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ABSENT BOUNDARIES OF REGULATION: THE HOUSEHOLD, THE LANDSCAPE AND THE DOMESTIC NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the process of naturalising the 'country' as a practice of domestication, regulation and ultimately a consolidation of both domestic and colonial authority. It does so with a specific reference to Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814). Focusing on domestic order, it foregrounds the premise on which peripheral locations and isolated spaces of the domestic realm, far removed from the centres of power, became intangible strongholds of putatively political power. The absent spatial boundaries of the household and the landscape are explored as operative components in the creation of domestic and national order. Focusing on matters of spatiality examined in the domestic novel, the paper delves into the imperceptible mechanisms of erasure which are indiscernibly entangled with the normalisation of the body, the domestic realm and consequentially the remote and unfamiliar bodies and territories of outlying colonial regions. The paper further investigates the different ways in which absent boundaries facilitate the endorsement of hegemonic power, exploring how the borders of both space and individual consciousness are permeated through invisible mechanisms of regulation. The ensuing permeation of power is explored as a process of dematerialisation of both the female body and the material constituents of space. Emptied of intuition, the individual domestic woman forgoes the constraints of her material self and acts instead as a public body. Similarly, the landscape exchanges its material substance for an idealised scene, emphasising extended views. Acting as a fixed, unchangeable spatial backdrop, the unpopulated and timeless landscape is denied practices of human labour, naturalising and consequently appropriating the actions of domestic life as a centre of authority.

INTRODUCTION

With the newly unified territory of the Kingdom of Great Britain and continuing process of land enclosures and land improvement, the nineteenth-century English landscape became increasingly significant in relation to national identity. Conceptions of space drew attention to the uninterrupted, borderless terrain of the nation as well as the unified enclosed land parcels which came to represent the ideal English landscape. The process of enclosure translated into an aesthetic rebranding of English space, turning farmland into picturesque scenes where human habitation was erased. This empty landscape embodied the idealised image of the nation; estate buildings, meandering paths, lakes, mounds and ruins replaced the cultivated fields and peasant labour. The observer perceived the landscape as an amplified aesthetic experience. Seeing from the estate window or the knoll, the viewer actively searched for prospects of the landscape looking for distant views and sublime backdrops to frame the tranquil borderless grounds. The ha-ha was a characteristic feature of the English landscape garden and played an important role in the design of the unbound view from the country estate. A concealed trench functioning as a hidden boundary, the ha-ha was imperceptible to the viewer but created the appearance of a continuous idyllic landscape.

Set in the English countryside of Northamptonshire, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* sets the scene for just such a landscape. Written in 1814, the novel mirrored the convergence of different national and political circumstances, as well as the cultural norms of the period. Named after the country estate, the novel foregrounds relations of space and spatiality, centring around family life. The familiar domestic space of the household is situated alongside the remote colonial plantation; the two sites act as counterpoints in the novel disclosing the tension between England's domestic and overseas territories. While the space of the domestic sphere is foregrounded, Antigua remains distant and unfamiliar – an outlying territory which appears to be merely incidental. Nevertheless, the patriarch's journey to the island is central to the plot and the assumed, unspoken funds from the implied slave plantation are equally essential for the land improvements and upkeep of the Mansfield Park family estate. The novel navigates the ambiguity and increasing significance of land as Austen locates the novel in the classic heartland of rural England, but at the same time centring the plot on the absence of the landowner away in the distant colony. Simultaneous disjunctions between local and overseas space and between the private space of the home and the public realm set up a series of binary underpinnings through Austen's narrative, emulating a seemingly incidental but purposefully absent force of regulation.

Austen's assertion that she intended to write a novel about 'ordination' directs us to explore this notion through its various possible implications; that is, by understanding it as referring to the act of ordaining the leading characters but also associating it with the process of putting things in order, the ideological function of being depicted or understood as 'ordinary' and the advocation of the practice of land ordnance.[1] Such broader associations implicate the novel in an extensive use of narratives of authority over body and space, positioning domestic action as a meaningful counterpart to colonial conduct.

The paper initially explores the domestic realm, which is utilised to instil order and create conditions for a stable home. From this domestic centre, actions, behaviour and the identity of the family are regulated and controlled. Acting as agents of another body, women of nineteenth-century domestic fiction assumed their role as the ambassadors of absolute power, exercising a moderated supervision within the domestic sphere. Surrendering their individual selves and relinquishing their subjectivity and

1 Six months before the completion of *Mansfield Park*, Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra about her new novel; 'Now I will try to write of something else, & it shall be a complete change of subject – ordination.' (Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters to her sister Cassandra and others*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 298.

material presence, they practised an internalised form of domestic authority, effectively regulating the household to the degree that they disciplined the self. The paper further examines the manner in which processes of domestication and ordaining of the protagonists becomes a way of augmenting patriarchal power as well as of maintaining the effective regulation of the household and the nation. Through an examination of Nancy Armstrong's work on the domestic novel and Michel Foucault's discussion of modern power, the actions and authority of the domestic woman are explored.[2] A closer look at the novel will also reveal how private actions of the home were positioned in the public realm. This involved a constant synchronisation of the private space of the home with the public context, creating a link between the home and the outside world.

In the second part of the paper, (The Imperceptible Boundaries of Space), the regulation of domestic space is investigated in the context of the landscape, connecting ideas of self-regulation and spatial boundlessness, through an examination of the ha-ha. By eliminating boundaries and creating the appearance of a unified landscape, the ha-ha is understood as an actual and conceptual mechanism of control, a concealed mechanism of authority over both the landscape and the viewer's perception, encouraging the erasure of boundaries.

With reference to Edward Said's seminal text, *Culture and Imperialism*, the paper discusses the idea of colonial space and its relation to the domestic realm. The focus of the paper foregrounds the idea of material erasure and absence, investigating the imperceptible mechanisms of control which rely on the absence of physical boundaries as well as the absence of labour. The novel is examined for the ambiguities that arise from these impalpable conditions of regulation that shift between the individual and the spatial, the material and immaterial, moral judgement and intuition.

THE SOCIAL BODY: CONDUCT BOOKS AND THE DOMESTIC NOVEL

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain, conduct books and domestic novels operated as educational literature for domestic women aimed at guiding them in matters of proper moral conduct and behaviour. Acting as educational manuals, conduct books were aimed at instructing women about household management but also delineated their identity in relation to behaviour and thought. Domestic novels later adopted and developed the conduct books' instructions, cultivating a very particular type of femininity, and in this manner greatly influenced how women reflected on their own identity as well as how they considered themselves as a part of the public arena.

In her book *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong explores narratives of domestic fiction and the ways in which they became involved in the construction of the female self. Armstrong emphasises the important role that women played at the centre of power, a power that was contained specifically within the domestic sphere. The authority of the domestic woman – revealed through the domestic novel – is understood as a paradoxical form of power. In contrast to her male counterpart, her strength lies not in the forceful command and disciplining of others, but instead, in what Foucault designates as self-regulation: an internalisation of discipline.[3] Actions, behaviour, thoughts and moral standing converge in the domestic woman's individual identity; in this way domestic authority does not operate on others, but instead through and on the self.

2 Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); David Macey and Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (Picador, 2003), p. 32.

3 David Macey and Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (Picador, 2003), p. 32.

The nineteenth-century English modern woman was branded with very particular traits of subjectivity and distinct criteria which related to her presence, her actions and her supervision of the household. This constructed identity defined her entire being, delineating her household duties, her role in relation to the patriarch, her physical presence, her public existence and her consciousness. Readers of domestic novels identified themselves with seemingly instinctive, natural thoughts related to issues of domestic desire and marriage, which were performed by the actions of worthy, husband-seeking heroines. Domestic fiction separated the sensation of desire from factors of wealth, religion and politics, concentrating on desire as a fully subjective notion. Such narratives were acted out in a carefully constructed, interiorised realm wherein the heroines who embodied seemingly independent sentiments acquired authority in the household. The domestic woman assumed the model conduct book role, internalising a series of social norms as 'natural in the self'.[4] Consequently, the domestic novel seemingly isolated the domestic sphere from the disorder and ambiguities of real life through undetectable strategies of regulation. The new 'narrative' woman that emerged was defined by an identity which was understood to disassociate her from existing social political and economic structures. Through her conformity, 'the domestic woman exercised a form of power that appeared to have no political force at all […]. It was the power of domestic surveillance.'[5] Such gendered forms of identity determined 'how people learned to think of themselves'.[6] Together, the conduct book and the domestic novel operated as powerful instruments of regulation. Enacted by the subjects which were affected by it, this invisible force was embedded in domestic actions and practices operating on the 'microlevels' of everyday life.[7] In his lecture: *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault identifies how such systems of power emerged in western society from the seventeenth through to the nineteenth centuries.[8] He outlines the transition from sovereign power, which used visible coercive mechanisms of control, to an increase in social mechanisms of control, which operated from peripheral positions as an invisible, distributed force.

Foucault pursues an understanding of power which looks precisely at the limits of its authority. Contrary to the visible power of centralised rule, he discusses how modern power violates the boundaries of protective regulation and instead utilises disciplinary methods which intervene and become assimilated into social relationships. Investigating what he calls 'forms of subjugation', Foucault examines the actual procedures of control and their physical execution through social relations, institutions and organisational procedures.[9]

Foucault reveals how, as the production of scientific knowledge expanded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particular ideologies and conventions became inseparable from the technologies of power, while individuals were compelled to conform to the evolving discourse of normality that arose out of new scientific knowledge. Seemingly natural, acts of conformity were carried out by individuals who voluntarily followed the emerging cultural norms. Through self-surveillance and self-regulatory practices, the force of conformity was imperceptibly distributed through the actions and behaviour of individuals. This disciplinary power was particularly associated with normalisation of the individual and the body.

Foucault recognises the development of a new technology of power which was applied to a social body in the second half of the eighteenth century. Rather than acting on individuals, he identifies 'biopower' as a power structure which is applied to humanity as a species. In this instance, power is addressed to a group, generalising the type of behaviour that belongs to that particular group of people in such a way that they act collectively.

4 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 9.

5 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 19.

6 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 16.

7 Macey and Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 32.

8 Macey and Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 32.

9 Macey and Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 32.

This massifying power does not act independently but often embeds itself in individual disciplinary power intensifying the effect of its combined invisible force.

Through a thorough examination of the novel, we witness how the disciplining of the individual body acts in tandem with the regulation and appropriation of behavioural traits which are typical of the western modern woman. It is precisely through such invisible technologies of power that the fragile, dematerialised body of the female protagonist, Fanny Price, takes form, but at the same time is distinctly united with and visible within the social body of the middle-class domestic woman.

THE IMMATERIAL BODY

Writing for the emerging middle class, the novelists and educational reformers of the nineteenth century placed the domestic woman in opposition to the formerly dominant aristocratic female, whose conduct epitomised the 'immoral' extremes of social life: craving power and desirability through flaunting her wealth and family name. The labouring woman was also considered inappropriate as a figure for respectable domestic duties, as her labouring body gave significance to materiality and to the surface of the body rather than its depth. With an emphasis on moral depth, domestic fiction produced a woman 'whose value resided chiefly in her femaleness rather than in traditional signs of status, a woman who possessed psychological depth rather than a physically attractive surface.'[10] The substance of the modern woman lay in the depths of her identity, emphasising female morality, education, and sensibility, as well as skills of management and planning for the home – the attributes of the desirable female were firmly located in her inner self. All forms of materialism were abhorrent. As such, the body of the modern woman was made immaterial.[11] The resultantly inconsequential body produced a figure characterised by compliance and motionlessness, displaying no resistance to her assigned role.

The emergence of the domestic woman generated a new force, a form of power which had no material reality, that was not implemented through a palpable bodily presence and used no suppressive force. Instead it effected its power through passive virtue and moral example. The regulation of such authority was located firmly in the home, but its influence on the real world extended far beyond the domestic realm. This 'middle-class power' as Armstrong refers to it, was 'a form of power that work[ed] through language,' representing a specifically constructed ideal of feminine subjectivity as a natural part of the female self.[12]

MANSFIELD PARK: AUTHORITY THROUGH AND ON THE SELF

Sir Thomas Bertram undertakes a treacherous journey to the West Indies to restore financial stability to his plantation in Antigua, leaving his country estate for over a year. During his prolonged absence, the house falls into disarray and becomes a site of moral disorder. It becomes apparent that the household loses stability whilst the patriarch is away.

Foregrounding the need for effective authority and orderliness, the absence of Sir Thomas forms a critical part of the narrative. Austen focuses on the idea of the absent patriarch in order to highlight the fact that Sir Thomas requires agents of his authority to effectively administer control in his absence. His domineering rule does not itself secure the family's loyalty, leaving the Bertrams with a feeling of liberation which leads them to act out their desires while he is away. Negotiating the aspirations and social position of the Bertram family members, Mansfield Park explores the problematic behaviour and the anxieties of inhabitants

10 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 76.

11 Around the 1830s, the discourse of sexuality shifted from censuring the aristocracy and instead aimed at the labouring population as a 'target of moral reform' (Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 67). Armstrong shows how the working-class population also became embraced in the moral education that the treatises were attempting. Politically aggressive groups of the labouring population were viewed as being in need of education and development rather than deserving of forced restraint. The use of oppressive power against dissident factions of the population was not effective in achieving long-term control. Instead, surveillance was thought a more efficient form of control (Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 20).

12 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 13; p. 33.

and visitors to the Mansfield Park estate.

The novel is positioned in relation to the three sisters, Mrs Bertram, Mrs Norris and Mrs Price, who are held to account for misguided supervision and the mismanagement of their respective households. They act as a backdrop to the unmarried female characters of the Mansfield Park estate, who experience dilemmas and anxieties through their searches for eligible husbands, alternately embodying and rejecting their internalised commitments to the role of the ideal domestic woman.

The novel reveals the authority that is gained by Fanny Price, following her from a subordinate status as the adopted niece, to a pivotal position in the household. The authority that she acquires is not a result of female empowerment but the outcome of conforming to a feminine identity which paradoxically places her at the centre of domestic power. Fanny's actions are set against the other female characters who transgress the boundaries of propriety. The novel also exposes the struggles of the heroine as well as her commitment to moral propriety; we witness the limitation of her emotions and the restrictions of her fragile body.

Sir Thomas Bertram's prolonged absence from the family home, Mansfield Park estate, generates a feeling of independence for the Bertram sisters, who are thankful for their father's departure to Antigua. Their newfound sense of freedom does not acknowledge moral boundaries. The older daughter, Maria, does not appear to have internalised feminine values prescribed by the conduct books. The narrative reveals the state of mind that guides her decisions and eventually leads to her misconduct. Without proper guidance, Maria cannot recognise moral boundaries, insofar as while her father's overbearing command seeks order and respectability it fails to instil moral value. As a result, her reliance on his physical presence to limit her actions becomes critical for shaping her future.

We are introduced to the protagonist Fanny Price at the age of ten, when she is adopted into the Bertram household. Our first impression of Fanny is of someone who has an unremarkable presence; we recognise the fragility and indistinct nature of her appearance. She is neither captivating nor repulsive. We observe her difficulty in carrying out simple physical activities. Austen repeatedly conveys that Fanny's strength does not lie in her body; she cannot carry out chores, endure prolonged exercise or be exposed to the sun: 'clouds are now coming up, and she will not suffer from the heat as she would have done then.'[13] Fanny does not like to draw attention to herself; she is after all not strikingly beautiful. She often prefers to withdraw from conversations. Upon witnessing awkward encounters, such as Sir Thomas' return home, she tries to recede or disappear. Just like the invisible guard of the panopticon, Fanny 'screened from notice herself, saw all that was passing before her'.[14] When receiving praise, she turns further into the window, trying to disappear from view. Afraid of attention and public exposure, she acts in such a way as to obscure her presence and accommodate those around her. Committed to stillness, her fragile figure recedes from view, seeking tranquillity and stability.

Fanny's absent body is set against the visitor Mary Crawford, whose strong, active figure is reflected in an equally striking mindset. In comparing the two characters, Austen reveals how the perception of the self relates directly to the physical body. Mary's strong figure characterises her as a dynamic personality. Constantly looking for new experiences and action, Mary gains confidence through her active pursuits: she openly expresses her opinions, her restlessness and her urge for novelty. After a walk around the estate, Fanny needs to rest, while Mary needs to move: 'I must move […] resting fatigues me. I have looked across the ha–ha till I am weary.'[15] Contemplating worldly experiences beyond the boundaries of the estate, Mary

13 Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 65.

14 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 172.

15 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 96.

is animated. She finds power in movement and cannot be still. Conversely, Fanny finds solace in stillness and observation rather than in physical strength.

Fanny's motionlessness enhances her capacity for observation. Pleasing everyone, Fanny is 'all things to all people'.[16] She makes the family the centre of importance, trivialising her own desires. Armstrong reminds us that the domestic woman was to be intensely aware but imperceptible in her supervision of the household. The promotion, harmony and stability of the household depends on her restraint and her ability to 'disappear into the woodwork'.[17] Absent in body, Fanny is an undeniably dependable counterpart to patriarchal control and domestic orderliness, safeguarding and enhancing Sir Thomas' authority.

Just as the narrative gradually shifts from adventurous expeditions, hazardous travel and theatricals to the isolated domestic sphere, so the readers' instinctive empathy for the positive, animated personality of cosmopolitan Mary is progressively contradicted by a steady commitment to the poor-spirited heroine and paradoxically repositioned, through gradual transposition, towards the motionless static protagonist that is Fanny Price. Austen's commitment to 'social stasis' generates a naturalised displacement from Mary's lively character.[18] This relocation takes the form of undetectable casual transpositions; the reader is progressively and unintentionally drawn towards Fanny Price, who is centred within the domestic sphere.

In the second part of the novel, the narrative becomes firmly anchored around the home. From this position, we encounter the weighty consolation of domestic centring, drawing the reader to a secure indisputable viewing position. As Fanny and her cousin Edmund share the evening view of the woods at Mansfield Park, the tranquil setting transposes them to a mutual awareness of the scene before them. Fanny alludes to the merits of the scene, contemplating the view before her in the 'proper' frame of mind: 'Here's harmony! [...] When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world.'[19] Fanny deliberates on how the sublimity of nature allows people to be 'carried more out of themselves,' while Edmund suggests that gazing at the view allows Fanny 'to feel.'[20] What she feels, however, is not so much her own judgement as an instructed taste for nature. Fanny and Edmund's shared vision is significant: he reflects on her feelings and not his own, encouraging her thoughtfulness. Such shared contemplation compensates for the spontaneous, innate emotions which, unlike Mary, Fanny cannot acknowledge. Edmund endorses the moral instruction involved within the shared view: 'they are much to be pitied who have not been taught to feel, in some degree, as you do.'[21] Seeing through his eyes, Fanny is prevented from engaging with the here and now. The landscape and its tranquillising effect substitute Fanny's own viewpoints and inhibit introspection of her true self. Fanny's identity is transposed onto, and at the same time shaped by, a shared vision; the sublimity of nature makes the private self a part of a collective image. The process of self-forgetting acts as a stabilising mechanism which replaces reflexive thoughts with mutual sensibilities, but also re-establishes a connection of the domestic space and self with the regulated public realm. As a result, Fanny's instincts are often suppressed, her observations are censored, her emotions reflect an ideological, normalised vision rather than her own sentiments, and the reader is comfortingly assured that the wickedness of the world is vanquished by this scene.

16 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 70.

17 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 80.

18 Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self* (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), p. 211.

19 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 231.

20 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 105.

21 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 105.

The intangible domestic authority that is instilled in the domestic woman is achieved through the process of establishing and maintaining strong moral boundaries in relation to the household, which, Armstrong has argued, results in a separation of the domestic realm from the political world. This separation rewards the isolated household with a very particular authority, in which it gains an advantage of centring and of translating external political and economic factors. Acknowledging such a separation, Edward Said argues that external factors become lodged inwards, so that history becomes translated through the language of domesticity: 'strategies which shift the public and outward to the private and inward create a deliberate detachment from actual events of public life.'[22] The emergence of the domestic realm as a stronghold of domestic authority not only subjugated the domestic woman in a position of moral restraint, but also normalised external political events by assimilating them into the household.

The shared moral atmosphere, including investment in the sublimity of nature and in the moral responsibilities of the domestic woman, created a mechanism for normalising such ways of thinking, formulating them as subjective and thus making them ordinary. There is a twofold process that takes place, in fact: while there is a distinct separation of the private domestic space from the public realm there is also an ensuing reconnection. It is this alternating separation and reconnection which creates opportunities for diverting political events through the domestic realm: making them ordinary and stabilizing them before they are redefined as public, triggering a reversal of the function of the disconnected country estate. The domestic space does not merely act as a defensive space which excludes external factors but operates as a backdrop from which a shared public position is reclaimed. The inferred separation of the domestic realm from the outside intensifies the household as a powerful structure of authority which influences both the internal domestic and the external political realm. This is achieved through the normalisation of the familial scene as well as through the ordination and regulation of the characters related to it.

THE IMPERCEPTIBLE BOUNDARIES OF SPACE; THE INTERNALIZED BOUNDARY OF THE SELF

Visions of the landscape and the stability of domestic space acted as the backdrop to domestic fiction and perfected the realisation of the domestic scene, generating a shared language and ideology. Mansfield Park demonstrates how Austen's manipulation of spatial concepts sustained the moral teachings of the novel. The landscape was interpreted not directly as a physical environment but through a set of values representing the viewer's moral judgement.[23] A reading of the land which connected it to acts of viewing and disconnected it from material production and wealth works in parallel with the protocols of the conduct book: authority lodged in the domestic realm is paralleled with a new authority over the landscape.[24]

The open structure of supervision and self-awareness that is generated in Foucault's panopticon is a regulating mechanism that functions on many levels in the domestic novel.[25] The absence of supervision characterises both psychological and spatial structures of control. A fundamental characteristic of this is related to invisible constraints which enhance authority but also regulate moral and physical transpositions. The absence of physical boundaries is supplemented by depth of thought, which requires the domestic woman to sustain a constant recognition of limits, but also acts as an invisible extension of power for the patriarch. The mechanism utilised for defining limits in the domestic narrative functions correspondingly through the use of visual, spatial and landscape elements.

22 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd, 1993), p. 90.

23 This abstraction of the landscape occurred at a time when land was the centre of production and investment – both locally and in colonial territories.

24 Raymond Williams focuses on disconnection of the landscape from agricultural practice; 'a working country is hardly ever a landscape.' (Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City* (Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 120.)

25 Leach, Neil. "Part V Poststructuralism, Michel Foucault." Leach, Neil. *Rethinking Architecture* (London: Francis & Taylor, 1997), pp. 329-357.

The ha-ha is a distinctive feature of eighteenth-century landscape design and enables extended views across the estate property without distinguishing its boundary line. Seen from the window of the home, the limits of the domestic domain appear to extend effortlessly across the rural landscape, offering boundless, uninterrupted prospects. Optical limitations of the domestic sphere are invisible; the views appear to negate the isolation of the household, instead visually reconnecting it to the surrounding public domain. Apart from the unlimited views, the country estate is also understood as an authoritative scene which represents power. Mary Crawford claims that 'A man might represent the county with such an estate'; once again the isolated country home is mentally repositioned into the public realm.[26] The absent boundaries designate the position of those who are associated with it, testing or enhancing their flaws or authority. The unlimited views across the estate enhance the power of the patriarch; the 'gentleman's unconstrained view' represents his ability to 'act objectively for his nation' intensifying his authority and ascertaining his public position.[27] Rachel Crawford describes how 'the unbounded prospect […] was transformed into a moral and political quality of the man of the property'.[28]

Viewing across and beyond his idyllic estate, the landowner acts as the universal observer, unavoidably annexing the surrounding landscape to his commanding gaze. Judgements regarding his own property extend naturally well beyond the ha-ha, embodying the expanding territory. Sir Thomas' actions are reinforced by such an omniscient view; knowledgeable judgement made in relation to his estate extends its authority beyond the boundary line of his property. As with the novel, the ha-ha advocates boundless vision: we are assured that Sir Thomas' command of the Mansfield Park estate extends to territories beyond Northamptonshire, to his colonial plantation in Antigua. As the patriarch of the family home, Sir Thomas' status is directly represented by the land and building, which function as setting but also 'denote the character and social responsibility' of the landowner.[29] The role of the rural estate as part of England's patriarchal identity was as embedded in the land as in the owner.

For the domestic woman, the open landscape sanctions a very different kind of power: one that binds her authority to self-regulation and internalised powers of restraint. The absent boundary urges her vigilant surveillance but also highlights the rebellious transgression of boundaries enacted by the morally compromised. What we observe through the narrative actions in Mansfield Park is a testing of the moral perception of characters which regulates actions in the absence of physical restraint but does not prohibit passage or transgression beyond boundaries. We have already witnessed the moral challenge that is faced by Maria Bertram, who does not recognise moral boundaries and limitations during her father's absence. While the discourse regarding the domestic woman is submerged in regulation and limits, her position in the domestic space also confronts her with a notional and visual boundlessness, generating a potentially dangerous sense of freedom. The visually endless rural landscape around the country estate has no visible border. Marked by absence, the boundary is physical and perceived, yet at the same time it remains invisible. The immaterial but essential spatial boundary binds action to space through the necessary restraints of moral conscience. Maria Bertram is seduced precisely by openness, failing to observe the distinctions that should ideally be defined by the confines of space. On the other hand, by replicating and at the same time inverting the function of the ha-ha, Fanny's effectively omniscient vision regulates the seemingly boundless narrative landscape. Despite its apparent absence, the spatial boundary continues to exercise its authority over moral conscience. The actions of both Thomas Bertram and Fanny Price are thus imperceptibly

26 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 149.

27 Rachel Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 14.

28 Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape*, p. 15.

29 Alistair Duckworth, T*he Improvement of the Estate* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 39.

augmented by that which is not immediately or physically present, operating beyond the immediate positions of space, time and consciousness. Their narrative position and authority are defined by what is not there. The narrative leads us to collaborate in this performance. How does something with no visual tangibility have such a strong presence? How does something with no limit or boundary make one feel restrained? How can the authority of absence be so powerfully present? The functioning of Foucault's panopticon is multiplied here. In this scene, there is a simultaneous magnitude and casualness. The absence of perceptible boundaries produces a placid setting while simultaneously acting as a formidable line of regulation. Although the language of the landscape is inherently ocular, the visual absence of the boundary becomes accommodated into subconscious thought on behalf of the protagonists and the reader. The apparent materiality of space is paired with the detailed actuality of the novel. Nature and narrative collaborate to secure their hold on the spectator. Their interplay secures territory and action; it is a slice of passive authority which reassures us of a 'natural' order and of moral authenticity through the omniscient view of the patriarch and the internalised boundedness of the heroine.

THE DOMESTIC OVERFLOWS INTO THE PUBLIC

The East room, an unused room in Mansfield Park house, acts as Fanny's space of refuge. The vacant room is used by Fanny as a space for writing, reading and contemplation: 'Her plants, her books […] and her works of charity were all within reach […] and pinned against the wall a small sketch of a ship […] by William with HMS Antwerp at the bottom in letters as tall as the main mast.'[30] From watering her plants and advising her cousin about acting in the play to taking an imaginary journey with her brother to the colonial territories, Fanny is synchronously inside and outside domestic space. In her room Fanny can resume her preferred cultural actions of writing and reading, which allow her to appropriate the inner world of the domestic environment. In this space, a transposition takes place: a shift beyond the home, toward a shared culture permeating the threshold between the domestic space and outside world: 'the domestic overflows into the public domain.'[31] The weighty boundary of the domestic space is thus proven permeable: the East Room, the most isolated room in the estate, is seamlessly connected to the outside world. In this instance, acts of writing carried out within the domestic space allow Fanny to dissolve the physical boundary surrounding her activities, enhancing her public identity. This spatial transposition upholds the sanctity of self and of domestic space while the physical boundary between the domestic and the outer world becomes thin enough to be permeable. This double transposition constitutes a process that redeems the most banal actions and recasts them into culturally refined acts. Once again, the separation between the domestic and the public is denied, therefore augmenting the authority of the humble domestic woman. The most neglected room in Mansfield Park becomes the conduit through which private life is given public form. Despite the devised separation that is constructed between the domestic and the public realm, the creation of a public self establishes a key part in female identity. The distinctiveness of the domestic woman defined by the educational treatises created a familiar moral and cultural identity. This identity not only acknowledged the personal feminine self but also defined a public identity enacted exclusively within the domain of the domestic sphere. This public image of the domestic woman endorsed her moral image, while simultaneously creating a unifying identity. The moral self of the private realm contributed to a shared common idea about the national self which saw women act out their roles as wives and mothers in an overtly public domain under a united identity of moral duty.

30 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 141.

31 Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 53.

32 Claiming the rural estate as the site of the archetypal domestic woman, a model of country life developed for the emerging middle-class population, allowing 'competing interest groups to ignore their economic origins and coalesce around a single domestic ideal.' (Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 69.)

33 Particularly as rural estates were typically financed by colonial slave plantations, as in the case of the Bertram family.

ABSENT LABOUR

Armstrong asserts that the novel appropriated the model of country life, formerly associated with the aristocracy, as the setting of the domestic narrative.[32] The adoption of the country estate, however, relied on re-negotiating its former status. As a site for the modern woman, the household was purposely separated from external factors, concealing the source of the revenue that sustained it. Economy was vaguely understood to depend on investment rather than any kind of trade or craft associated with the family.[33] The household was 'made into a self-enclosed world whose means of support were elsewhere, invisible, removed from the scene.'[34] Just as the female body was asked to deny or disavow its materiality and its association with labour, so the country house denied the economic foundation of its maintenance. This denial of material existence introduced another dimension of absence to the correlated realms of the landscape and the self.

Thomas Gainsborough's Mr and Mrs Andrews (1750) depicts the eponymous newlyweds in a scene into which the readers of the domestic novel could project themselves.[35] The Andrews are sitting to one side, allowing the viewer to see their property, which has been enlarged and consolidated by their marriage. The old oak tree anchors the scene in the context of a respectable domestic and natural heritage, which they appear to have inherited. Situated within the empty, houseless landscape, Mrs Andrews is nonetheless ideologically construed as ready to perform her natural duties of household management. regulation, which 'became a matter of good taste and a way of displaying domestic virtue,' in this way, her actual labour remained imperceptible.[36]

The passive virtues of the ideal woman are accordingly framed by an equally passive and empty landscape, where agricultural labour is made impalpable. Images of the landscape and the qualities of the domestic woman thus align to produce a representation marked by absence: the absence of visible boundaries and the absence of labour. Taken for granted, the agencies of production and the subsequent wealth that it produced are made to appear 'natural'. Just as the domestic woman has instinctive natural qualities, which produce a well-ordered household, so the inherently abundant land produces itself. The ideal domestic scene and the ideal landscape are created in the absence of labour. Such duties no longer included practical tasks that involved labour, but were instead activities of household regulation, which 'became a matter of good taste and a way of displaying domestic virtue', in this way, her actual labour remained imperceptible.[36]

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The omission and suppression of associations of use and everyday practice is a central aspect of the reading of land and space involved here. Although constructs of the landscape and how it changed have a very strong and immediate physical and visual presence – an unquestionable reality marked by social and physical change through intensified agricultural production – their visual portrayal is filtered through representational processes. These processes conceal the actual agricultural practices.

34 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 69.

35 https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/thomas-gainsborough-mr-and-mrs-andrews; Many of the biggest landowners in England, who were often leaders in agricultural reform, commissioned paintings which showed such idyllic images of their rural estates, where acts of labour and modern agricultural features were omitted. Taken for granted, the means of production and the subsequent wealth that it produced are made to appear as innate in the pastoral abundance of the painted scene and not as something that is the result of labour (Hugh Prince, 'Art and Agrarian Change 1710-1815' in *The Iconography of Landscape*, ed, Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 99-101.)

36 Conduct books initially incorporated advice about the preparation of medicines, care of livestock, and cooking (Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, p. 63).

37 Prince, *Art and Agrarian Change 1710-1815*, pp. 99-101.

Suppressing the social dimension of the landscape, including human labour as a basic critical part of its production, this representational process directly complements the one that produces the domestic woman. In the absence of labour, the land produces itself.[38] This process turns the overwhelmingly palpable view into an unconscious, insensible viewpoint. Landscape emerges as something independent from human action, relying only on nature for its presence. Like the ideologically normalised self of the modern woman, the autonomous landscape endorses concepts of fixity and stability. With no work and no evident source of wealth, the country house denies, at one and the same time, the labour of the domestic woman herself as well as the agricultural labourers and, inevitably, the slave labourers in Antigua that produce the invisible wealth of the rural estate.

THE CARTOGRAPHY OF HERENESS

Austen's narrative descriptions of space are modest: views, landscapes and interiors are mostly unobtrusive and incidental to the narrative. However, the impression of space is regulated in various ways. Instances of shared views present a palpable atmospheric scene, whereas other settings are represented through quantifiable features. Austen is concerned with establishing a scene that represented the setting with precision and accuracy.[39] The author knowingly portrays actual sites and spaces: environments, journeys and everyday actions which are consistent with historical events, actual locations, precise distances.[40] Accounts of visual relations – views, distances and boundaries – are never left to chance. We are entirely confident about the presence and portrayal of spatial relations. Actions in space are defined and ordered in relation to elements which portray stability and heritage such as old oak trees, church spires, gates, matured hedges, fireplaces; all of them act as points of reference: emblematic, sited, measured, traceable, recorded, discernible and perceptible. Spatial constructs are also supported by significant fictional incidents in the novel which occur in close relation to historic reality.[41] The realism of space and time is indisputable: the remoteness of unfamiliar territories, the vastness of the unbound landscape, the complex visualisation of perspective, the materiality of dirty plates. Through the novel, the actuality of spaces and events is naturalised and made ordinary. Yet, the extent to which the accuracy of place and event allows the narrative to achieve an undeniable authenticity and spatial hereness is to the same degree mitigated by the author's treatment of these incidents and sites as merely circumstantial.

Elements of stability are also found in the idyllic landscape, which is directly connected with the rural estate. The picturesque landscape, carefully designed to achieve muted seasonal variations, comprises of a composition of natural features, producing an unchanging scene that is devoid of cultivated land and scenes of everyday labour.[42] Unchanging and constant herself, Fanny tellingly admires the evergreen which provides a static view of nature. Like Fanny, it does not change, it remains predictable and reliable. Austen's novel nurtures an awareness and appreciation of elements related to fixity and stability; it brings us to this position through a recognition of the elements which define orderliness, gradually transposing the reader to a static notional centre of space.

Austen's careful descriptions of space focus on impartial but visually detailed renderings. They establish shared sensibilities, cultivating the tasteful qualities of culture and tradition. In other words, Austen does not treat space as a setting but as an objectified image of an ensemble of social relations. Just as with the cartographic ordnance map, the novel's accurately produced representations are 'stable, indisputable mirrors of reality […] quantitative and rational, such representations are also seen to be true and neutral.'[43]

38 Whilst the splendour of the country estates performed the task of 'complementing and ratifying the social position of the landowner,' the landscape connected to the estate was portrayed as natural, timeless and unchanging; its existence was maintained through a 'natural order': 'The actual men and women who rear the animals […] who trap the pheasants and partridges and catch the fish; who plant and manure and prune and harvest the fruit trees: these are not present; their work is all done for them by a natural order' (Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 93; p. 32).

39 It is acknowledged that Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra, asking if Northamptonshire, the area where the novel is located, is 'a country of hedgerows.' (Jane Austen, *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems*, ed. R.W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 10).

40 Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, p. 28.

41 'The sense of contemporary actuality is fortified by street-names in real towns; consistent dates, culled from almanacs; journeys timed with atlases and time-tables; lawsuits, carefully checked with legal experts.' (Marylin Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 155).

As a map maker, Austen carefully constructs a distinct universal perspective, bringing things into view as matters to be ordered, reproducing a composed mapping of local and global spaces and producing a system of artificial geographies. Through a language of domestic abstraction, Austen creates a narrative map, establishing an objective 'passive authenticity,' marking place and authorising its appropriation from a distance.[44] Austen's mapping is an act of consolidation, bringing together the omniscient and the detailed view. Her representations of space and order unite culturally divergent conditions and transpose them into the space of the interior.

CONCLUSION

Edward Said views the novel as a 'domestic accompaniment to the imperial project.'[45] In Culture and Imperialism, Said distinguishes corresponding actions and readings between the spheres of the domestic and the overseas. Pairing domestic to colonial action, he identifies the family home as a 'microcosm of society.'[46] He produces a concurrent repositioning of historic events that brings together culture and politics, past and present. This 'contrapuntal' retelling, as he calls it, allows us to perceive domestic, local and overseas events as parallel actions: '[Austen] sees clearly that to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and rule an imperial estate in close, not to say inevitable association with it. What assures the domestic tranquillity and attractive harmony of one is the productivity and regulated discipline of the other'[47] Said maintains that the presence of the colonial is merely incidental and barely existent in Mansfield Park, which is nevertheless scripted around a narrative of a wealthy British family estate supported by overseas colonial investments. Fanny's notorious questioning of her uncle about the trip to his colonial estate in Antigua is one of the few instances in which direct mention of the colonies is made: 'Did not you hear me ask him about the slave trade[…]?'[48] Said stresses the silence that follows Fanny's "awkward" question, indicating the lack of appropriate language that marks the limits or boundaries of representation. Her question however, is critical. Fanny asks her question not from a position of prioritising propriety and courtesy, but because she is demonstrating her vigilance and effective managerial skills. Her role of supervision and management of the domestic realm is not limited to the space of Mansfield Park. The domain of the domestic includes not only the home but also the imperial nation and thus, inevitably, its overseas territory.

Said notes that the outside (imperial) world becomes domesticated through the novel and hence 'principles become interiorised.'[49] Following the treacherous journeys, disruptive plays and family turmoil, the second part of the novel focuses on the home. Here, for Said, is where the Austen achieves 'consolidation of authority.'[50] Alongside the more evidently colonial spaces, Said showcases the seemingly inconsequential components of the domestic realm, which, like Fanny, command an increasingly binding and centralising role in the narrative process. Said refers to the incident of Fanny's first arrival to the Mansfield Park Estate, which can be read as one of the significant spatial dispositions that takes place at the beginning of the novel: 'Fanny, Edmund, and her aunt Norris negotiate where she is to live, read, and work, where fires are to be lit.'[51] His mention of this scene is significant as Fanny's initial and eventual status and 'position' in the house correspond to her ultimate value and authority.

42 Based on Edmund Burke's adaptation of the Georgian landscape, estate gardens integrated aspects of the sublime and the beautiful – nature was valued for the sublimity of its landscape, such as the mountains, cliffs and forests, which create a feeling of awe and amazement. Beauty was associated with smaller pleasing elements of nature such as flowers, trees and fields. The combination of these two elements made up a picturesque landscape, bringing together the more ordered patterning of beauty broken up by the irregularity of more rugged sublime terrain.

43 James Corner, 'The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention' in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion, 1999) 213–252 (p. 202).

44 Corner, *The Agency of Mapping*, p. 224.

45 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 70

46 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 77

47 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 87.

48 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 184.

49 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 93.

50 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 77.

51 Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 85.

The fireplace referred to in this scene is an immaterial but definitive component of the home which embodies both space and regulation; it has a spatial location as well as a centralising function. The fireplace, like Fanny, acts as an allusive haven of domestic unity, an essential spatial mechanism of domestic authority. Upon recognising her value and commitment, Sir Thomas arranges for a fire to be lit in Fanny's East Room on his return from Antigua. Here, space and action are again coupled; like the fire, Fanny is there to "comfort." As mechanisms of value and unity, both the fire and Fanny symbolise family: 'Fanny is both device and instrument'[52]; she draws us closer, centralising, refining and articulating her position well beyond the home. Normalised and imperceptible, her familial authority could not, at the same time, appear as more unremarkable and ordinary.

Just as the fireplace acts as a congenial space of convergence for the family, the hegemonic and patriarchal power of nineteenth-century England also appropriated the ordinary setting of the household as a site for consolidation of power. As explored through the novel, the immaterial boundaries of the home facilitated invisible mechanisms of control which became embedded in everyday domestic activities. Equally, the unbound views of the landscape functioned effortlessly to intensify the power of the patriarch. Operating as powerful centres of regulation, the invisible boundaries of the country estates produced normalised and decontextualised spaces of authority. Abstracted and signified as inert and static, the erasure of boundaries contradicted the material production of the site, erasing human labour and the historic becoming of the land which in turn produced an unbecoming of the material body.

52 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 85.

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