

## “Undiverted Hearts”: Domestic Alienation and Moral Integrity in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* and Henry James’s *Washington Square*

### “Corazones leales”: Alienación doméstica e integridad moral en *Mansfield Park*, de Jane Austen y *Washington Square*, de Henry James

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**Abstract:** My aim in this article is to argue that Henry James’s *Washington Square* (1880) is an unacknowledged reworking of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814). To this purpose, I have analyzed both narratives as fictions of domestic alienation in which the heroines refuse to allow their individuality to be subdued by; (a) patriarchal authority and parental mismanagement; (b) the interferences and meddlings of their manipulative aunts; or (c) the libertine corruption of their deceitful suitors. Although they have been subjected to coercion and manipulation, Fanny Price and Catherine Sloper rebel against the pressures of parental authority and emerge as the true preservers of moral integrity.

**Keywords:** *Mansfield Park*; *Washington Square*; domestic alienation; moral integrity; individuality.

**Summary:** Introduction. Authoritative Fathers. Meddlesome Aunts. Deceitful Suitors. Stoic Heroines. Conclusions.

**Resumen:** Mi objetivo en este artículo es argumentar que *Washington Square* (1880), de Henry James, es una reescritura no reconocida de *Mansfield Park* (1814), de Jane Austen. Para ello, he analizado ambas narraciones como ficciones de alienación doméstica en las que las heroínas se niegan a permitir que su individualidad sea subyugada por; (a) la autoridad patriarcal y la mala

gestión paternal; (b) las interferencias y las intromisiones de sus manipuladoras tías; o (c) la corrupción libertina de sus engañosos pretendientes. A pesar de haber sido sometidas a coacciones y manipulaciones, Fanny Price y Catherine Sloper se rebelan contra las presiones de la autoridad paterna y emergen como las verdaderas preservadoras de la integridad moral.

**Palabras clave:** *Mansfield Park*; *Washington Square*; alienación doméstica; integridad moral; individualidad.

**Sumario:** Introducción. Padres autoritarios. Tías entrometidas. Pretendientes engañosos. Heroínas estoicas. Conclusiones.

## INTRODUCTION

In a letter to Mrs. Humphry Ward, Henry James writes “I’m a wretched person to read a novel—I begin so quickly and concomitantly for myself to write it, rather—even before I know clearly what it’s about! The novel I can only read, I can’t read at all!” (*Life in Letters*, 320). This statement summarizes James’s process of writing; of reading the works of others with the intention to reappropriate and to rewrite them (Wrenn 13). As Adeline Tintner asserts, James felt compelled “to redo the classic works of literature . . . to improve them and to revise them in a way” (30). This tallies with one of Bloom’s categories of influence, “tessera,” in which the author “completes” his precursor’s work, retaining its terms but arranging them in a new way, “as though the precursor had failed to go far enough” (Bloom 13). Thus, I uphold that James’s novels are made of what Roland Barthes calls the “already-read,” the “already-written” (Allen 70), a “multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and class” (Barthes 146).

Readers of *Washington Square* have detected the influence of James’s preferred French patron, Balzac, especially of his short novel, *Eugénie Grandet* (1833), which shares many traits with *Washington Square*: the tyrannical father, the vulnerable daughter, and the mercenary suitor. Besides, James’s tale also owes something to Victor Cherbuliez’s Gothic novel, *Le Comte Kostia* (1863), which revolves around the hero’s rescue of the only daughter of an oppressive father. A third source for this tale can be found in America with James’s great predecessor, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and his tale “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844), which James admired and in which we find again the triangle of James’s tale: a despotic father, an imprisoned daughter, and a potentially redemptive suitor (Poole ix–xii). While these form some of the known literary sources and influences of *Washington Square*, the many thematic similarities between

*Washington Square* and *Mansfield Park* have passed unnoticed by both readers and critics.

Henry James’s allusions to Jane Austen are scattered throughout his numerous critical essays and letters, and canonical critics like F. R. Leavis (1948), Brian Lee (1986), and Tony Tanner (1986) have pointed out Austen’s undeniable influence on Henry James and more recently, critics like William C. Duckworth (1999), Mary Ann O’Farrell (2006), Elsie B. Michie (2011), and Juliet McMaster (2019) have made interesting contributions to the literary relationships between Austen and James. And yet, the link between Austen and James has not been adequately examined, most likely because it has frequently been assumed as self-evident (Valero Redondo “Craving to Be Frightened,” forthcoming). In this paper, I want to recuperate Tanner’s assertion that Catherine Sloper “is a Jamesian version of one kind of Jane Austen heroines” (9) and to argue that *Washington Square* (1880) forms a yet unacknowledged reworking of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814). Although *Mansfield Park* is considerably longer than *Washington Square* and its storyline far more complex, I will analyze both narratives as fictions of domestic alienation in which the heroines refuse to allow their individualism and volition to be assimilated or exhausted by; (a) patriarchal authority and parental mismanagement; (b) the perverted manipulation of meddling aunts; and (c) the libertine corruption of deceitful seducers. In his review on George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, James praises “the indefinable moral elevation” of Eliot’s female characters (“On Middlemarch” 424). It is precisely this moral elevation that James admired in Eliot’s heroines that distinguishes Fanny Price and Catherine Sloper, who eventually resist instrumentalization and emerge as the true preservers of moral integrity in *Mansfield Park* and *Washington Square*, respectively.

## 1. AUTHORITATIVE FATHERS

Both *Mansfield Park* and *Washington Square* are narratives about parental mismanagement and the rejection of paternal rule. Hence, although both tales have been read by critics as a satire of patriarchy, they are in fact “a satire of a failure of patriarchy” (Downie 740) since they expose the serious consequences of a childhood without adequate love and guidance. Thus, we find two severe and authoritative father figures—in the case of Fanny his uncle and in the case of Catherine his natural father—who subject their daughters to persuasion, coercion, and victimization. Sir

Thomas and Dr. Sloper significantly contribute to both Fanny's and Catherine's internal struggle between self-expression and restraint, turning them into "complex and layered individual[s]" (Armstrong 92). And yet, the heroines prove to have sufficient individuality and a capacity for self-expression to reject—or violate—paternal rule.

In *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas exerts pressure on Fanny by trying to convince her to marry Henry Crawford, whom he considers a young man "of sense, of character, of temper, of manners, and of fortune" (*MP* 249). Fanny longs to reveal the reason of her forceful rejection of Henry, but she cannot tell Sir Thomas that she has already engaged her heart to her cousin, Edmund Bertram, since he is socially above her. Besides, Fanny has substantial reasons to think ill of Crawford's principles. However, to describe Crawford's misconduct would imply betraying her cousins, especially Maria, so Fanny cannot justify her rejection. If unmarried women were particularly helpless in the patriarchal society of nineteenth-century England, Fanny is "both a young woman and a poor relation in comparison to the landowning Bertrams" (Folsom 91). Sir Thomas resorts to the language of "cultural propriety in patriarchal England" to subjugate his niece (Stampone 197), and the words "duty," "obligation," and "owe" pervade his discourse in the novel:

I should have thought it a gross violation of duty and respect. *You* are not to be judged by the same rule. You do not owe me the duty of a child. But, Fanny, if your heart can acquit you of *ingratitude*—. (*MP* 249)

The discourse of "duty" and "gratitude" associates patriarchy with mental subjugation "and marks Fanny Price as the text's representative slave" (Stampone 198). Like the villains of Gothic romances, Sir Thomas demands of his niece complete submission to patriarchal norms.

In *Washington Square*, the situation is ironically reversed, and we do not find an authoritative father figure forcing his daughter to marry a prosperous man. On the contrary, Dr. Sloper coerces Catherine into giving up her suitor, Morris Townsend, alleging that he is "a selfish idler" (*WS* 243), and threatening to disinherit her if she persists in her infatuation. It is evident that Dr. Sloper perceives in Morris a disturbing alter ego of himself, since—like Morris—he also made his fortune with a highly advantageous marriage. Like Sir Thomas Bertram, Dr. Sloper also employs the discourse of "duty" and "gratitude" when he talks with Morris Townsend about his daughter:

As for Catherine’s giving you up—no, I am not sure of it. But as I shall strongly recommend it, as I have a great fund of respect and affection in my daughter’s mind to draw upon, and as she has the sentiment of duty developed in a very high degree, I think it extremely possible. (WS 92)

He knows that Catherine worships him and he has determined to use her veneration to his own advantage. In both cases, the subtleties of language expose patriarchy as “an inescapable system of mental slavery” (Stampone 24).

Sir Thomas and Dr. Sloper contrive similar schemes to render their daughters’ will or desire ineffectual and, like King Lear, they send their daughters into banishment for violating patriarchal authority and “for failing to provide the appropriate answer which, as daughter[s], is expected of [them]” (Calvo 86).<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas decides to send Fanny back to Portsmouth with her original family hoping that the modest conditions there would teach her “the value of good income” (MP 289). Besides, the narrator’s indirect account of Sir Thomas’s consciousness is characterized by a discourse of medicine, cure, and prescription. Hence, Sir Thomas’s plan is “a medicinal project upon his niece’s understanding, which he must consider as at present diseased” (MP 289). He justifies his coercion by comparing himself to a doctor prescribing strong drugs to cure a dying patient.

Sir Thomas’s “medicinal project” finds its parallel in Dr. Sloper’s success in diagnosing diseases and in his predictions about his daughter’s intelligence and her future marriage prospects. Dr. Sloper treats his daughter’s infatuation as “a king of experiment in human sexual selection” (Scheiber 2) and he tends to judge everybody by means of what he considers scientific categories. In his conversation with Morris’s sister, he expounds his “scientific” theory of “dividing people into classes” (WS 101). His profession gives him “honor” and “credit” since it combines “the realm of the practical” with “the light of science” (WS 27). When he realizes that his daughter will not easily give up Morris, Dr. Sloper devises a scheme to see if Catherine “will stick” (WS 126), since the idea of her “sticking” offers him “a prospect of entertainment” (WS 126). Like Sir Thomas, Sloper decides to take Catherine to a one-year trip around Europe, in the hope that she will forget Morris.

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring here to Fanny Price as a daughter because she is symbolically one.

The imagery of cold, snow, ice, clinical whiteness, and death permeate the descriptions of the doctor (Maini 96). Thus, Mrs. Penniman says of her brother that “[h]is state of mind really freezes my blood” (WS 173), and Morris repeats this metaphor when he says that Dr. Sloper “combines the properties of a lump of ice and a red-hot-coal” (WS 174). The fact that he chooses a valley in the Alps to confront his daughter is significant, since it stresses his cold-bloodedness. Tellingly, the doctor finally dies of “a violent cold” (WS 207). It is possible indeed to perceive a relationship between cold, ice, suppressed sexuality, and mercilessness (Maini 96).

The relationship between Sir Thomas and Fanny is transfigured from one of power and resistance to what the narrator calls “mutual attachment” (MP 371), and Sir Thomas ends up realizing that “Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted” (MP 371). Sir Thomas comes to acknowledge his own shortcomings as a father: “Sir Thomas, poor Sir Thomas, a parent, and conscious of errors in his own conduct as a parent, was the longest to suffer” (MP 362). In *Washington Square*, however, Dr. Sloper and Catherine’s relationship remains one of power and resistance since Dr. Sloper never acknowledges his parental mismanagement. He is stuck in “his know-it-all attitude and his underestimation of his daughter’s ethical qualities” (Levin 275). The masterstroke of his calculating intelligence takes place during their confrontation in the Alps:

You try my patience . . . , and you ought to know what I am, I am not a very good man. Though I am very smooth externally, at bottom I am very passionate; and I assure you I can be very hard. (WS 154)

Even Mrs. Almond is struck by his heartlessness: “You have no sympathy . . . . That was never your strong point” (WS 201). He is incapable of empathic judgment and self-reproach. Catherine finally comes to the tragic realization that “the great facts of her career were that Morris Townsend had trifled with her affection, and that her father had broken its spring” (WS 203). Therefore, with his heartless and selfish behaviour, Dr. Sloper breaks Catherine’s heart and also creates a fissure in her affection for him.

*Mansfield Park* and *Washington Square* are then stories about the disintegration of a family, and the agent of this collapse is rebellion by the daughters against irrational patriarchal rule. In Austen’s novel, Fanny’s rejections of Henry Crawford’s proposal of marriage bring about Fanny’s domestic alienation in the house and Maria Bertram’s adultery, since she elopes with Henry. Mary Crawford is indeed aware of Fanny’s fault in the

issue: “Why would not she have him? It is all her fault. Simple girl!” (*MP* 358). Maria and Henry’s adultery throws into disarray the stability of the family. Thus, Maria’s marriage with Mr. Rushworth is obviously invalidated and it ends in a divorce and Maria’s elopement encourages Julia to do the same with Mr. Yates. It does not matter whether the family is renewed by Fanny and Edmund’s eventual marriage. The seed of chaos is already planted (Valero Redondo, “Operative and Inoperative Communities” 267).

Similarly, in *Washington Square*, Catherine’s rebellion against patriarchal authority prompts her domestic isolation and the collapse of her illusions, and she becomes “a mature and diffident spinster” who, like a modern Penelope, spends her life sewing in the front parlour (*WS* 203). As Balzac puts it at the end of *Eugene Grandet*, “such is the story of a woman who, made to be a magnificent wife and mother, has neither husband nor children nor family” (192). Catherine has retreated into the back parlour of the house, her “quiet habits,” and her aunt’s company (*WS* 210). In other words, she has accepted her fate and resigned herself to it. That James associated Austen with the cultural figure of the old maid, is quite significant. Could he envision his heroine as an alter ego of Jane Austen?

*Mansfield Park* and *Washington Square* portray a conflict between paternal and social demand and personal will. And yet, there is a space of possibility in both narratives. According to Nancy Armstrong, the novels of Jane Austen “mark the simultaneous modernization of the individual and maturation of the novel” since her heroines’ interiority “make[s] small but important differences within a circumscribed community of country gentry” (7). Henry James follows in his predecessor’s footsteps in *Washington Square*—and in his subsequent novels—and portrays Catherine’s development towards expressive individualism and the dramatization of her interiority. Hence, both Fanny and Catherine defy patriarchal authority and this results in domestic alienation and grief. They emblemize the difficulty of preserving true moral self amid tyrannical parental authority, but, at the same time, they also privilege the search for individuality and self-expression within the domestic plot of the novel.

## 2. MEDDLESOME AUNTS

The character of the meddlesome aunt figures prominently in both narratives and it functions as a subordinate figure of oppression and manipulation. Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Penniman are marginalized and

dependent women who force their nieces into surrogate figures, a substitute of their own making, willing to exert revenge on them or to put them at emotional risk for their own amusement. With their meddling and manipulation, they play an important part in their nieces' domestic alienation. However, the heroines eventually manage to get rid of their pernicious influence and maneuverings.

Both Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Penniman replace the maternal figure in both narratives, since the mother is either neglectful of her role—as Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park*—or has died in childbirth—as Mrs. Sloper in *Washington Square*. Mrs. Norris is surely the most despicable character in *Mansfield Park*. She is accepted in the house as a surrogate mother, since Lady Bertram “paid not the smallest attention” to the education of her daughters (*MP* 16). Sir Thomas is aware of this and entrusts Mrs. Norris with the moral education of his offspring, but he eventually realizes “how ill he had judged” to commend his children to her care (*MP* 363). Mrs. Norris fosters Mr. Rushworth and Maria Bertram’s engagement and tries to encourage—though quite unsuccessfully—a match between Henry Crawford and Julia Bertram. She is also responsible for trying to coerce Fanny into taking a part in the theatricals: “I am not going to urge her . . . , 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* 116). Mrs. Norris discloses here “the truth that underlies the family’s attitude towards Fanny, but one that should never be spoken so brutally” (Wiltshire 108).

Mrs. Norris certainly harbors a strong antipathy for Fanny. Tellingly, it is she who persuades Sir Thomas to adopt Fanny because the latter provides a surrogate figure, an even more helpless and impoverished person in the house for her to harass, whereas Maria and Julia Bertram embody more flattering versions of herself, since they are legitimate members of the family (Souter 211). According to Tanner, this situation echoes a common theme in fairy-tales, in which the intruding step-daughter is accepted in the household until the step-mother regards her as a competitor (208). Her interest in adopting a daughter of her sister Frances and to make her internalize her own social inferiority in the house allows her to appease her bitterness and hostility (Wiltshire 88). Mrs. Norris’s constant harassment and scorn of Fanny are ways to exert control upon her and to play her own frustrations. Not only does her manipulative and hypocritical discourse incessantly assert her kindness and selflessness, but it also uncovers “that she needs continuous self-soothing and self-



appeasing, and that is because in her deepest sense of herself she is a victim” (Wiltshire 89).

Mrs. Penniman is a different kind of meddler; not as mean as Mrs. Norris, and more similar to other of Austen’s heroines, like Emma Woodhouse. As Adrian Poole puts it, “Mrs. Penniman is a character on whom Jane Austen would have been proud” (xx). Like Mrs. Norris, Catherine’s aunt also functions as a surrogate mother for her niece. An impoverished widow, she settles herself in her brother’s house with the account of “tak[ing] charge of her niece’s education” (WS 31). Dr. Sloper—though quite skeptical about his sister’s intellectual powers—accepts “the proposition which Mrs. Penniman had tacitly laid down, that it was of importance that the poor motherless girl should have a brilliant woman near her” (WS 32). Catherine’s aunt projects her desire to experience, however indirectly, the romantic scenarios she has read about in novels. She is described as a romantic and sentimental woman who had “a passion for little secrets and mysteries” (WS 33). Like Emma Woodhouse does with Harriet, Mrs. Penniman tries to force Catherine into a surrogate figure who will succumb to a romantic and forbidden relationship with a dashing gallant. Her match-making fantasies serve to entertain herself and to pass her unoccupied time. She becomes a kind of chaperon and encourages the relationship between Morris and Catherine, even to the point of foiling it.

Mrs. Penniman is a quixotic manipulator who feeds off Catherine’s life and who is eager to put Catherine in emotionally charged situations that she herself could never experience during her youth. She uses her niece to satisfy her own frustrated needs. Thus, when Morris deserts Catherine, Mrs. Penniman imagines that Catherine has left the house in a desperate search for her suitor, clasping her hands “with admiration and envy” (WS 189). In an authorial (and satirical) comment, James parodies Mrs. Penniman’s clichéd romanticism, betraying her repressed desire to steal the limelight from her niece: “It may even be said that there were times when she lost sight altogether of the modest heroine of the play, in the contemplation of certain great passages which would naturally occur between the hero and herself” (WS 79). Mrs. Penniman represents the misguided folly of conflating art with reality, much like Catherine Morland and her fascination with Gothic novels in *Northanger Abbey* (McMaster 206).

Both Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Penniman take an active part in their nieces’ misfortunes and domestic alienation with their selfishness, and

their silly intrusions and meddlings. They have projected their own frustrations and insecurities onto their nieces, who serve as scapegoats for the appeasement of their bitterness. Whereas Henry Crawford and Morris Townsend are the dangers from without, Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Penniman are the dangers from *within* the domestic realm. Despite their selfish manipulations and schemes, these meddling aunts do not manage to coerce Fanny and Catherine. Fanny resorts to passive resistance to endure Mrs. Norris's tyrannical behavior and she does not yield to her aunt's pressures to take part in the theatricals—although she almost yields to Edmund's pressures—and Sir Thomas, finally convinced of Mrs. Norris's pernicious influence on his offspring, banishes her from Mansfield Park: “Mrs. Norris's removal from Mansfield was the great supplementary comfort of Sir Thomas's life” (*MP* 365). Similarly, Catherine finally understands that Mrs. Penniman has been Morris's accomplice in her desertion: “A consummate sense of her aunt's meddling folly had come over her during the last five minutes, and she was sickened at the thought that Mrs. Penniman had been let loose, as it were, upon her happiness” (*WS* 192). She is finally awakened to her aunt's machinations and intrusions and “judge[s] her aunt finally and without appeal” (*WS* 192). Through the strategies of passive resistance and self-expression, Fanny and Catherine manage to dodge the selfish manipulations of their surrogate mother figures.

### 3. DECEITFUL SUITORS

Both narratives portray a conceited and deceitful seducer who likes to trifle with women's affections. This role is played by Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park* and by Morris Townsend in *Washington Square*. According to Juliet McMaster, Morris Townsend bears a resemblance to Henry Crawford, exuding charm and sophistication while possessing an unwavering belief in his own worth (205). These seducers mask their real intentions through acting. They rely on impersonation to seduce and entrap vulnerable and unprotected women like Fanny and Catherine. The heroines, however, are capable of looking through their masks, proving to have sufficient judgment and capacity for self-expression.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Penny Gay (2002) and Paula Byrne (2007) have made a significant contribution to Austen criticism, analyzing Austen's novels in light of her knowledge of eighteenth-

Henry Crawford entertains himself by seducing the two Bertram sisters and once they are totally infatuated with him, he turns his mind to Fanny: “my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me” (*MP* 179). However, Fanny is not as easily seduced as he imagines. She is not deceived by his talk and attention and she cannot forget how he compromised her cousins’ decorum and propriety during the theatricals. Fanny’s affections are steady and loyal, and her love for her cousin Edmund, remains unaltered. Catherine Sloper, however, *does* fall prey to Morris Townsend’s gallantries, falling sincerely and devotedly in love with him. He is an opportunist who is only in love with Catherine’s inheritance, and when he learns that her father will not leave her a dollar, he deserts her unscrupulously and heartlessly, leaving her with a broken heart.

Both Henry Crawford and Morris Townsend are deceitful actors who know how to play their roles. Indeed, Fanny considers Henry the best actor of all in the theatricals: “She did not like him as a man, but she must admit him to be the best actor” (*MP* 129). Like the great actor that he is, he can mimic and appropriate the feelings that he says he has. His talent for acting is again underscored in his courting of Fanny. In one interesting episode, he takes a copy of Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* and starts to read it, performing the parts of all the different characters, “and whether it were dignity, or pride, or tenderness, or remorse, or whatever were to be expressed, he could do it with equal beauty” (*MP* 264). He can imitate all these feelings because he can feel none of them inside (Tanner 169). It is telling that Austen chooses *Henry VIII* as the play that Crawford picks up, given that both Henries are real Casanovas who entertain themselves by seducing a variety of ladies (Tanner 169). Of all the characters, Henry is the one who recalls the theatricals with more enthusiasm and nostalgia: “I shall always look back on our theatricals with exquisite pleasure. . . . We were all alive” (*MP* 176). As Penny Gay, puts it, “only while acting does Henry feel really alive and purposeful; he has no other ‘employment’” (Gay 103).

Similarly, when she meets Morris Townsend for the first time at a party, Catherine wonders at his eloquence:

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century theatre and demonstrating how she brings the characteristics and techniques of the theatre into the narrative form of the novel.

It was the way a young man might talk in a novel; or better still, in a play, on the stage, close before the footlights, looking at the audience, and with every one looking at him, so that you wondered at his presence of mind. (*WS* 44)

The fact that, at the same time, “he seemed so sincere, so natural” (*WS* 44), proves that he, like Henry Crawford, is indeed a very talented actor. It is also quite significant that Morris has travelled widely, read widely, and has been a keen theatregoer: he has seen “all the principal actors” and has “been to all the best theatres in London and Paris” (*WS* 57).<sup>3</sup> The theatrical qualities of Morris inevitably reminds us of the anecdote which triggers the plot of the novel: actress Fanny Kemble’s story about her hypocritical brother, who deserted her fiancée when he learned that her father would not leave her a penny (*Buonomo* 34). It is as if “James had transferred Fanny Kemble’s role and skills onto her brother’s fictional counterpart” (*Buonomo* 34). Both Henry and Morris use their dramatic talents to seduce and manipulate naïve and innocent women.

These seducers have a remarkable ability to please. Henry, “though not handsome, had air and countenance” and his manners “were lively and pleasant” (*MP* 33). Not only is Henry a shrewd seducer, his sister Mary Crawford also likes “to arouse and tease affection” (*Souter* 209). Their spoiled childhood and the fact that they were adored and manipulated by their aunt and uncle makes them use feelings as weapons “to be used when useful, and an investment against possible future need” (*Souter* 209). Thus, Henry entertains himself by making the Bertram sisters fall in love with him:

Mr. Crawford did not mean to be in any danger! The Miss Bertrams were worth pleasing, and were ready to be pleased; and he began with no object but of making them like him. He did not want them to die of love; but with sense and temper which ought to have made him judge and feel better, he allowed himself great latitude on such points. (*MP* 35)

As good a performer that he is, Henry is “quick, sensitive, and multi-talented” (*Gay* 99). Likewise, Morris’s talk “was light and easy and

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<sup>3</sup> Tellingly, the ghost of Peter Quint is also characterized as an actor in James’s *The Turn of the Screw*. Thus, when the governess encounters the ghost for the first time, she asserts that the odious figure gave her “a sort of sense of looking like an actor” (37). For James, the ability of acting is associated with deviousness.

friendly” (WS 56) and he did not require a lot of effort to cajole Mrs. Penniman and Catherine at a party, an ideal setting in which he can display his performative qualities, namely his handsomeness, sophistication, pleasing manners, and eloquence (Buonomo 32).

These characters are “living commodities,” offering themselves up “for visual consumption as a thing of beauty and a product to be purchased at a very high price” (Buonomo 32). Thus, despite his plain physical appearance, Crawford is soon admired by the two Bertram sisters, who compete for his attention. Morris Townsend, on his part, soon gains the admiration and confidence of both Mrs. Penniman and Catherine. Mrs. Penniman asserts that he is very handsome and clever, and that he expresses himself “with a great deal of felicity” (WS 47), whereas her niece compares him to “a young knight in a poem” (WS 56).

Apart from this, these dashing gallants have a cosmopolitan and sophisticated nature. They have travelled and read widely, and they are most comfortable when in society. Therefore, Henry Crawford, who is accustomed to the thrilling life of London, has a great dislike “[t]o anything like a permanence of abode, or limitation of society” (MP 33), a fact that is regarded with suspicion by the more conservative Edmund and Fanny. As for Morris Townsend, he is also a wanderer: he had been “knocking about the world, and living in queer corners” (WS 44). He has spent his youth travelling and spending his inheritance recklessly and, at the moment he meets Catherine, he has been teaching his nephews and nieces Spanish (WS 102). In short, they have turned themselves “into an exquisite object for visual and social consumption” (Buonomo 34).

As the living commodities that they are, Henry and Morris regard the women around themselves as little more than fetishist commodities, “essentially bought and sold by members of her family, encouraged to sell [themselves] for rank and wealth, and doubly deserted by both [their] immediate and adopted relatives” (Heydt-Stevenson 144). Hence, Henry schemes with her sister to “buy” Fanny with a necklace and, tellingly, Mary metonymically refers to Fanny as a “lovely throat” (MP 203). Additionally, Henry contrives to have William Price promoted in order to obtain Fanny’s favors as a reward. He marks Fanny’s body as a “displayable commodity” (Gay 115). Her very name, Fanny Price, implies prostitution, the value of her body, and echoes the name of Fanny Hill, the heroine of John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749), “the narrative that helped codify the name of Fanny as slang for female genitalia” (Heydt-Stevenson 144). Despite his maneuverings, Fanny is

able to see behind Henry's apparent benevolence and to resist his encroachments. Fanny's moral intelligence is unshakeable and resolute and she never falls prey to Henry's performative traits. In rejecting Henry, Fanny proves to have self-determination since she refuses to participate in heterosexual commerce.

Morris Townsend, on his part, woos and seduces Catherine and, when he learns that her father will not bequeath his money to her, he deserts her. Not daring to break their engagement, Morris asks Mrs. Penniman to prepare Catherine and to ease him off. However, seeing that Mrs. Penniman will not be of much help to him, he tries to provoke a quarrel between him and Catherine, behaving in a cruel manner and leaving her brokenhearted. Days later, Morris sends her an insincere letter full of excuses and playing the role of a victim of "a great social law" (WS 196). After Dr. Sloper's death and with Mrs. Penniman's assistance, Morris comes back to the house to win Catherine—and her inheritance—back, this time playing the role of a repentant suitor and unsuccessful man who has "an evil star against him" (WS 212). Morris has certainly perfected his theatrical skills and constantly rehearses his part as the hero of a sentimental romance.

But Catherine has gained maturity, judgment, and self-expression, and she rejects Morris's pitiful discourse once and for all: "I can't begin again—I can't take it up. Everything is dead and buried" (WS 219). She undergoes a *rite de passage* from illusion to disenchantment: "It seemed to be he, and yet not he; it was the man who had been everything, and yet this person was nothing" (WS 216). Her awakening is complete, and Catherine is, finally, confronted with the real man behind the mask. Her ensuing resistance to marry any other man implies a desire to preserve her social and economic independence and a rejection of any proprietary treatment of her.

#### 4. STOIC HEROINES

In both novels, we find two stoic heroines who pay a high price for upholding their moral values in the sadistic and perverted power play that unfolds around them. In this sense, they are like Richardson's Clarissa, conservative heroines torn between the coercion of their family and the preservation of their moral self (McKeon 418). Their internal struggle between self-expression and self-discipline turns them into complex and layered individuals. And yet, both Fanny Price and Catherine Sloper

preserve their moral consciousness among the selfish and aggressive manipulation of their families and they are finally able to rebel against the pressures of paternal authority. They are timid, silent and unassertive heroines who are extremely vulnerable, but who can judge and see the world more accurately than the rest of the characters. According to Tonny Tanner, we can see in Fanny Price a “lonely conscience” (Tanner 175) and I argue that we can apply this to Catherine as well. Both protagonists have been subjected to manipulation, coercion and victimization, and yet they have been finally erected as the true preservers of moral integrity.

Fanny Price is first described as “small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty; exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice” (*MP* 10). The references to her “faults of ignorance and timidity” (*MP* 16) and her “quiet passive manner” (*MP* 12) are frequently stressed by the narrator and characters in the novel. Similarly, the ironic narrator of *Washington Square* presents Catherine Sloper as a “quiet and irresponsive girl” who, like Fanny, was “shy, uncomfortably, painfully shy” (*MP* 147). Like Fanny as well, she “is extremely modest, had no desire to shine, and on most social occasions... you would have found her lurking in the background” (*MP* 145). As opposed to most of Austen’s and James’s other heroines, who are active and talkative, confront injustices, and resist oppression, Fanny and Catherine are totally passive and submissive. “What is become of all the shyness in the world?” asks Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra (*Jane Austen’s Letters* 124). She means “a true unassertive reticence of soul. A selflessness; a quietness” (Tanner 156). Fanny and Catherine are stoic heroines with “undiverted heart[s]” (*WS* 160) who exert resistance through silence and endurance.

However, although they are continually subjected to abuse, persuasion and oppression by their tyrannical fathers, Fanny and Catherine possess a steady and unshakeable moral intelligence. They stick to their pledges and unrequited loves, and this results in sacrifice, renunciation, and solitary grief. When her cousins and Mrs. Norris try to persuade her to participate in the theatricals, Fanny gathers all her courage to voice her rejection: “Me! . . . Indeed you must excuse me. I could not act any thing if you were to give me the world. No, indeed, I cannot act” (*MP* 115).

But Fanny’s most significant resistance to pressure occurs when Sir Thomas—the figure of authority—attempts to coax her, against her better judgment, to marry Henry Crawford. Fanny is able to threaten parental logos and to resist Sir Thomas’s subjugating authority: “I—I cannot like him, sir, well enough to marry him” (*MP* 246). As Jane Stabler puts it,

Fanny's resolute rejection of Henry Crawford goes beyond the courage displayed by Elizabeth in refusing Darcy and Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*. Fanny's act of resistance involves not only rejecting a potential marriage based on financial considerations but also defying parental authority (xxxii). Thus, Fanny struggles to maintain her inner independence without revealing her most cherished secret; her silent love of Edmund Bertram. Her main weapon is certainly "the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure" (*MP* 372). Clara Calvo reads Fanny as a reworking of Shakespeare's Cordelia (85); her passivity and silence certainly echo Cordelia's famous avowal: "What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent" (1.1. 62). Like Cordelia, Fanny also loves Edmund and remains silent.

Similarly, Catherine Sloper also demonstrates moral vitality and independence when she refuses to be directed by her father's and her suitor's manipulations. Catherine feels a strong devotion for her father and he knows how to take advantage of this. Her docile nature is stressed by the narrator: "her father's words had such an authority for her that her very thoughts were capable of obeying him" (*WS* 124). According to Scheiber, her "subordinate position requires her to demonstrate her subservience and transparency to her father's will" (6). When Dr. Sloper orders her to choose between him or her suitor, and to give the other up, Catherine responds "with a pitiful cry" (*WS* 126) since she expected some understanding from her father. Yet, Catherine manages to resist her father's coercion and her lover's pressures by what Levin calls a "slowness campaign" against them (281). Hence, when Morris inconsiderately presses her to marry him as soon as possible, Catherine resorts to patience: "I should be strong enough to wait—to wait a long time" (*WS* 133). Her courage lies certainly in her patience and endurance. Dr. Sloper does not understand Catherine's passive resistance, her "slowness campaign," which is based on patient expectation: "To be good, she must be patient, respectful, abstain from judging her father too harshly, and from committing any act of open defiance" (*WS* 107). Like Fanny, Catherine also adopts Cordelia's strategy of passivity and silence: "What shall Catherine speak? Love and be silent."<sup>4</sup>

Catherine's most decisive act of resistance occurs when she refuses to make a promise that would imply total surrender to her father's coercion.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a rewriting of Shakespeare's line in *King Lear*: "What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent" (1.1. 62).



She refuses to promise him that she will never marry Townsend after his death. Instead of deceiving him, Catherine decides to remain silent with a father who is anxious to know the truth. As Rosenberg puts it, “in refusing to give to coercion what she had previously offered willingly, Catherine refuses humiliation. To her father, she will grant no leeway to injure her once more” (67). Dr. Sloper—the man who prides himself on predicting everything—dies frustrated by Catherine’s enigmatic silence. The infallible philosopher, who can diagnose any sickness and who can divide people into types, is unable to foresee what her “plain inanimate girl” will do (Bell 111). Catherine asserts her independence through her silence and passive resistance.

Even though they have a passive and acquiescent surface, both Fanny and Catherine prove to have an exemplary moral consciousness that protects them against coercion and the moral corruption of their families. Our heroines are neither active nor resolute; they do not challenge their oppressors, they lack vitality, but they do possess self-reliance. Fanny and Catherine do not use their psychological depth and their ability to analyze others in order to cause damage, but to protect themselves, and this signals their own moral superiority (Zacharias 215). As Edmund says to Sir Thomas, “Fanny is the only one who has judged rightly throughout, who has been consistent. *Her* feelings have been steadily against it from first to last” (*MP* 147). Fanny follows her inner instincts “in a world of falling worldly standards” (Tanner 147). When Henry Crawford instinctively asks her for guidance and approval, Fanny answers: “We have all a better guide in ourselves: if we would attend to it, than any other person can be” (*MP* 324). Her most important weapon against coercion and immorality is her own moral consciousness, which allows her to endure and survive. For Fanny, “no law can be sacred but that of [her] nature” (Emerson 2).

Catherine also undergoes an internal development in the novel, since she eventually learns how to analyze her father’s harshness towards her without condemning him. She gains insight about her father’s conduct and limitations and she comes to understand that Sloper’s love for her dead mother somehow hinders his paternal affections, even if he ignores it (*WS* 166). Catherine thus develops a form of “empathic judgment,” which implies “an acknowledgement of what is more vulnerable in the being one judges” (Levin 286). She also demonstrates her capacity for empathic judgment when Morris Townsend returns with the aim to resume their relationship. We can trace here the evolution of her character. She is no longer the vulnerable and naïve girl who was infatuated with Morris’s

eloquence and physical appearance: “It seemed to be he, and yet not he; it was the man who had been everything, and yet this person was nothing” (WS 216). Like Fanny, Catherine gains more psychological depth and self-reliance. This moral growth allows her to become a kind of counsellor to all the young members of the neighborhood, who go to her for guidance and counsel in amorous matters. According to Zacharias, “Catherine becomes for others the mentor she never had for herself” (215).

These heroines’ vulnerabilities and silences are counterbalanced by their ability to see beyond appearances and impersonation (Calvo 87). Their rebellion against patriarchal authority not only implies a movement towards self-knowledge and self-expression, but also an awakening to the knowledge of potential freedom and autonomy.

## CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, I have read Henry James’s *Washington Square* as an unacknowledged reworking of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* and I have analyzed both novels as fictions of domestic alienation in which the heroine refuses to allow her individuality to be threatened by patriarchal authority and parental mismanagement; by the interferences and meddlings of their manipulative aunts; or by the libertine corruption of their devious suitors. Both narratives portray stories about parental mismanagement and the challenge of patriarchal authority. Therefore, we find two patriarchal figures who subject their daughters to coercion and oppression, contributing to the heroines’ internal struggle between expressive individualism and emotional restraint. And yet, both Fanny and Catherine gather sufficient individuality and capacity for self-expression to confront paternal authority.

The character of the meddling aunt is also a subsidiary figure of coercion and manipulation in the domestic sphere. Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Penniman are frustrated women who force their nieces into surrogate figures, eager to exact retribution for their ostracised status in the household, or to put them at emotional risk for their own entertainment. With their meddling and selfishness, both aunts take an active part in their nieces’ tribulations and domestic alienation. Despite this, Fanny and Catherine resort to the strategies of passive resistance and self-expression to effectively challenge their aunt’s selfish manipulations.

A further participant in the domestic warfare between the heroines and the parental figure is the character of the deceitful seducer who likes to

trifle with women's affections. Henry Crawford and Morris Townsend rely on their dramatic talents and their eloquence to seduce and manipulate vulnerable and unprotected women like Fanny and Catherine. They have a remarkable ability to please and they know how to use it to their own advantage. These gallants offer themselves as "living commodities" (Buonomo 32) and, therefore, they regard women around themselves as little more than fetishist commodities. However, Fanny possesses sufficient judgement and capacity for self-expression to reject Henry, whereas Catherine, at first infatuated with Morris's eloquence, gains maturity and self-expression, and ends up rejecting Morris once and for all.

Although they have been subjected to coercion and oppression by these three manipulative figures, Fanny Price and Catherine Sloper are able to resist domestic alienation and they emerge as the true preservers of moral integrity in their families. They are neither active nor resolute, but they possess self-reliance and moral intelligence, which allow them to endure and survive in the contested domestic sphere. Their insurgence against patriarchal rule not only implies a movement towards self-knowledge and self-expression, but also the consciousness of their potential self-determination and independence.

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