggesting a postcolonial reading of Austen but he was incomplete in his analysis of her work; such an approach to her work requires attention to the restrictions placed on her gender which significantly impacted her writing. Said laid the foundation for postcolonial studies but the growth of the theory since the time of his writing shows that there is room within this critical approach for issues of power as it relates not only to race, but also gender. Austen was not complicit in the English colonial agenda but rather an early critic of this system and thus perhaps an early proponent of postcolonial studies herself.

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