

The Writings of City in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*

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Abstract: *Mansfield Park* is the work of Jane Austen, a prominent 18th century female writer. In this novel, Austen depicts the city of London in an indirect way, thus expressing her concern for urban problems in the context of industrialization. Austen portrays two siblings from London, self-serving Crawfords, who neglect morality, and follow the philosophy of money, indirectly reflecting many of the city's problems. In addition, the urban values gradually penetrate the country represented by Mansfield Park, and the characters in the novel are also affected, such as Maria eloping with Mr. Crawford and thus getting into a scandal, and the Bertram siblings and others staging degrading theatricals at home. And the novel's heroine, Fanny Price, is the only character in the novel who resists the temptation of urban values. Austen sees her as a representative of the country culture, and her noble behavior represents the resistance of the country culture to the city values. Austen's writing about the city in *Mansfield Park* also reflects her intention to try to correct the problems caused by urban development.

Keywords: Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, City, Urban values.

1. Introduction

As one of the most significant and well-known British female authors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jane Austen (1775-1817) concentrated her stories on the landed aristocracy and the small world of rural England. Although she is not a prolific writer, her six major long novels have garnered her a ton of acclaim and popularity among readers and academics. Virginia Woolf praised Austen as a writer with "singularly perfect" gifts, "the most perfect artist among women" creating "the most perfect of English novels" [8].

The protagonist of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price, is a physically frail, self-conscious, and morally upright young woman who was sent to live with her affluent uncle and aunt, Sir Thomas Bertram and Mrs. Bertram, since her poor family could not support nine children. Despite receiving harsh physical and psychological treatment at her new home, Mansfield Park, Fanny finally developed morality and matured. Austen's

Mansfield Park describes the conflict and antagonism between urban and rural England during the transition from an agrarian to an industrial civilization, documenting the clash of urban and rural values and the reasons behind the antagonistic relationship between urban and rural England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Besides, it portrays the influence of the city on the country under the Industrial Revolution, reflecting Austen's thoughts on urban-rural relations, and revealing her nostalgia for the old rural world and concern about the impact of the new industrial civilization on the rural order.

London writing dates back to the Renaissance. Numerous descriptions of London, its inhabitants, and their daily lives may be found in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Daniel Defoe's works contain blatantly literary writing about the industrial London. What Defoe depicts demonstrates that London is a prosperous, modern city.

Raymond Williams puts forward the concept "city" and "country" in his *The Country and the City* (1973). For Williams, "the contrast of the country and city is one of the

major forms in which we become conscious of a central part of our experience and of the crises of our society" [7]. Williams has also noted that "the Industrial Revolution not only transformed both city and country; it was based on a highly developed agrarian capitalism, with a very early disappearance of the traditional peasantry." [7] *Mansfield Park* was written with the British industrial revolution and urbanization serving as an essential social backdrop.

This paper focuses on the writings of the city in *Mansfield Park*, which are mainly about the indirect descriptions of city and how city values invade the country. Jane Austen depicts the city, that is, London, through indirect means. She shows the readers the moral corruption and materialism of the city by describing the behavior and character of the Crawford siblings. The country, represented by Mansfield Park, was a world of purity and beauty before the erosion of urban values, where people lived a simple and quiet life, but with the industrial revolution and urbanization in Britain, traditional rural values were shattered and Austen's ideal state of country life was shattered. With *Mansfield Park*, therefore, Austen demonstrates her intention to try to redress the ills of rapid urban development by curbing the city's growing desires through sanity in rural people.

2. City Writing: Indirect Descriptions of London

Urban Problems arise as a result of the industrialization-related fast social change that occurs as cities develop quickly. According to Henri Lefebvre, industrialization supposes the de-structuration of existing structures [5]. More precisely, the conventional agricultural framework has been disrupted by the urbanization of the economy and people. What's worse, rural traditional values are being undermined and subverted.

London is a city that symbolizes the superficial chase of wealth and the desire to control and rule everything with money. Most of Austen's novels only include indirect depictions of cities rather than many direct ones. *Mansfield Park* focuses more on the city's inhabitants and their actions than it does on the city's surroundings. In the metropolis like

London, people are mainly concerned with their own interests and pleasure. Behind the city lie numerous societal issues. For instance, ideals such as materialism, social estrangement, and the isolation of man from nature are all very common, and morality is perverted.

2.1. Materialism and Ignorance of Morality

According to *A Memoir of Jane Austen* written by Austen Leigh [2], Jane Austen visited London and acknowledged its riches, but she also observed its unpleasant side, which she had depicted in her book *Mansfield Park*. One of the themes that Austen is interested in is the moral conundrum. Many of the people that Jane Austen creates in *Mansfield Park* are either from London or often travel there and are heavily impacted by it. They clearly investigate the London moral.

The Crawfords are frequently seen as individuals who pose a danger to traditional rural values and, by extension, to England itself. Henry and Mary are shown as being vivacious, smart and alluring while yet acting in morally reprehensible ways. And Mary Crawford, as well as Henry Crawford, her brother, carry the moral decay of London to Mansfield Park.

The theatrical episode in *Mansfield Park* depicts the moral decay of the city London. People at Mansfield Park agreed to act a play named *Lovers' Vows* except Fanny and Edward, and this play is about the pre-marital relations of a baron and a woman, and their bastard son. After knowing that Maria who has been engaged to Mr. Rushworth plays the role of Agatha, Henry still accepts the role of Frederick assigned to him. "Frederick [Henry] was listening with looks of devotion to Agatha's [Maria's] narrative, and pressing her hand to his heart, [...], he still kept his station and retained her sister's hand" [1]. The play's impropriety is indicated by the scene in which Henry touches Maria, and Henry's relationship with Maria shows how morally decrepit he has become. His actions reveal his ulterior motives, which are to flirt with an engaged woman and gain a sense of satisfaction. For this kind of behavior, Robert Hume has pointed out: "the worst things in London have invaded the holy Mansfield Park. It's loud, it's vulgar, it's a bad life" [4].

In addition, Henry, who is lazy and bored, turns to Fanny, who doesn't like him, after the Miss Bertrams depart Mansfield Park. He shamelessly announced to his sister, "And how do you think I mean to amuse myself, Mary, on the days that I do not hunt? My plan is to make Fanny Price fall in love with me" [1]. What he says about the "plan" is simply motivated by a desire to win, not by the search for love. The peaceful and classic Mansfield Park is greatly damaged by this self-centered and frivolous behavior.

Additionally, Mary's reaction toward her knowing of her brother Henry and Maria Bertram's adultery shows her moral degeneration. After Henry and Mrs. Rushworth's affair is revealed in the book, Mary tries to cover up the scandal and criticizes her brother's folly but she is unaware of the immorality that occurred in the relationship. She also accuses Fanny of refusing to accept Henry's proposal so that her brother wouldn't be forced into this unwelcome adulterous relationship. "It is all her fault. Simple girl! I shall never forgive her. Had she accepted him as she ought, they might now have been on the point of marriage, and Henry would have been too happy and too busy to want any other object" [1].

London, one of the world's major financial hubs at the start of the nineteenth century, was crucial to the flow and distribution of credit and capital. London has developed into

a world-class financial and commercial metropolis as a result of the tireless efforts of city bankers and financiers. Commodity culture, on the other hand, greatly influences people's spiritual lives and promotes people's drive for consumption.

In the novel, Mary Crawford's views on money perfectly illustrate the urban notion of money. Mary Crawford wishes to hire a farmer's horse and cart to perform errands for her on the occasion when she has to have her harp fetched from London to the Mansfield Park parsonage. She is shocked to learn that no farmer will rent out his horse and cart to deliver her harp. "To want a horse and cart in the country seemed impossible" [1]. When Mary is told the reason is that the farmers are "in the middle of a very late hay harvest" [1], However, it is clear that Mary is unaware of its significance. She believes her comfort should come first and says "coming down with the true London maxim, that everything is to be got with money" [1]. The value of London is that money has unlimited power and may be used to obtain anything.

Mary first thinks highly of Tom and feels "she should accept him" [1]. just because he frequents major cities like London and, more crucially, because Tom holds a baronetcy and will inherit a sizable sum of money. Later, as they interact on a daily basis, Mary forms a good opinion of Edmund. But she is shocked to find that Edmund would become a clergyman in the future. "Men love to distinguish themselves, and in either of the other lines distinction may be gained, but not in the church. A clergyman is nothing" [1]. "the profession is well enough under two circumstances: if it make the fortune, and there be discretion in spending it" [1].

"I mean to be too rich to lament or to feel anything of the sort. A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of. It certainly may secure all the myrtle and turkey part of it" [1]. The fact that Mary believes that having money is the only way to be happy in life once more reveals her deeply ingrained materialism. Because of this, even though she and Edmund had a strong relationship in the past, she firmly severed her affection for him because his wealth could not satisfy her material needs. But when Edmund is likely to inherit his father's title and fortune, she comes around. Fanny knows her character well, "Edmund would be forgiven for being a clergyman, it seemed, under certain conditions of wealth...She had only learned to think nothing of consequence but money" [1]. This action reveals her conceit and snobbery.

2.2. Lack of Humanistic Care

Selfishness and apathy frequently characterized social relationships based on wealth and power, which led to estrangement between individuals and a break between man and environment.

In *Mansfield Park*, the selfishness and apathy in interpersonal relationships, such as those between husband and wife, uncle and niece, and friends, are reflections of the lack of humanistic care among residents of the city. In the city, husbands and wives have arrogant, self-centered relationships. A marriage of this type is that of the Admiral and Mrs. Crawford. Admiral Crawford makes the hasty decision "to bring his mistress under his own roof" [1] after Mrs. Crawford passes away. It illustrates how flimsy and uncaring the marriages of the couples in the city are.

What's more, the relationship between uncle and niece in the city is also a kind of reflection. For instance, Mary Crawford discusses the improvement of a cottage bought by

her uncle the Admiral, “Three years ago the Admiral, my honored uncle, bought a cottage at Twickenham for us all to spend our summers in...and rustic seats innumerable: but it must all be done without my care” [1]. It is obvious from the paragraph above that Mary “speaks so freely of her uncle” [1], with a sarcastic undertone. Even though her uncle intends for his family to have a wonderful and enjoyable vacation in the country, Mary despises his method of upgrading the home. It implies that the alienation between people in the city of London cannot be concealed by even kinship. Family bonds are no longer strong in the city because of the isolation and indifference that permeate every aspect of daily life.

The significant changes that occurred in the late eighteenth century profoundly altered not only the issues of pollution, crime, and other by-products, but also the interaction between man and society and man and nature. In the minds of the rural class, agricultural civilization has evolved into a golden period of leisure, luxury, and harmony. Many of Austen’s works feature beautiful rural settings and landscapes. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen uses several landscape descriptions but pays little attention to natural scenes in the city. The Crawfords’ actions on the Sotherton trip are mentioned by Austen to allude to the estrangement between people and nature in the city without directly describing the natural surroundings in the city.

The Crawfords’ vehicles travel “through a pleasant country” on their trip to Sotherton, but neither has the desire nor the leisure to stop and take in the surrounding natural beauty. Henry Crawford is talking and joking while flirting with Julia. And Mary Crawford “saw nature, inanimate nature, with little observation; her attention was all for men and women, her talents for the light and lively” [1]. Their attitudes toward this Sotherton excursion suggest that they view it more as a chance to show off than as a chance to take in some fresh air and appreciate gorgeous landscapes for spiritual fulfillment. Overall, the Crawfords cut themselves apart from nature.

Through the Crawfords, Austen enables us to draw the conclusion that London may be a place of sin and perdition. The reader can learn about London’s many charms, but they can also learn about how false appearances are eroding the fundamental foundation of propriety. London is portrayed by Austen in a bad light along with the Crawfords, and the city is depicted as a world of immorality with no redeeming qualities. Fanny “think[s] the influence of London very much at war with all respectable attachments. She saw proof of it in Miss Crawford, as well as in her cousins” [1].

3. Urban Culture’s Invasion into the Country

For humans, the countryside is their nearest home and place to live. It embodies the significance of pre-city society as a whole. The capitalist method of production, particularly its cultural and moral encroachment on England, expands into rural areas with the growth of the Industrial Revolution and urbanization. The Crawfords’ entrance, which stands for the infiltration of London ideals into Mansfield Park and the young people here, represents how the country represented by Mansfield Park in the novel is influenced by London’s culture and moral principles.

Mansfield Park is a representation of the landed gentry’s way of life under landlordism. It was a tranquil manor with a pastoral atmosphere, the complete reverse of London’s

capitalist city. However, we can see from the ongoing plots that practically everyone is restless as a result of the Crawfords’ sway. According to Austen, a small agricultural community in the country is the best setting to retain the rural areas’ historical significance.

3.1. The Penetration of City Values

From the estate improvement to the Bertrams’ moral failings, the novel *Mansfield Park* alternates between many detrimental effects of the city on those living in the country who have been corrupted or affected by urban values. Plans for estate improvements that are frequently referenced in the book come across as destructive and would completely eradicate tradition, religion, and the natural beauty of Mansfield Park and the neighboring surroundings.

First, Austen shows how Sotherton Court is improved to show how London has infiltrated the countryside. Sotherton Court, also referred to simply as “Sotherton”, is an estate in Mansfield Park, owned by James Rushworth. As “one of the largest estates and finest places in the country” [1], Sotherton is a brick building “built in Elizabeth’s time, and is a large, regular, brick building; heavy, but respectable looking” [1]. Overall, Sotherton Court is not a part of the “new money” world of business because it has an Elizabethan-style home rather than a modern one.

The Crawfords, who force their aesthetic preferences on the countryside, are solely responsible for the estate improvement of Sotherton. The Reptonian estate improvement, which encourages tree removal near homes to “open the prospect amazingly” is quite similar to the Crawfords’ estate improvement. The Crawfords, who unmistakably support Reptonian improvements, also emphasize the reliance on money to produce beauty, which is very different from the conventional method of enhancing gardens in rural areas. The natural world needs to be greatly enhanced and made more beautiful for those whose values have been influenced by urban values.

Rushworth is ultimately lured to the Reptonian or the Crawfords’ estate improvement due of its artificiality and materialism, which are two London values that have an impact on rural places. To Rushworth, “the approach now is one of the finest things in the country” [1]. The characters’ comments about money and improvements highlight the lack of tradition or guiding moral value in this Reptonian, and later Crawfordian, version of estate improvement—it is only guided by money and the attempt to create the unnatural from something natural [3].

Early in the novel, Repton becomes the occasion of aesthetic disagreement among the characters. This aesthetic disagreement suggests a significant difference in societal orientation as the narrative goes on. The Crawfords, Maria Bertram, and Mrs. Norris, who have been linked to Reptonian improvements, are barred from the Park by the book’s conclusion, while Edmund and Fanny, who are anti-Repton, get married and take over as the estate’s guardians.

Additionally, Tom Bertram, Maria Bertram, and Julia Bertram all exhibit the moral penetration of London into the countryside. Tom Bertram, Sir Thomas’s eldest son, has been a part of London’s upper class from his adulthood when he first appears in the book. He develops an addiction to the immoral atmosphere of London as a result of his associations with London dandies. Tom Bertram has a shocking lack of financial responsibility. He is a heavy drinker and gambler who accumulates large debts when he stays in the capital of

London.

Additionally, Maria and Julia Bertram are sisters who, ever since they were little, have been inspired by a variety of ladylike ideas. Though they used to get along well, ever since they met Henry Crawford, they have started to lose their minds. They have specifically forgotten their father's instructions. In an effort to get Henry's approval, they compete with one another. Maria doesn't hesitate to flirt with Henry despite the fact that she was formerly engaged to Mr. Rushworth. "Her prospect always ended in Mr. Crawford and her sister sitting side by side, full of conversation and merriment... was a perpetual source of irritation" [1]. In short, the Bertram sisters' bad behaviors have put Mansfield Park in a predicament. The country that Mansfield represents has almost been destroyed by urban values.

3.2. The Resistance from Country

The invasion of Mansfield Park and its surroundings by the city of London, as previously indicated, results in strong resistance, with Fanny Price serving as a spokesman, while the city of London infiltrates Mansfield from such elements as aesthetic taste and moral values. Her rejection of Henry's proposal and *Lovers' Vows* show how strong her character and morals are, which can be used to understand Austen's reaction to and struggle against the prevailing urban norms in the countryside.

The theatrical production of *Lovers' Vows* poses a grave threat to Mansfield Park since it invites outsiders to interfere with the tranquility of the park, like the Londoners Mr. Yates and the Crawfords. After reading the script, Fanny steadfastly declines to participate in the play and does not change her mind at all, despite being persuaded and cajoled by numerous individuals to do so. She also tries to prevent Maria playing a part in it but she fails, "you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes; you will tear your gown; you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha. You had better not go" [1]. Even "Edmund, the moral deputy in Sir Thomas's absence, gives no leadership where most required to his infatuated sisters" [6].

The Crawfords' influence over Mansfield Park is ultimately defeated by Fanny alone. It is clear from her anti-theatricality that Austen does not approve of private theatricals or the corrupt values provided by the Crawfords, as evidenced by the fact that Regency England viewed theater as morally corrupting.

Additionally, Fanny's refusal to wed Henry Crawford, who represents the evil qualities of the city, shows her sharpest opposition to the cultural invasion of London. Fanny maintains her position and refusal to accept Henry's proposal, choosing to defy the persuading corrupt forces of the city in favor of her own better judgment, stating that "she trusted, in the first place, that she had done right, that her judgment had not misled her" [1]. Fanny firmly rejects Henry by telling him that she does not want to marry him and never will, despite the fact that Austen portrays Henry as a guy with enormous charisma and riches.

The only character in the book who constantly opposes the Crawfords' bold suggestions for "improvements" and attacks on nature and religion is Fanny Price. People in Mansfield Park are particularly drawn to the subtle yet catastrophic threats the Crawfords pose. Fanny, the moral protagonist of the story, so aims to save Mansfield Park from the perilous outside influences of London. Fanny represents both the lovely environment that Austen adores and the moral values

she upholds in Mansfield Park. Fanny's ideals and ethical beliefs are consistent with Jane Austen's morals and her longing for the rural past.

4. Conclusion

In *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen indirectly describes London. When the majority of Austen's contemporaries praised the prosperous London, Austen began to draw distinctions to investigate the evil aspects of London, which she attributes to the deteriorating morals and nature of money-worship.

Mary Crawford, as well as Henry Crawford, her brother, carry the moral decay and materialism of London to Mansfield Park. They perform degrading theatricals in Mansfield Park. Henry still flirts with Maria who is engaged to Mr. Rushworth and even tries to flirt with Fanny. People in London tend to think that money is the key to obtaining anything. Growing up in such an environment, Mary Crawford could not comprehend why the farmers do not lend her a horse and cart to fetch her harp or why Edmund thinks clergymen are so necessary for people.

Rural residents enjoy the beauty of nature and uphold their enduring rural or traditional values before the invasion of urban values. In contrast, urban residents pay little attention to the natural world and adopt urban ideals like a focus on money and a decline in morals as a result of industrialization and urbanization. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen vividly describes the whole process how the London culture tries to invade Mansfield Park through the improvement of the Sotherton Court and how Mansfield Park struggles to resist its invasion through how Fanny tries to influence Mr. Crawford and preserves her own culture.

Austen uses Fanny as a symbol of all that is good about the country to illustrate her distaste for the values of the city and her longing for the past. The strength of Fanny's character and moral convictions are demonstrated by her refusal to participate in *Lovers' Vows* and her rejection of Henry's proposal. These actions show Austen's reaction and opposition to the prevalent urban values in the countryside.

As a writer who frequently extols the virtues and beauty of rural life, Austen actually suggests a means to address the drawback of the modern city through the description of cultural invasion and resistance between London and Mansfield Park, that is, curbing the city's growing desires through sanity of rural people.

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