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Jane Austen and the Significance of Names

Through her six novels, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey* (1817), and *Persuasion* (1817), Jane Austen shows English society of the early nineteenth century primarily through the eyes of young women. The similar plot structure of the novels encourages a reader to compare and contrast characters, not only through their distinctive traits but also through the surnames and estate names that surround them. Many elements of characters' names or estate names themselves, not just the actions and situations of these people, link aspects of personality and plot surrounding the characters within one novel; others relate to additional names in the novels more generally. This paper argues that the names in Austen's novels do not take away from the overall realism as a completely planned and overt system of naming would; they enhance a reader's understanding of, and interest in, these characters and their places in the structure of the novels.

To follow this significance of names, Austen's readers may trace names through a particular novel, or trace only one name that is repeated throughout the novels, linking those names to the broader network of names that connects the novels to each other. In this way, the reader can see the importance of names in the novels grow. The critic Maggie Lane, in her book *Jane Austen and Names*, chooses to focus on the importance of the characters' own use of Christian names in the novels, and to provide a greater "understanding of the culture to which [Austen] belonged" by showing "only the names which a society is free to choose for itself—and to choose afresh with each generation—reveal its values, conflicts and aspirations" (7). Though she consciously chooses not to focus on the surnames and place names, they too have importance. Their significances call on the reader to make connections between names and

greater themes of the novels, as well as the personalities and experiences of the characters themselves.

Although some of the names are important to character structure and the reader's knowledge, the names never become allegorical or superficial types. In the general sense, Jane Austen's novels follow the basic guidelines of literary realism. One interpretation of these guidelines comes from Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, in which he argues that "'realism' came to be used primarily as the antonym of 'idealism'" (Watt, 10). Also importantly, Watt describes realism as something original that uses "non-traditional plots" (15). Both of these definitions apply to Austen's novels, as her novels do not borrow from typical plots that show ideal situations; although all revolve around marriage, the individual characters and the presentation of their consciousnesses are the focus of each of the novels. Katherine Kearns, in *Nineteenth-Century Literary Realism*, discusses the marriage plots and states that, in fact, "realism does not allow one to forget how that [marriage] knot may slip or be sliced. By filling its pages with cautionary tales, realism undercuts any delusion of marital bliss" (100); she then discusses how Austen's novel *Mansfield Park* speaks to this "matter" of marriage ironically (100). Furthermore, in *The Rise of the Novel*, Watt describes Austen's writing specifically as a "unity...both of realism of presentation and realism of assessment, of the internal and external approaches to character" (297). Early in this same work, Watt states that the approach that provides this individualism of character is one of the main components of the realist novel. Ultimately, realistic novels present individual characters within equally realistic plots. Their names, including a reading of increased significance into any particular components of a name, are one of the greatest ways in which that individualism is seen.

Therefore, although some of the names in Jane Austen's novels have symbolic significance, not all of the names are significant past the point of maintaining the realism. Many of the characters of her novels, especially the lesser characters, are named "in exactly the same way as particular individuals are named in ordinary life," which, in *The Rise of the Novel*, Watt describes as typical of realism in general (18). With regard to those names that are significant, Watt mentions Austen's predecessor Samuel Richardson as a great realistic novelist, who gives "names that are subtly appropriate and suggestive, yet sound like ordinary realistic ones" (19). Austen's characters often have names that act in the same manner as those of Richardson. The names, both surnames and estate names, in Austen's novels also often suggest more significant meanings, while still maintaining the realism of character and plot development through the subtlety of that significance. Furthermore, the names that are more explicitly symbolic only help to show the true nature of the individual character. In the end, each name stays true to the requirement of realism, that "the primary function of the name...is to symbolize the fact that the character is to be regarded as though he were a particular person and not a type" (20). Therefore, this realism of naming helps to maintain the realism of the novel itself.

The novels also support realistic readings in that many of the names' significances are unobservable without a good knowledge of the particular novel or even all six novels as the author's body of work. This subtlety of additional readings emphasizes that realism while at the same time supporting the enhanced understanding of character and plot. Never are the names obviously significant to the point that the reader immediately forms broad connections that make him or her secure in the knowledge of the character's personality. Even the names that are more open to allegorical readings are surrounded by purely realistic surnames and place names that

obscure their significance within the realism of the work. Furthermore, the characters are often situated in real English towns, such as Bath, Brighton, and Lyme Regis.

While Austen does include real places in her novels, she also creates fictional towns and estates. Although the fictional place names many times support the significance of their respective estate owners' surnames or have symbolic meaning individually, in the novels they most often have purely realistic meanings. According to A.D. Mill's *A Dictionary of English Place-names*, there are many aspects that structure a place name. One such type of name is the topographical, which "consisted originally of a description of some topographical or physical feature" (xx). Jane Austen's novels contain many, perhaps most, estate names that make some connection to the physical, natural surroundings. For example, *Emma*'s Hartfield, *Sense and Sensibility*'s Norland, and *Mansfield Park*'s Sotherton all contain natural imagery that gives an idea of the possible landscape, typical of real English estates. Mill also states that "from a structural point of view, most English place names are compounds, that is they consist of two elements, the first of which usually qualifies the second" (xx). The previous examples are not the only names that combine two images; among many, there are Longbourn and Netherfield Park from *Pride and Prejudice* and Combe Magna, Willoughby's estate in *Sense and Sensibility*. One can see the practicality, for example, of calling the estate Combe Magna in the novel itself ("combe" meaning "the valley," according to the Oxford English Dictionary Online, and "magna" evoking the idea of an extensive area), when the character Charlotte Palmer "could fondly rest [her eye] on the farthest ridge of hills in the horizon, and fancy that from their summits Combe Magna might be seen" (*Sense and Sensibility*, 248). The height of the Palmers' own estate suggests that Willoughby's home rests in a valley. Therefore, at the same time as the place name is realistic to the setting and time of the novel, character commentary within *Sense*

and Sensibility shows Austen's own consciousness of naming. The reader can see this consciousness extend to other place names and surnames in all the novels.

I. Names Significant through Nature—

In addition to place names that often are tied to nature, some of the characters' surnames are significant through their natural meanings, which are both symbolic and realistic. According to P.H. Reaney in *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, "local surnames, by far the largest group, derive from a place-name" and furthermore, "a very large number of English local surnames derive from small places, or denote residence by a wood, in the marsh, by oaks, elms, ash, etc." (xv, xvi). Therefore, many of the roots of real English names come from natural landscapes, and the naturalistic surnames in Austen's novels maintain continuity with these names. Some of her names that have ties to nature also have significance on other levels, but the natural level is a good base of understanding. For example, the surnames Willoughby and Dashwood from *Sense and Sensibility*; Woodhouse from *Emma*; Croft, Musgrove, and Clay from *Persuasion*; and de Bourgh from *Pride and Prejudice* all contain natural elements. Yet, the names that fit into this type of significance through nature may find stronger places in other categories, or even not be as strong in their significance as other surnames in different categories. The importance of this area of significance is that the names can have symbolic significance and still maintain the realism of the novels, as a relationship to nature is typical of the roots of English naming.

Some of the names which connect to nature are better placed in different categories, where they can show their significance more extensively. For example, the Woodhouse family in *Emma* and the Dashwoods in *Sense and Sensibility* have names that very likely connect to the idea in *A Dictionary of English Surnames* that many of the "local surnames...denote residence

by a wood...” (xvi). The names Dashwood and Woodhouse are more interesting, though, when the reader connects them through the common element of “wood” and then contrasts the entire surnames to show the additional levels of difference in character and situation. The temporal connotation of “dash” contrasts with the solidity of “house,” while both names are linked by their association with nature. Also, Willoughby from *Sense and Sensibility* contains the natural element of the “willow” in his surname. This more specific connection to nature (than just the general “wood” of the two previous names) does not add to the realism in quite the same way, as it does not suggest the location of his estate. His surname, instead, better lends itself to a more specific reading of his own personality as willow-like in pliability and, consequently, influential in negative ways, while still ambiguous in its claim to sympathy.

While those names find places in more than one category, some of the names tied to nature do not unite so firmly with multiple readings in other categories of significance. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Lady Catherine de Bourgh is a character whose surname is tied to nature. Lady Catherine is Mr. Darcy’s aunt, and her surname “de Bourgh” connects to the idea of nature as part of the construction of many local surnames. As P.H. Reaney mentions in the introduction of *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, the division of surnames that contains the local names contains names that “derive (with occasional exceptions) from English, Scottish or French places and were originally preceded by a preposition *de, at, by, in*, etc.” (xv). Later in Reaney’s introduction, he states, citing Ekwall, that the use of prepositions, though never ceasing completely, gradually began to fall out of use around the 14th century (xvii). Therefore, the use of a preposition in Lady Catherine de Bourgh’s name would suggest that it is long standing. One reading *Pride and Prejudice* can understand that Lady Catherine is aristocratic through her title,

estate, and attitude towards class distinction, but her name itself also connotes permanency of social standing through the continued use of the preposition in the family name.

The name itself, though, “de Bourgh,” has the connotation of extreme exclusivity, because the closely associated word “burg,” when connected to borough, is “occasionally applied by historians to a fortress (Borough 1) or a walled town (Borough 2) of early and medieval times, so as to exclude the later notions connected with *burgh, borough...*” (OED Online). Therefore, her surname evokes an image of a constructed place that relates itself to nature through its attempt to exclude it. In the Oxford English Dictionary Online, the definition of “burgh” is connected to higher classes: royalty, regality, and barony. The ideas of exclusion and social distance that come from the words from which her name is derived very clearly apply to Lady Catherine herself, most obviously in her attitude toward the possibility of Elizabeth and the entire Bennet family creating a union with Mr. Darcy and her own family. Lady Catherine is the character who tries hardest to keep Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth apart, and her reasons are that she considers him to be engaged to her daughter and that Elizabeth is ““a young woman without family, connections, or fortune”” (*Pride and Prejudice*, 306). Therefore, her name provides the same idea of long-standing stasis (both in the construction of local surnames and the solid image of the fortress) that Lady Catherine’s character shows.

Several of the names significant through nature enrich another Austen novel, *Persuasion*. For example, this novel’s Admiral and Mrs. Croft are a couple who, based on his profession and both their personalities, are tied inextricably to the sea. At a dinner early in the novel, Mrs. Croft tells Anne that ““the happiest part of [her] life has been spent on board a ship”” (47). Furthermore, she and her husband don’t own property; they rent Kellynch Hall from Anne Elliot’s family. Even if they weren’t drawn so clearly to the sea, renting the Elliot home shows

their weak and temporary connection to the estate and land in general. Therefore, the surname takes on irony when one knows the meaning of the word croft. According to the OED online, a croft is “a piece of enclosed ground, used for tillage or pasture: in most localities a small piece of arable land adjacent to a house.” Although this definition tied to nature lends itself to a reading that contains some irony, the connection is not strong or specific enough to overshadow the idea of a deep bond to nature that the Crofts bring to the novel. Just as the grandness and exclusiveness of the name Bourgh attempts to exclude itself from nature, the Croft name evokes the image of a small construction, either the small farm from the OED definition or that which the name sounds like—a small boat craft. Either way, it is something that exists in conjunction with nature, just as the couple in *Persuasion* does.

Mrs. Clay, similarly to the Crofts, is a character in *Persuasion* whose surname takes on natural significance. She is the companion in Bath of Elizabeth Elliot, Anne’s older sister; as a now widowed woman under the same roof as Anne’s widower father, Mrs. Clay is considered by Anne as a possible threat to her father and the inheritance of the estate. Mrs. Clay’s surname takes on greater meaning for the reader when one considers the physical properties of clay. According to the OED Online, clay is “a stiff viscous earth found, in many varieties, in beds or other deposits near the surface of the ground and at various depths below it: it forms with water a tenacious paste capable of being moulded into any shape...” This definition connects the natural meaning to the character Mrs. Clay, because, at a very basic level, she is linked to the idea of an object that is low and common. Mrs. Clay as a person is often considered “unequal” and an unsuitable companion for the aristocratic Elliots, for example by their close friend Lady Russell (*Persuasion*, 12). As well, Elizabeth Elliot herself considers Mrs. Clay unattractive and freckled

(24). In fact, none of the characters in *Persuasion* initially views Mrs. Clay as anything extraordinary.

When the reader goes more deeply into her personality and function within the novel, though, one can see that she is the kind of person who can be “moulded into any shape” by the people around her, most importantly by Elizabeth and their cousin Mr. Elliot. Anne, upon arriving in Bath, thinks of the woman, “Mrs. Clay was very pleasant, and very smiling; but her courtesies and smiles were more a matter of course. Anne had always felt that she would pretend what was proper on her arrival” (90). As well, her physical appearance itself changes in the minds of the other characters, like Sir Walter Elliot, when he considers her more attractive when she has used at his suggestion a lotion to make her freckles less pronounced (96). In this case, Mrs. Clay’s ability to be transformed by others shows that Anne’s original qualms, about Mrs. Clay’s close position to Sir Walter in the household, have foundation.

Another definition of clay that shows this character to be unworthy of the distinction she does gain in the novel is “Earth as the material of the human body (cf. Gen. ii. 7); hence, the human body (living or dead) as distinguished from the soul; the earthly or material part of man” (OED Online). Although this definition originally comes from the Bible and, therefore, has a religious association, the word also has an everyman connotation. This view of Mrs. Clay generalizes her character and shows her definitely not to be on the same social level as the “elite” Elliots, not to mention on a lower moral level than Anne. Therefore, in several ways, the natural meaning of clay increases the importance of Mrs. Clay’s name in understanding her own personality and other characters’ visions of her in the social and familial spheres.

Though the name Musgrove, a family name also in *Persuasion*, connects to nature in that a grove is “a small wood; a group of trees affording shade or forming avenues or walks,

occurring naturally or planted for a special purpose” (OED Online), the natural reading is not the strongest. A reader could consider Musgrove in a similar manner to Dashwood and Woodhouse, whose names suggest residence in or near woods, according to a reading of *A Dictionary of English Surnames*. One then might suppose that the family lives near a grove; otherwise, the idea of a grove has little to do with their family specifically. Mainly, the man-made, and therefore unnatural, grove most clearly ties into Mary’s creation of artificial illnesses: Mary, “...inheriting a considerable share of the Elliot self-importance, was very prone to add to every other distress that of fancying herself neglected and ill-used” (25). While these appearances of illness are integral to understanding Mary’s character, they do not encompass the image of the entire Musgrove family.

Instead, the beginning element of the name: “mus,” which sounds like the word “muss,” is the more important part of the name when it comes to understanding the personalities and actions of the Musgroves, especially the daughter Louisa and Mary (who has married into the family). One of the definitions of muss, according to the OED, is “a state of untidiness or disorder; a muddle, a mess; messiness, confusion.” This definition can be used in significance with both Louisa and Mary (even though Mary has married into the family). The word muss can show a similar part of Mary’s character as the “grove” element, but goes farther by showing how her illnesses affect the other characters. She always fakes illness when she finds it convenient and creates confusion for Anne especially, but even Charles tells Anne, “I wish you could persuade Mary not to be always fancying herself ill” (*Persuasion*, 30). Her muss is more of an annoyance, neither very serious nor much noticed. Louisa, though, creates a more permanent kind of confusion and mess for the Musgrove family, not only with the change of affections from Wentworth to Benwick (114) but also the event that leads up to this change: her decision to jump

and her subsequent fall at Lyme (74). Therefore, the Musgrove family often creates confusion for itself, and the “mus” element of their surname only strengthens this reading.

In addition to the negative reading of the Musgrove name is the more positive one, in which muss evokes the idea of family comfort and a lack of strict rules about appearances. The narrator states that “The Musgroves, like their houses, were in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement,” but in the same paragraph that “Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove were a very good sort of people; friendly and hospitable, not much educated, and not at all elegant” (*Persuasion*, 27-28). Therefore, their untidiness is not meant to be the result of unhappiness as it is for Fanny Price’s family in *Mansfield Park* (“It was the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety” (*Mansfield Park*, 305)). Rather, the lack of order provides the image of congeniality that makes the Musgroves overall sympathetic characters.

The names significant through nature do not provide the most complex readings. Instead, their strength is to offer a general idea that the names can have subtle significance while still serving the overall realism of the novels. Also, they maintain the tradition of English naming that involves the natural setting in the construction of both surnames and place names. The natural readings are important to show the varying degrees of significance of names in Austen’s novels—from the purely realistic to the more clearly significant.

II. Names Significant through History—

Some names, both surnames and estate names, contain elements that have bases in English history. Whether they connect to historical people or occurrences, the names provide insight into characters’ personalities and estates’ structure.

According to the Oxford Online Dictionary of National Biography, two surnames in *Emma* have ties to historical figures: Churchill and Fairfax. Churchill was a duke of Marlborough in the 17th and early 18th centuries, long before *Emma* was published in 1815. As well, one example of the name Fairfax in history was a surname of lords from Cameron. Both Fairfax and Churchill are names that are biographically tied to aristocratic families. Knowledge of these families sets up the surnames of Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill in the novel as equal, and it foreshadows them eventually revealing their engagement (yet another equalizing connection). As Maggie Lane claims in her *Jane Austen and Names*, “[Austen] had a penchant for those of the aristocracy: Wentworth, Ferrars, Tilney...” (42). These aristocratic names, such as Wentworth, often take on other symbolic levels of meaning not tied to the aristocracy. Additionally, though Lane is discussing the characters’ social stations in their respective novels, the use of aristocratic names seems to extend to the construction of other characters’ names not necessarily of the aristocracy themselves, in order to unite them on more than one level.

Perhaps the name that ties most importantly to history is Mansfield in *Mansfield Park*, because elements of the historical Mansfield Decision help structure the novel and emphasize the importance of slavery to the maintenance of the Bertrams’ lives and estate. The Mansfield Decision of 1773, also known as Sommerset’s Case, claimed that no law on slavery has been passed in England, and, therefore, the slave Sommerset was free (Goslee). Furthermore, Lord Mansfield, the Chief Justice, set the precedent that any slave who came to England and stayed would be free. This case has particular bearing on *Mansfield Park* in Austen’s novel of the same name, because it brings up the issue of slavery.

On one level, the reader knows that the Bertrams’ estate of Mansfield Park is maintained through Sir Thomas’s plantation holdings in Antigua. Edward Said, in “Jane Austen and

Empire,” states that “the Bertrams could not have been possible without the slave trade, sugar, and the colonial planter class” (491). The characters themselves discuss the estate’s foundation in slave property, such as when Mrs. Norris tells Lady Bertram early in the novel, ““Why, you know, Sir Thomas’s means will be rather straitened, if the Antigua estate is to make such poor returns’” (24). This physical distance from their main means of finance represents the Bertrams’ lack of desire to understand their own dependence, whereas they in turn constantly remind Fanny Price of her financial obligation to them. Also, the estate name’s link to the issue of slavery always gives it the unsettling backdrop of the slave economy, which doesn’t allow Mansfield Park to be a completely positive image. Fanny Price, though, does see it as basically good, when she contrasts it with her family home in Portsmouth; the least of her disappointments upon returning to the Price family home after her long absence is that “she soon learnt to think with respect of her own little attic at Mansfield Park” (304). The historical background of the name Mansfield united with the characters’ own views of it provide conflicting readings of the estate’s influence. Said claims in the same “Jane Austen and Empire” text that the reader cannot fully understand the strength of the structure of the Bertram estate without reading the entire novel (492). This need for a sufficient understanding of the estate and its name mirrors the general idea of names’ subtlety and the need for a reader’s extensive knowledge of the works in order to easily analyze them.

More figurative than the connection to the financial aspect of slave holdings, though, is the comparison between the issue of slavery and the treatment of women in the novel—both are equated to property (*Mansfield Park*, xxxii). The financial language that both the narrator and characters in the novel use to describe the monetary burden of Fanny Price, the Bertams’ dependent niece, stems from discussions of Antigua. As well, many of the characters, including

Fanny herself, are in danger of making matches for financial reasons, thereby making themselves property. Sir Thomas's desire that Fanny marry the wealthy Henry Crawford would require that she view herself as goods to be sold (249). Maria Bertram does in fact do just that in her decision to marry the wealthy, but extremely stupid, Mr. Rushworth. Ironically, it is the Mansfield estate that ties Fanny closely to the idea of property and an obligation to marry for money, but it is Maria's desire to leave Mansfield that solidifies her image as slave-like property: "She must escape from [Henry Crawford] and Mansfield as soon as possible, and find consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world, for a wounded spirit" (158). For both Fanny and Maria the Mansfield estate lives up to its historical connection to the issue of slavery, because both women face the difficulty of being seen by others and even themselves at times as no more than property.

III. Names that Repeat through the Novels

Unlike the naturally or historically significant names that enhance the reading of individual novels, some names are significant because they occur in more than one of Austen's novels. Though Austen repeats use of Christian names frequently in her novels (often the names of her own family members), her repetition of surnames occurs less often. Therefore, when surnames are reused, they seem to call for some kind of connection of similarities. Unlike those of other categories of significance, though, these names have little significance on their own. They instead rely on side-by-side readings for much of their importance.

Some of the reused names, like Pratt, are of truly minor characters, or even characters only mentioned but not actually present in the novels. Mr. Pratt in *Sense and Sensibility* is Lucy and Anne Steele's uncle, and Pratt in *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the men of the militia with

Wickham (189). These two characters are associated with the deceitful characters of the novels. According to the OED, the noun “prat” can mean “a trick; a piece of trickery or fraud; a prank or practical joke.” This definition applies to both of the men named Pratt in these two Austen novels, not because they themselves trick other characters but because their characters are linked to certain situations and characters that promote fraud. Pratt in *Pride and Prejudice* is part of Wickham’s militia who comes to a party thrown by the Forsters, thereby connecting himself with the deceit of Lydia and Wickham when Lydia and the Forsters follow the militia to Brighton in Chapter 41. More importantly, Mr. Pratt in *Sense and Sensibility* is linked to the story of Edward Ferrars’s schooling in Plymouth, for it is there that Edward forms his secret engagement with Lucy Steele (107). Therefore, the name Pratt on its own has very little significance, but when the reader traces it through more than one novel, one can see similarities in the structure of their situations.

The most obvious name that is repeated in the novels, though, is Smith. The most fully described characters with this name are Harriet Smith in *Emma*, Mrs. Smith (Willoughby’s cousin and patroness) in *Sense and Sensibility*, and Mrs. Smith (the friend of Anne Elliot) in *Persuasion*. In itself the name Smith promotes the idea of anonymity or a connection to the working-class blacksmith. In the novels, though, all three characters have several similarities past the general sense of the name; for example, none of the women has a husband, and all are weak in some way. Harriet is weak-minded, as even Emma thinks to herself when reading about “ready wit” in the riddle she assumes Mr. Elton has written for Harriet: “Humph—Harriet’s ready wit! All the better. A man must be very much in love indeed, to describe her so” (*Emma*, 71). The other two Smith women are physically infirm; Anne Elliot’s friend is “...a widow, and poor...She had had difficulties of every sort to contend with, and in addition to these distresses,

had been afflicted with a severe rheumatic fever, which...had made her for the present a cripple” (*Persuasion*, 101). Willoughby’s cousin is “an elderly lady of very good character, [but] unfortunately too infirm to mix with the world, and never stirred from home” (*Sense and Sensibility*, 34). All three women show weakness of mind or body, but that weakness contrasts to their strength of character.

All are denied right in some way to the social world, whether it is by infirmity or through a lack of parentage, but still have the similar traits of good nature and likeability. Both *Emma*’s Harriet Smith and the Mrs. Smith of *Persuasion* are considered unfit companions for their respective novels’ heroines. *Emma*’s heroine overestimates the Miss Smith of this novel, and Mr. Knightley, the voice of reason, asks Emma “What are Harriet Smith’s claims, either of birth, nature or education, to any connection higher than Robert Martin?” (59). In *Persuasion*, Sir Walter Elliot considers the widow Mrs. Smith “low company” for Anne, and does not understand why Anne will honor an engagement with Mrs. Smith rather than meet their relation Lady Dalrymple (104). Similarly, Mrs. Smith of Allenham is not on the same level as the Dashwoods of *Sense and Sensibility*, but in contrast to the situation of each of the first two Smiths, it is the opposite position in the social hierarchy. She is not part of the social world, because she chooses not to be (due to her infirmity).

As well as lack an active position in society, all the Smith women have obscure or no family connections. For example, in *Emma* the narrator states that “Harriet Smith was the natural daughter of somebody. ...This was all that was generally known of her history” (20). In addition, Harriet and as well as Mrs. Smith in *Persuasion* have no money, which only diminishes the social standing they might have gained from family connections. Mrs. Smith in *Sense and Sensibility*, though she owns the family estate of Allenham, does not have in her cousin

Willoughby a stable dependent or permanent fixture in her life. He visits her estate only a few times a year, presumably to maintain the relationship enough to still inherit. For example, after breaking off his relationship with the middle daughter Marianne, he tells the Dashwoods, “My visits to Mrs. Smith are never repeated within the twelvemonth” (63). Therefore, the already weak connection he has had with Mrs. Smith previously has now lessened because of his indiscretions and subsequent fall from favor. Though he later regains favor, he marries into money and no longer needs so badly the financial relationship with his cousin. He bluntly explains the situation to Elinor when Marianne is ill towards the end of the novel: “‘Every year since my coming of age, or even before, I believe, had added to my debts; and though the death of my old cousin, Mrs. Smith, was to set me free, yet that event being uncertain, and possibly far distant, it had been for some time my intention to re-establish my circumstances by marrying a woman of fortune’” (263). Mrs. Smith, therefore, loses the only form of family she has through Willoughby’s inability to depend upon himself for finances.

Following this same idea of superficial relationships with deceitful people, all the women named Smith have been misled in some way, either in their own actions or by an incorrect belief in another’s character. Their own misfortunes, though, help the heroines of the novel by serving as a voice of warning. Mrs. Smith of Allenham in *Sense and Sensibility* is misled by her cousin Willoughby’s character, but her decision to cut him off causes the break in his relationship with Marianne (63), which is ultimately beneficial for her. Mrs. Smith in *Persuasion* tells her friend Anne Elliot how she and her late husband were led to financial ruin by Anne’s cousin Mr. Elliot (132), but her own hardship enables her to warn Anne about Mr. Elliot’s true character so Anne herself will not be duped. In fact, in *Jane Austen’s Literary Manuscripts* B.C. Southam, in his discussion of the changes in the literary manuscript of *Persuasion*, says that the substitution of a

paragraph in the ending of the novel “extends the reference to Mrs. Smith and links her more closely to the fortunes of Anne and Wentworth” (97). Therefore, Austen consciously chose to make Mrs. Smith an integral part of the novel. Harriet Smith in *Emma* is misled by the heroine herself when it comes to how she should choose a husband, but Harriet’s later decision to voice her desire of marriage to Mr. Knightley allows Emma to encounter her own true feelings for Mr. Knightley (422). Therefore, the Smith women’s weaknesses enable the heroines of the novels to examine their own actions and behaviors and often lead to the change in mindset that allows for the satisfaction of these heroines’ hopes.

The names that connect more than one of the novels show characters with similar characteristics or at least similar positions. Additionally, though, they often serve as catalysts for other characters’ actions. Therefore, the reader’s understanding of the names’ similarities requires knowledge of more than one of the novels, in order to deepen their importance within the plots of the novels.

IV. Overtly Symbolic Names—

As the reader moves away from the names in the novels that show realism through connections to nature as well as names like Smith that mainly unite themselves within the novels by similarities, one can see that some names in the novels are more overtly symbolic and, therefore, may seem to border on name typing or the allegorical. But, just as Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* claims credibility for Henry Fielding’s “Allworthy” and “Heartfree” (Watt, 20), the more obviously suggestive names of Austen are also credible, without diminishing the realism of the novels themselves. Furthermore, these names are few and do not overshadow the insignificant (purely realistic) names or even the subtly suggestive ones.

One surname that is obviously symbolic is “Price” in *Mansfield Park*. The heroine, Fanny Price, is always connected to the idea of value and, consequently, burden; at first she is unable to live up to the value that the Bertrams and Mrs. Norris believe she ought to show, or even show enough appreciation of the financial security they have bestowed on her. Many of the descriptions of her (by the other characters and the narrator), therefore, contain financial language. They are always describing Fanny’s “good fortune” that they condescended to take her into their home, but at the same time wanting to preserve the distinction between her and the Bertram daughters. Sir Thomas makes sure Mrs. Norris understands that ““Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different”” (*Mansfield Park*, 9). When Sir Thomas’s Antigua estate loses money, he begins to see Fanny not only as a price but a financial burden. He speaks of her as something of which Mrs. Norris should “claim her share” (19). Throughout the novel, her value fluctuates, to the point that her “...consequence increased on the departure of her cousins,” and Sir Thomas is proud of his own stock in her personal charms, even feeling that she owes him for them (160, 217). Furthermore, Sir Thomas sees her possible marriage to Henry Crawford as a means for her family to gain wealth. When Fanny refuses, he is angered by her lack of understanding of her own financial duties (249). Even as Fanny seems to grow in value, she still maintains some connection to price, because those same characters continue to dwell on what she owes them for the manner in which she grew up.

One change as the novel progresses is that more of the characters begin to call her Fanny rather than Miss Price. Although this change in address from the formal to the familiar is a typical practice of nineteenth-century society, the shift from Miss Price to Fanny only de-emphasizes her position as a continuing financial burden. This change coincides with the view of

her character becoming more about her personality and somewhat less about her connection to the idea of price.

Fanny is not the only one of her family considered in terms of monetary value. Mrs. Norris states matter-of-factly, “‘Now here are my sister Price’s children:—take them all together, I dare say nobody would believe what a sum they cost Sir Thomas every year, to say nothing of what *I* do for them’” (239). Fanny’s brother William Price in particular is considered a financial burden to Sir Thomas, as he spends much of the novel trying to rise in rank in the navy. After Henry Crawford uses his contacts to make William a lieutenant (which Henry does in order to raise his own value in the eyes of Fanny, whom he wants to marry), Mrs. Norris again considers William’s financial cost, but thinks about how his recently gained prominence will now save Sir Thomas the financial burden and how she herself is “glad that she had given William what she did at parting, very glad indeed that it had been in her power, without material inconvenience just at that time, to give him something rather considerable” (238-239). Overall, the financial discussions in the novel, beginning with the very first chapter’s discussion of the three Ward sisters’ marriages (3), only intensify in connection to the Price family; their surname emphasizes that connection.

In another Austen novel, *Emma*, Mr. Knightley is one character known almost solely by his last name, so even more than Fanny Price he is connected to the significance of his surname. The reader finds only one or two instances of a character or the narrator using his first name, George. Even Emma, who knows him perhaps better than any other character, states, “‘I never can call you any thing but “Mr. Knightley,”’ when they become engaged towards the end of the novel (474). In contrast, Emma’s own surname, though significant to the understanding of her

personality, is much less inextricably tied to her personality, and he has no trouble calling her “my dearest Emma” (472).

Therefore, the careful reader should have no trouble finding instances where Mr. Knightley lives up to his name and acts as a knight should. He is someone both men and women in the novel, not just Emma, look up to (57). For example, he is kind to the less fortunate characters, like Miss Bates and Harriet Smith. In the third volume of *Emma*, he “saves” Harriet at the ball by dancing a set with her after she has been snubbed by Mr. Elton (336). He also saves Miss Bates in a way at the Box-Hill picnic when he criticizes Emma’s mockery of her (383). With his speech to Emma in the scene following Miss Bates’s humiliation, Mr. Knightley not only shows his own knowledge of right and wrong, but also criticizes others when they show a lack of propriety.

In addition to Mr. Knightley, Miss Bates herself has a surname that lends itself to a symbolic reading. The unmarried, “old maid” Miss Bates of *Emma* is mocked or bated by the entire community, worst of all by the novel’s heroine. In the aforementioned Box-Hill picnic, Emma implies that she is dull (380). Just as with Mr. Knightley of the same novel, the reader can easily pass over the mention of her first name, Hetty, which is partly because, from Emma’s point of view, she never approaches the level of familiarity required for the use of Christian names, but structurally the lack of importance emphasizes the significance of her last name in the construction of her character. The OED Online provides several definitions for the verb “to bate.” One that particularly applies to Miss Bates’s own personality is that which means “to flutter, struggle; to be restless or impatient.” She shows impatience and a flighty nature in all situations, but most clearly in the way she reacts to letters from her niece Jane Fairfax by always

displaying them to the entire Highbury society (156). This aspect of her nature in turn affects how that society treats her.

In relation to the other characters of the novel, Miss Bates is connected to an idea of lessening. The OED online also describes “to bate” as “to lower, let down; *fig.* to cast down, humble, depress, deject.” In the same Box-Hill picnic scene, after Emma’s thoughtless joke about the dullness of the older woman’s personality, Miss Bates, “deceived by the mock ceremony of her manner, did not immediately catch her meaning; but, when it burst on her, it could not anger, though a slight blush showed that it could pain her” (380). This instance is the first time Miss Bates is humbled by being able to see herself as the subject of mockery.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, the surname Steele also obviously and solidly connects to words that promote a symbolic reading. The Steele sisters, Lucy and Anne, both are calculating women—Lucy is just infinitely more successful and discreet. Their surname can evoke the idea of to steal or even the noun “steel.” The OED Online defines the verb “steal” as “to take dishonestly or secretly,” which brings in the idea of concealment and directly pertains to the long-standing secret engagement between Lucy and the higher-class Edward Ferrars (as mentioned earlier with connection to the name Pratt). Lucy later deliberately steals the heroine Elinor’s happiness by telling her of the engagement in order to make it clear that Edward is not free for any other woman, namely Elinor (107); at the end of the novel, she seems to have stolen Edward completely, when Elinor believes they finally have married (290).

When the reader considers the surname’s connection with the word “steel,” defined as “a general name for certain artificially produced varieties of iron, distinguished from those known as ‘iron’ by certain physical properties, esp. greater hardness and elasticity, which render them suitable as material for cutting instruments, and for various other industrial purposes,” one can

see certain similarities with the Steele sisters' characters. It is especially important to note that the definition of steel contains the idea of artificiality. For example, in the Steele sisters' initial visit to the Middletons (the Dashwoods' cousins and providers of their cottage), Lucy shows her artificiality through her attempt to please everyone by praising the children. Her deception begins to suffer, though, when she is called upon to satisfy two mothers, and "Lucy, who was hardly less anxious to please one parent than the other, thought the boys were both remarkably tall for their age, and could not conceive that there could be the smallest difference in the world between them" (192). Throughout the whole novel, Lucy and Anne both maintain this preoccupation with socially acceptable appearances.

For Anne, though, the ability to maintain these appearances eventually crumbles, and the surname works on yet another level—she steals the happiness of her sister by telling Fanny Dashwood of the secret engagement between Lucy and Edward Ferrars (211). Both Anne and Lucy use their distant relations to try to steal into the higher class, but their own inadequacies ("Lucy certainly was not elegant, and her sister not even genteel" (189)), show them to be unworthy rather than unfortunate.

All of these characters with more clearly symbolic names have strong functions in moving forward the plots of the novels. Their symbolism does not overwhelm the other, less overtly signifying, names, either in number or the characters' importance. In fact, it enriches these realistic novels, and the strength of the names echoes the strength of their influence on the other characters.

V. Ironic Names—

Another category of names has a less overt connection to its respective characters than does that of the more obviously symbolic ones. Some names in Jane Austen's novels upon closer reading take on a level of irony, in addition to possible other levels of significance, once the reader knows the characters' personalities as well as their contribution to certain aspects of the novel. In this sense, their surnames can be misleading, but the names Austen gives her characters do not follow a perfect system into which all the names fit. Therefore, the irony of names allows Austen to add to the complexity of reading into the names' significance. Furthermore, the characters whose surnames are ironic usually are more minor characters, the fact of which includes irony in the overall subtlety of the significance of names in the novels.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Forsters are the couple that invites Lydia to Brighton (196-197). One reading of the surname Forster presents itself when one connects the name to the closely related name "Foster." (*A Dictionary of English Surnames* lists Foster along with other similar names under its description of the name Forster (174).) Though now obsolete, one meaning of foster is "to encourage, indulge in a habit" (OED). This definition, though not ironic, definitely could connect to Mrs. Forster's own character and her negative effect on the development of Lydia's character. For it is with the Forsters that Lydia goes to Brighton and subsequently runs away with Wickham, destroying her reputation (231).

As well, Foster is synonymous with guardianship (according to the OED Online), and with this definition, an ironic reading of the surname Forster enables the novel to foreshadow Lydia's later fall from respectability. Elizabeth Bennett herself questions the couple's ability to foster, when she warns her father of "the little advantage [Lydia] could derive from the friendship of such a woman as Mrs. Forster, and the probability of her being yet more imprudent with such a companion at Brighton, where the temptations must be greater than at home" (197).

Therefore, it is no surprise that it is with the Forsters that Lydia puts herself in the most danger. Both definitions of the same word connect to their character, albeit one through a more ironic reading.

When read out loud, the name also can sound like “forced her.” The language in the novel that surrounds the descriptions Lydia gives of Mrs. Forster in particular support the connection of this surname with the idea of force. For example, one paragraph in which Lydia describes to her sisters a party that the Forsters have thrown also contains the phrase “forced to” twice: “...Pen was forced to come by herself” and “...we were forced to borrow one of her gowns” (189). Though this scene itself is not the most explicit representation of the Forsters’ purpose in the novel, the language the narrator uses surrounding them invites this reading. As the couple, they force into existence the situation that loses Lydia her reputation, though Lydia is anything but an innocent bystander.

Another surname that invites an ironic reading is Fairfax; Jane Fairfax in *Emma* has a surname which sounds like “fair facts.” Very little of what is told about Jane throughout the novel, though, could be described as fair facts. Jane’s own discretion and secrecy about her personal life, because of her secret engagement to Frank Churchill, lead Emma and Frank Churchill (for her, as a joke and, for him, a cover) to offer their own ideas about Jane’s life. Therefore, when Jane comes into contact with Highbury society, very few of the “facts” told about her are true; they are solely opinion based on rumor. Neither does Jane offer the truth nor do the characters genuinely seek to understand her.

The end of the novel, though, offers Jane a change in perception. After the people of Highbury learn of her engagement to Frank Churchill, they begin to learn the true facts about her. The idea of fairness comes into play when Emma realizes that Jane is actually a more

suitable companion for herself than Harriet: "...had she endeavoured to find a friend there instead of in Harriet Smith; she must, in all probability, have been spared from every pain which pressed on her now" (431). Throughout the whole novel, she has been unfair to Jane and never willing to get to know her. Therefore, Jane's last name serves as an ironic reflection not only on Jane's secrecy about her own life, but also reflects the heroine Emma's close-mindedness. Jane admits that the appearances she put forth had been unclear, telling Emma, "'You are very kind, but I know what my manners were to you.—So cold and artificial!—I had always a part to act.—It was a life of deceit!'" (471). In turn, Emma didn't want to like Jane, because she thought Mr. Knightley was in love with her (461). Both women do not care to move past these anything-but-fair facts in order to forge a friendship of equals.

Another, although not as complete, reading of Jane's surname deals only with the first part of her name, "fair." According to the Oxford English Dictionary Online, one definition of fair as a noun is "an exhibition, especially one designed to publicize a particular product or the products of one industry, country, etc." Though Jane's subdued, perhaps even boring, personality does not immediately lead the reader to associate her with the idea of an exciting fair, for her aunt Miss Bates, Jane's letters are most certainly something to be exhibited and publicized to the whole of Highbury. This association with exhibition leads other characters, Emma at least, to be "'sick of the very name of Jane Fairfax. Every letter from her is read forty times over...'" (*Emma*, 86). In fact, Emma's overall dislike of this part of her experience of Jane connects again to the heroine's own misunderstanding of character, not only when it comes to Jane. Therefore, this reading of Fairfax shows better Emma's view of Jane, more than to be an interpretation of Jane's own character, ironic or not. Overall, the ironic reading of Jane Fairfax's entire surname more completely reveals her impression on Highbury society.

The same association with display does have some relevance with the fact that Jane intends to become a governess, and to do so must advertise. She makes it clear to the nosy Mrs. Elton that she wants to put herself in the market. Mrs. Elton tries to find her a job, but Jane prefers to find employment in “‘offices, where inquiry would soon produce something—Offices for the sale—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect’” (305). Again, though, this image of Jane willingly displaying herself does not quite fit, because she is really stalling while she waits for her secret engagement with Frank Churchill to come into the open. Therefore, the surname Fairfax emphasizes the reading of Jane as a complex, secretive character.

The names that invite ironic readings are less straightforward than names in some of the other categories of significance, even to the point that the words’ definitions can present both ironic and serious readings for the same characters. Their significance, though, allows these sometimes overlooked characters more importance in the novels.

VI. Names Significant through Opposition—

Like the name “Smith” that maintains certain character traits among more than one of the novels, in the novels some other names have common ties. Instead of calling attention to the individuals’ similarities, though, the repeated elements in these names instead show the differences or even oppositions in character which they strengthen.

One such case occurs with the surnames containing the word “worth,” as with Captain Wentworth from *Persuasion* and Mr. Rushworth, Maria’s fiancé, from *Mansfield Park*. According to the Oxford English Dictionary Online, the beginning of Frederick Wentworth’s name, “went,” when a noun, means “a turn or course of affairs; an occasion or chance.” Combined with the word worth, his name suggests a complete change in the view of his worth in

society and potential marriage. This idea of a change in value makes sense when connected to the knowledge of his own experiences within the novel. In the back story, Wentworth has been refused by Anne Elliot, because he had no money or stable profession, and, therefore, “she had given him up to oblige others” (*Persuasion*, 41). When Wentworth returns to their society, his profession and financial wealth have taken a turn for the better, and he becomes a worthwhile catch for anyone, especially Louisa Musgrove.

By contrast, “rush,” the beginning of Mr. Rushworth’s name, can mean several things. In general knowledge, the verb means to hurry heedlessly. In the engagement and subsequently the marriage to Mr. Rushworth, Maria and the Bertrams in general rush into his acquaintance solely due to his financial wealth. Mrs. Norris, a character known for financial efficiency and a desire to accumulate money, is the one who promotes the match, for “...yet as far as Mrs. Norris could allow herself to decide on so short an acquaintance, Mr. Rushworth appeared precisely the young man to deserve and attach [Maria]” (*Mansfield Park*, 31). Sir Thomas also neglects to question the man’s character, but rather accepts any good reviews in hopes of “an alliance so unquestionably advantageous” (32). Only Edmund is vocal in questioning Maria’s fiancé’s worth, in his ironic statement that “‘If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow’” (32). Finally, in regards to the word rush’s meaning as to hurry, Rushworth himself rushes into the engagement with Maria, as he, “being inclined to marry, soon fancied himself in love” (30).

Less obvious, though, is the definition of a rush when it is a noun, a plant that is not worth much. Figuratively, a rush is “used as a type of something of no value or importance, especially in negative phrases as *not to care a rush*, *not to be worth a rush*” (OED). Therefore, in this case, the two words “rush” and “worth” are connected even outside the novel *Mansfield*

Park, in the phrase “not to be worth a rush.” As can be seen in descriptions of Rushworth’s personality as stupid and superficial (such as when he is enamored of his “two and forty speeches” and “pink satin cloak” (110)), the phrase “not to be worth a rush” is exactly what the narrator and most of the characters think of him.

Through the repetition of the word “worth” in the surnames of Wentworth and Rushworth, the reader can then call attention to the marked differences between “went” and “rush,” and subsequently, see more clearly the opposite value placed on each character. For Wentworth, there is a change in position which leads to better value placed on him, whereas Rushworth shows a stagnancy of character that Maria ultimately cannot stand, no matter how much value she or her family has placed on his money in the beginning.

In the novels *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*, the heroines have surnames that are similar, yet with a complicated relationship. Dashwood and Woodhouse, though they seem to suggest a similarity of character among Marianne, Elinor, and Emma, in fact show their differences. Most important is the heroines’ difference of situation. Both of their surnames contain the word “wood,” which connects itself to the idea of nature and land. Where they differ is in the words that are the other components of their names: “dash” and “house.”

The Dashwoods are, at the very beginning of *Sense and Sensibility*, moved out of their estate as it has been inherited by their half-brother upon their father’s death. The four women are, in that sense, “dashed” from their sense of stability, as the Oxford English Dictionary Online provides one definition of the verb dash as “To drive impetuously *forth* or *out*...” Their removal is sudden, not only in the novel structure (it occurs in the first few pages), but also in the fact that “No sooner was [John Dashwood’s] father’s funeral over, than Mrs. John Dashwood, without sending any notice of her intention to her mother-in-law, arrived with her child and their

attendants” (*Sense and Sensibility*, 5). In this instance, the reader can apply multiple meanings of the word “dash”—to both the heroines, in that they are dashed from their home, and to the intruders, in that they dash into taking their inheritance of Norland Park. This instability of the Dashwood women’s sense of home connects to other instabilities, such as in the relationships of Elinor and Marianne. As mentioned with the character Lucy Steele, Elinor faces uncertainty as to her relationship with Edward Ferrars. Due to Willoughby’s deceit, Marianne faces even more incapacitating instability.

The Dashwoods’ lack of steadiness also shows itself in how they move around through much of the novel. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor and Marianne travel to London with Mrs. Jennings (124). They later also stop at Mrs. Jennings’s daughter Charlotte Palmer’s home on the way back home to Barton (248). Conversely, Emma Woodhouse does not travel in *Emma*, even to the point that in the end of the novel, she will not even have to move from Hartfield upon being married to Mr. Knightley (459). Therefore, the Dashwood name is significant in its own novel, because it suggests an instability that colors almost all of their situations and relationships. In contrast, the Woodhouse name suggests stability and lack of movement, which shows just how dramatic Emma’s change of mind must be in order to go up against all her solidly established ideas.

Emma Woodhouse, as the solidity and structural elements of her name (in both “wood” and “house”) would suggest, has a secure position. She is neither in any hurry to get married nor under any obligation to do so, as the other novels’ heroines might be, due to the fact that she is financially secure. Therefore, the stability of her name suggests the stability of her estate and standing in the social structure, unlike that of the Dashwoods. Like *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma* provides the answer to the question of stability in the first pages of the novel: “Emma

Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition...had been mistress of [her father's] house from a very early period" (*Emma*, 1). Even as the stability of her own sense of character changes as the novel progresses, Emma's connection to her estate is never taken away. Even in her engagement to Mr. Knightley, she is not forced to leave Hartfield. He reassures her that "'While her dear father lived, any change of condition must be impossible for her'" (459).

Therefore, both the names Dashwood and Woodhouse link the respective heroines more solidly to their experiences, especially those that affect their connection to the estate. Alone, the names simply show the tie to nature without much opportunity for understanding the characters' personalities, but when contrasted, the differences in personality and situation show through very clearly. Both sets of names: Dashwood and Woodhouse, Wentworth and Rushworth, strengthen in meaning when set opposite one another.

VII. Names of the Same Type with the Same First Letter—the "W" Names—

Similar to the entire names that repeat among Austen's novels are the names from the same category of villain that repeat the first letter: W. Although the surname Wentworth, from *Persuasion*, seems to be the exception, he is part of the hero type. Both Willoughby (*Sense and Sensibility*) and Wickham (*Pride and Prejudice*) have names that begin with "W" and are villainous characters (though to varying degrees). Also, Willoughby specifically echoes a character of the same name and similar character in Francis Burney's novel, *Evelina* (Doody, xxviii). A reader's knowledge of this connection allows one to link even more closely that character, and possibly characters of similar-sounding beginnings like Wickham, to an idea of immorality.

The reader, through an understanding of Willoughby's place in *Sense and Sensibility* as well as the structure of his name, can see an ambiguity in his character. This ambiguity is especially evident when one takes into consideration the scene towards the end of the novel, in which the character Willoughby explains to Elinor in Volume III, Chapter VIII his unfeeling actions towards Marianne and the entire Dashwood family. He does treat Marianne badly by courting and then abandoning her when he will be disinherited for past indiscretions (63), but is not as solidly a liar or a villain as are some of the other dishonest characters of Austen's novels, such as Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Willoughby's name itself takes on several meanings that connote a sense of ambiguity, which, therefore, only increases the significance of his nature not being entirely villainous. His name presents the natural image of the willow, which the OED Online describes as "in allusive use with reference to pliability." Therefore, his selfish actions with both Marianne and the young Eliza Williams, whom he abandons after impregnating (171), show his inability to decide whether he prefers love or money. In the end he switches his efforts of courting to Miss Grey, thereby choosing money, but still is not able to let go of the past love (as seen in the aforementioned scene when he confesses to Elinor).

This idea of pliability in Willoughby's character also connects to another definition of "willow" which is "taken as a symbol of grief for unrequited love or the loss of a mate" or "in uses containing an allusion to the willow as a symbol of mourning or of being lovelorn" (OED Online). This reading of his surname relates more to how Willoughby as a character affects those whom he encounters, most importantly Marianne. Marianne grieves over the loss of Willoughby so much that she eventually loses health to the point of serious illness (251). Therefore, although

Willoughby does show some remorse for his actions, this reading more clearly shows his effect on Marianne.

As well, when the reader connects Willoughby to the names of the characters important in helping to construct his true character, one can see his ambiguity as even more negative (perhaps not as villainous, but the ambiguity shows his immaturity). Though he has true love for Marianne, he is connected to movement back and forth because he is happy with neither love nor money, whereas the man Marianne eventually marries, Brandon, connects himself to permanence. Just as his character is one of permanent goodness and stability, the surname Brandon contains the word “brand,” which generally is an enduring mark on something. Their names as well as their character traits set up the two men as opposites. In addition, the woman Willoughby finally does marry also has a name (Grey) that evokes the color gray, which is an in-between shade. Therefore, even though he unites with her, the uncertainty connoted by her name emphasizes Willoughby’s own uncertainty that he made the right choice in marrying for money.

The antagonistic character Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* is much more clearly villainous than Willoughby. His surname contains the element “wick,” which quickly reminds a reader of the word “wicked.” Also, in the OED one of the meanings for wick, under adjective, is “The bundle of fibre, now usually loosely twisted or woven cotton (formerly rushes, tow, flax, etc.) in a lamp, candle, or taper (formerly also in a torch), immersed or inclosed except at one end in the oil or grease, which it absorbs and draws up on being kindled at the free end, so as to maintain the flame.” This definition brings forward the image of fire, more importantly a fire that is quick to light, sparks, and then dies down. It is important that a wick is part of a candle, something that does not last long, is not permanent. The character Wickham himself does not connect to permanence, not only with romantic relationships, but also how he cannot maintain a

job. For example, Mr. Darcy tells Elizabeth how ““he resigned all claim to assistance in the church...his studying the law was a mere pretence”” (172-173). Therefore, though both Wickham and Willoughby lack permanence, Wickham’s seems much more consciously deceitful than that of Willoughby.

Another definition of wick deals more with Wickham’s manner of destroying any claim to sympathy of his character. “To dip one’s wick” is slang for sexual intercourse, which is part of how Wickham destroys Lydia’s respectability after they run away together (247) (OED Online). Even as Wickham’s surname, though, moves closer to a more symbolic reading, it is qualified by the element “ham” at the end. According to *A Dictionary of English Place-Names*, hām is “homestead, village, manor, estate” (404). Many English place names end in ham, which shows that this name is still tied to realism.

Both Willoughby and Wickham’s surnames can stand alone in significance, but, like the names in the previous category of opposition, their significance strengthens when the reader compares the two. The beginning letter of their names offers this kind of reading, just as the common element of “wood” connects Dashwood and Woodhouse.

VIII. Names that Show Personality—

At times, names, both the surnames and estate names, show the personalities of certain characters, but in a less overt way than the names that are more clearly allegorical. Often they also connect to other names in the same novel, either by comparison or contrast, which enhances the significance even more. They even speak to larger themes of the novels that connect to how a character’s personality affects his or her perception of experience. For example, the excessive language of *Northanger Abbey* mirrors Catherine’s own overactive imagination.

Though the first few pages of *Northanger Abbey* would suggest that Catherine Morland will be mediocre heroine with “a mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is” (*Northanger Abbey*, 8), the rest of the novel shows her to be a girl surrounded by excess, usually of her own making. Even these first few pages, though, show excess, both in language and descriptions surrounding Catherine, if not about her own person. Her ten-child family is one of the largest of those of all the Austen heroines (3); it is rivaled only by the Prices of *Mansfield Park*, who must permanently send away some of their children to be raised by relatives in order to be able to manage financially. Also, although the narrator describes Catherine’s early “training” as a heroine as typical, she asserts that “Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way,” suggesting an extraordinary burst of heroism from Catherine that will produce this effect (7). In that training, she is even up against the formidable “perverseness of forty surrounding families” in not supplying a hero (7), which shows not only her own character is excessive but also the language used to describe her situation. Overall, the opening descriptions of Catherine suggest a heroine who will show excessive charm in winning over her hero and proving herself a heroine. The excess she shows makes up for the mediocrity suggested about her in the beginning pages.

Catherine’s excessive actions include her reading so many novels: “She saw that the infatuation had been created, the mischief settled long before her quitting Bath, and it seemed as if the whole might be traced to the influence of that sort of reading which she had there indulged” (214). The novels she primarily reads are Gothic, indicated in the next paragraph’s discussion of the charm of “all Mrs. Radcliffe’s works,” speaking of the late 18th- and early 19th-century Gothic novelist. The Gothic genre itself is one that ties itself to excess—of emotion, the supernatural, etc. Furthermore, with *Northanger Abbey*, Austen is satirizing the Gothic—and

satire itself uses excess to critique. Many elements of the novel that influence Catherine deal in excess also. When Catherine visits Northanger Abbey, the Tilney's home, General Tilney's avarice shows itself physically in his dining-room, "fitted up in a style of luxury and expense which was almost lost on the unpractised eye of Catherine, who saw little more than its spaciousness and the number of their attendants" (175). General Tilney points out the lavishness to Catherine in order to encourage her to marry into the family (as he thinks she will inherit a great deal of money from the Allens), but it also serves to reinforce the Gothic grandeur satirized in this novel.

Imagination as well suggests a link to the excessive, and Catherine is deeply connected to her imagination. Catherine hopes for the Abbey's "long, damp passages, its narrow cells and ruined chapel, [that] were to be within her daily reach, and she could not entirely subdue the hope of some traditional legends, some awful memories of an injured and ill-fated nun" (147). The possibility for satire comes when she first arrives at the Abbey, and she is disappointed that it does not immediately live up to her expectations of a place of terror and obscurity. "To an imagination which had hoped for the smallest divisions, and the heaviest stonework, for painted glass, dirt and cobwebs, the difference was very distressing" (170). The use of this excessive language—smallest, heaviest, very, distressing—occurs throughout the entire novel, but especially in the Abbey. Due to Catherine's expansive imagination and expectations of her own life, she expects more from others, not just the Abbey. She attracts the attention of characters such as the Thorpes; Isabella encourages Catherine to read more Gothic novels, telling her "...when you have finished *Udolpho*, we will read the Italian together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you" (33). John Thorpe is the one who tells General Tilney the false information that Catherine will be an heiress, greatly exaggerating the

fortune she supposedly will receive (97). This one action is the catalyst for Catherine's introduction to the Abbey in the first place.

Therefore, it makes sense that the names that surround Catherine—her surname Morland and the place where she lives, Fullerton—produce vague ideas of excess as well; for, though they are perfectly acceptable as realistic names (in fact, Fullerton is an actual town in Hampshire), they contain the words “more,” “fuller,” and “ton.” Also significant is their connection to each other. Separately, they would have less power and less significance to Catherine's overall excessiveness. Together, they suggest a deeper look into Catherine's character.

Another character whose name shows more clearly aspects of her personality is Mrs. Norris in *Mansfield Park*. The OED online provides the definition of the verb “norry,” which sounds similar to Norris, as “to nurse; to rear, foster.” Although this word is not the first thing to come to mind when the reader is introduced to the character in *Mansfield Park*, Mrs. Norris, its meaning does have some relevance. When placed against the protagonist Fanny Price, Mrs. Norris is not at all a person who fosters her. (Throughout the novel, Mrs. Norris reminds Fanny of her position as an outsider and, furthermore, a financial dependent.) With this reading, her name is somewhat ironic, but this does not have the strongest significance. The reader can understand this animosity of Mrs. Norris towards Fanny even without the added level of her name's significance.

The added layer of meaning comes from Mrs. Norris's own belief in her ability to foster and rear the children of Sir Thomas Bertram, especially Maria and Julia. As well it emphasizes the contrast between the aunt's relationship with Fanny and that with Maria and Julia (and their outcomes). This fostering is somewhat twisted in that she cares for the two Bertram daughters to their own detriment. What is ironic about this reading comes not from Mrs. Norris's intentions

(as she truly does try to foster the children, take the place of Lady Bertram, and thereby control the daily run of the household (27)), but instead from the lack of success that comes of her care. Even “Sir Thomas, indeed, was, by this time, not very far from classing Mrs. Norris as one of those well-meaning people who are always doing mistaken and very disagreeable things” (260). Once her biggest advocate, he eventually thinks of Mrs. Norris as “an hourly evil” (365). Therefore, the ability to foster is more in her own head than in her actions.

Although Mrs. Norris’s surname does not immediately produce for the reader an idea of significance as would the more overtly symbolic names, such as Knightley in *Emma*, the knowledge of the similar word *norry*’s definition emphasizes Mrs. Norris’s role in the novel; it introduces in one word the contrast between her relationships with her nieces and the directly related contrast between the moral choices of these nieces.

Overall, the names that are important through enhancing a reading of characters’ personalities have great strength in showing their relationships with others. They also show the amount of influence—in Catherine Morland’s case, the ability to accept influence, and in that of Mrs. Norris, the ability to provide it.

The surnames and place names of Jane Austen’s six completed novels do not follow any overarching pattern of structure, which would threaten to undermine the novels’ realism. In fact, many surnames and place names find their greatest importance in maintaining the realism of Austen’s novels. Rather, the names that have symbolic significance often follow complex, interlocking patterns that allow some names to subtly add to a reader’s understanding of

characters' personalities and the interplay of characters. Comparison of names, both within the same novel and among more than one of the novels, often strengthens readings more so than searching for one name's individual meaning. Overall, a more critical reading of names is meant to enhance a reader's comprehension of the novels. A significant reading of surnames and places names in the novels is made all the more interesting by its subtlety of symbolism. This subtlety simultaneously allows Austen to stay well within the bounds of realism and offers another manner of reading critically the novels, either individually or united as a body of work.

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