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“It could have all turned out differently”

Ideological Censorship of the Marriage Plot in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*

This paper examines the marriage-plot convention of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* in the context of the conservative ideology of the “middle-class aristocracy” in early nineteenth-century England. It argues that despite *Mansfield Park*’s apparent endorsement of the patriarchal values of domesticity and femininity represented by the protagonists and the narrator, the novel does contain an equally valid yet utopian alternative offered by Henry Crawford, an alternative of difference and vitalistic openness necessarily suppressed by the regulatory pattern of the marriage plot.

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In the closing sequence of Patricia Rozema’s *Mansfield Park* (1999), when the camera jauntily swings high over an English landscape and penetrates into gardens and houses to take a sneak peek at the main characters’ futures, Fanny’s commanding voice-over narrates what happened to each character and twice acknowledges that “it could have all turned out differently, I suppose. . .” Each time the characters are freeze-framed for a moment and released after Fanny playfully adds ‘but it didn’t’, as if it were in her power to decide their future destinies. As Claudia Johnson suggests, the momentary suspension of action in this refrain “breaks the illusion of realism to call attention to the intervention of her art.”¹ Despite a number of “post-modern” liberties Rozema took in her cinematic adaptation of Jane Austen’s novel,² the most audacious of which is arguably Fanny’s blending into “a fictional stand-in for Austen” herself,³ the film’s conclusion does, nonetheless, echo an ironic ambig-

1. Claudia L. Johnson, “The Authentic Audacity of Patricia Rozema’s *Mansfield Park*: ‘Run Mad, but Do Not Faint,’” *London Times Literary Supplement* (31 December 1999), 16–17, p. 17.

2. Jan Fergus, “Two Mansfield Parks: Purist and Postmodern,” in *Jane Austen on Screen*, eds. Gina and Andrew Macdonald (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 69–89.

3. Belén Vidal, “Playing in a Minor Key: The Literary Past through the Feminist Imagination,” in *Books in Motion: Adaptation, Intertextuality, Authorship*, ed. Mireia Aragay (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 263–86, p. 275.

ity of the novel's happy-ending, where the omniscient narrator, in the manner of a dramatic epilogue, ponders alternative options for ending the story by pointing out that Fanny would have "voluntarily bestowed" herself on Henry, had he persevered, "and uprightly."⁴ But he didn't. In her *Mansfield Park*, therefore, Rozema seems to follow Austen's subtle balancing between her seemingly wholehearted commitment to the conventional logic of the courtship plot with its inevitable telos of marital closure, and an ironic exposure of its self-imposed artificiality. Such an interplay, or tension, between the normative pressure of convention and the insidious transgression of it is, for example, evident in the famous opening sentence of her *Pride and Prejudice* ("It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife"), which simultaneously registers "both ironic humor and a sly truth"⁵ or, as William Galperin points out, "the coercive weight of public opinion" and "the wish-fulfilling fantasy of women, whose affirmation of 'truth' is a by-product of their vulnerability and subordination."⁶

Just as each of Austen's novels, *Mansfield Park* relies on the marriage plot as its central structuring device responsible for keeping the narrative development under strict ideological control. Many generations of readers and critics of the novel have both attacked and defended the marriage of Fanny and Edmund from numerous perspectives just as Fanny Price, the novel's protagonist, has been seen equally as the victim of patriarchy and as its empowered subject benefiting from it. Jane Austen's sister Cassandra was the first to critique the union of Fanny and Edmund as the major flaw of the novel and even attempted to persuade her sister to let Henry marry Fanny and Edmund marry Mary.⁷ For Tony Tanner, similarly, it "is perhaps the most nearly asexual marriage among the marriages achieved by Jane Austen's heroines." And yet, as he concedes, it is "a paradigmatic marriage for society in a larger sense" that symbolizes "far-reaching reconciliations and restorations" and therefore "transcends personal gratifications."⁸ Given that Austen's marriage-plot convention, complicated by her preference for the intrafamilial alliance (with its "crippling effects"⁹), is insepara-

4. Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 434.

5. Catherine J. Kordich, *Bloom's How to Write about Jane Austen*, Chelsea House Publications, 2008, p. 126.

6. William H. Galperin, *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 125.

7. Elizabeth Jenkins, "Address to the General Meeting of the Jane Austen Society," *Collected Reports of the Jane Austen Society: 1976-1985*, Jane Austen Society (1989) 152-173, p. 166.

8. Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 173.

9. Johanna H. Smith, "'My Only Sister Now': Incest in *Mansfield Park*," *Studies in the Novel* 19 (1987) 1-13, p. 1.

ble from the cultural and historical context of her time, it is important to emphasize the ideological component of this plot pattern. In this regard, *Mansfield Park* is generally considered to be “the most visibly ideological of Jane Austen’s novels”¹⁰ where she sets out “with almost evangelical clarity her views on the proper organization of society.”¹¹ Marilyn Butler is one of the first critics to foreground the reading of *Mansfield Park* within its contemporary ideological context of female education in the spirit of Evangelicalism, whose moral ideal is personified by humble Fanny Price, an ideal set against the amoral and individualistic Crawfords. Yet if Fanny seems to be a “true Christian” from a conservative perspective, from a feminist one she reappears as a deathly pale and still “Snow White”: instead of approving the abortive marriage closure of *Mansfield Park*, Gubar and Gilbert argue for the potential sisterly bond between Fanny and Mary Crawford.¹² Poststructuralist critics are particularly sensitive to the censoring work of the marriage plot that translates “the polyvalent language of the novelistic (oriented toward the signifier)” into “the univocal language of the ideological (oriented toward the signified).”¹³ “In marrying Edmund instead of Henry Crawford,” Joseph Litvak argues, “Fanny indeed helps Sir Thomas to consolidate his empire and to protect his property from dispersion at the hands of outsiders. In keeping the family circle closed, she affirms repetition over difference, and legitimates Sir Thomas’s patriarchal program.”¹⁴ From a Marxist perspective, Eileen Cleere views the endogamous marriage as an economic strategy which utilizes Fanny as a domestic commodity “invested with both exogamous and endogamous sexual value [that] can be exchanged and retained simultaneously.”¹⁵ Despite the apparent oppressiveness of the novel’s marriage-plot imperative, a few critics still undertake somewhat desperate attempts to salvage its moral value. Thus, Julie Shaffer contends that Austen’s marriage plot can be seen as empowering for women since in questions of domesticity and romantic relations women *are* superior to men.¹⁶ Glenda A. Hudson, for example, argues for the

10. Marilyn Butler, “*Mansfield Park*: Ideology and Execution,” in *New Casebooks: Mansfield Park and Persuasion*, ed. by Judy Simons (London: Macmillan, 1997), 19–36, p. 19.

11. Mary Evans, *Jane Austen and the State* (London: Tavistock, 1987), p. 27.

12. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Yale University Press, 2000), p. 165.

13. D. A. Miller, “Good Riddance: Closure in *Mansfield Park*,” *Jane Austen: Mansfield Park. A Reader’s Guide to Essential Criticism*, ed. Sandie Byrne (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 178–185, p. 180.

14. Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 24.

15. Eileen Cleere, “Reinvesting Nieces: *Mansfield Park* and the Economics of Endogamy,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 28.2 (1995) 113–30, p. 116.

16. Julie Shaffer, “Not Subordinate: Empowering Women in the Marriage Plot: The Novels of Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen,” *Criticism* 34 (1992) 51–73.

moral benefits of the novel's expulsion of *difference* represented by the Crawfords and its authorization of endogamous *sameness* as the condition of domestic harmony: "Fanny and Edmund are of the *same* stock and are *similar* in appearance; they instinctively understand one another, and share the *same* views. . . In short, the sanctity of the family at Mansfield is preserved by the incestuous alliance."¹⁷ In a more recent study, Mary Jean Corbett suggests we "[put] aside our critical preoccupation with the vicissitudes of the marriage plot . . . and . . . concentrate instead on the family plot," which empowers Fanny with a certain "degree of agency."¹⁸

As we can see, the novel provides enough evidence for both conservative and radical readings: in the former, we would endorse Fanny's inexpressive humility as a moral virtue rewarded by marriage in the end; in the latter, we would rehabilitate the Crawfords' expressive vitality exorcized by the narrative's closure. Such an interpretative duplicity of *Mansfield Park* is the result of the ideological censorship of its marriage plot, to which the narrator is fully committed while being ultimately incapable of totalizing the entire novel within a unified meaning. In what follows, I will extensively consider the historical and ideological context of *Mansfield Park*'s marriage plot, which not only prescribes the conservative ideal of domesticity and femininity but also points to an equally valid yet utopian alternative, or a "missed opportunity," offered by Henry Crawford, an opportunity which is inevitably suppressed by the realistic and regulatory pattern of the novel's plot. As William Galperin observes, "the missed opportunity" produced by the exigencies of the dominant plot with its forward temporal momentum is a constitutive residue of Jane Austen's fictions "suspended between the freedom of possibility . . . and the more probable world."¹⁹ In the disciplinary continuum of her narratives, the utopian possibilities in which "it could [indeed] have all turned out differently" – such as the "improbable" marriage of Fanny and Henry, the clandestine romance of Frank and Jane or even dispensing with marriage entirely (like Tom Bertram or *Emma*'s Miss Bates) – do appear yet can only manifest themselves as being necessarily dismissed or foreclosed "under the sheer weight of impossibility."²⁰ To recover an alternative, or utopian, course of events buried under the layers of the novel's internalized censorship, I will also turn to Gilles Deleuze's theory of active and reactive forces that partly explains the triumph of the conservative ideal symbolized by the Fanny–Edmund alliance.

17. Glenda A. Hudson, "Incestuous Relationships: *Mansfield Park* Revisited," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 4.1 (October 1991) 53–68, pp. 61; 66.

18. Mary Jean Corbett, "'Cousins in Love, &c' in Jane Austen," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 23 (2004) 237–59, pp. 244; 255.

19. William H. Galperin, "'Describing What Never Happened': Jane Austen and the History of Missed Opportunities," *ELH* 73.2 (2006) 355–82, p. 379.

20. Galperin, p. 359.

2

Ideologically, *Mansfield Park* manifests itself as the conservative project of the country house novel intended to improve the decaying state of the aristocratic family in the late 18th–early 19th century period known as the Regency Crisis.²¹ Not only does *Mansfield Park* historically capture the transitional moment of aristocratic England, it also promotes the reinforcement of the domestic ideology as a programmatic cure for it, an ideology which is to solidify and preserve family and home values with the emphasis on paternal authority and thereby reanimate the traditional (national, patriotic) tendencies of the “middle-class aristocracy.”²² Before we look at how this ideological improvement of the English estate is accomplished throughout the novel’s plot, let us first consider what exactly is wrong with Mansfield Park.

The Regency crisis of Mansfield Park is primarily represented through the irresponsible and cheerfully selfish behavior of Sir Thomas’ son, Tom, who is supposed to be in charge of the family and the estate while his father is away in the West Indies. He spends most of his time at fashionable watering places gambling, drinking, and running up debts. When he is at Mansfield, he proves to be a master only in the arrangement of pleasurable activities, such as an impromptu ball or theatrical, not business matters. It is quite noteworthy that Tom is a rather marginal character in terms of his self-representation in much of the novel; he does not participate in the chief ideological dynamic of the narrative, which is organized around Fanny and Edmund as the agents of domesticity on the one side and the Crawfords as their antagonists (anti-domestic metropolitans) on the other. He consistently abstains from his regent’s responsibilities yet he is too weak as a person to sustain his social transgressions in the form of a clearly defined (ideological) standpoint. His case represents the rank of the aristocracy in its decline, on the verge of extinction. The entropic tendency of Tom’s hedonistic lifestyle is exemplified by the fact that he very nearly dies in his compulsive pursuit of self-gratification. Furthermore, although physically recovered and morally improved, Tom does not participate in the happy ending of the novel, which is ideologically marked by marriage as the promise of domestic stability in future. That is, it is unclear whether Tom as the heir to Mansfield will produce an heir himself and thereby continue the Bertram line (such suspicions are reinforced by the fact that throughout the novel there are no women among Tom’s “intimate friends,” but exclusively men). The marginalized and uncer-

21. See Roger Sales, *Jane Austen and the Representation of Regency England* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

22. The term is taken from Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 159–60.

tain status of Tom as character is ultimately the result of the regulatory work of the narrative, which foregrounds the problematic of inheritance and pointedly suggests that not only might he fail to become a patrilineal successor, but his “connections” as well are made quite suspect in this respect. It is precisely Tom who initiates the subversion of Mansfield Park by inviting his latest “intimate friend” John Yates into the house and allowing him to use Mansfield as the stage for the theatrical (while the Crawfords are later recommended by Yates to take part in it). It is also Tom who proposes *Lover’s Vows* as the play for the theatrical, the Rousseauian content of which rapidly escalates the destabilization of Mansfield Park (although he prefers to take minor parts in the play).

Therefore, Tom’s personality, with his explicit preference of the interests of outsiders over those of the family, symbolizes the internal threat to the estate, a threat to blur the boundaries within Mansfield Park between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, relative and stranger, order and disorder, security and danger, depth and surface, the natural and the artificial, the masculine and the feminine, and so on. And it is the regulatory stabilization of the clear-cut divide between these dichotomies that becomes the chief objective of *Mansfield Park’s* project, where the character of Fanny as the exemplar of “steadiness and regularity of conduct,”²³ “the perfect model of a woman,”²⁴ “the one for whom habit [has] most power, and novelty least”²⁵ serves as the primary ideological device in the novel’s work of the reconstitution of the value system in this historical moment of transition.

3

Given that Fanny is promoted as the agent of the resurrection of paternal authority, it is worth looking at the representation of Sir Thomas Bertram, who exemplifies the ideal of fatherhood *in transition*. As most commentators observe, Austen’s characterization of Sir Thomas (as well as that of Fanny) was undertaken under the influence of Thomas Gisborne’s writings, namely *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men* (as well as *An Inquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*). At the beginning, Sir Thomas does not match the standard of ideal fatherhood described by Gisborne, but as the novel’s plot progresses, it registers his successive improvements, culminating in his ultimate admission of his faults (“grievous mismanagement”) in the last chapter. Thus, one of the primary features of Gisborne’s ideal father is that of being *affectionate* to his children: “A parent ought constantly to aim at gaining the affec-

23. Austen, p. 271.

24. Austen, p. 322.

25. Austen, p. 328.

tionate confidence of his children; and should lead them to regard him not as a father merely, but likewise as a friend. He must avail himself, that he may govern them properly, of the joint principles of love and fear.”²⁶ Sir Thomas is emotionally unavailable to his children; he is strict, reserved, severe, and even sublime in his awesome gravity. Despite the fact that it is originally his intention to adopt Fanny into the Mansfield household, he nonetheless fails to be welcoming to the heroine upon her first arrival.²⁷ Even when he attempts to exert his fatherly authority through friendly considerateness, he fails to do so: his advice manifests itself as the ultimate order that aims at gaining “persuadableness”²⁸ rather than “affectionate confidence” from Fanny.

According to Gisborne, the father’s attitude towards the marriages of daughters consists in not “constraining their choice in marriage”; the father should not impose his own decision on them but “may certainly be justified in requiring a longer pause and delay from them, when he deems the proposed connection unfavorable to their welfare.”²⁹ Sir Thomas is aware that Maria is indifferent to stupid Rushworth and advises that her happiness should not be sacrificed for the economic advantage; yet he is “happy to secure a marriage which would bring him such an addition of respectability and influence.”³⁰ The same holds for Sir Thomas’ attitude towards the Crawford’s proposal to Fanny. Despite her quite determined decline, he attempts to clarify the advantages of the “proposed connection.”³¹ Sir Thomas’ advice discloses its absolute power in his decision to exile her to Portsmouth.

The failure of Sir Thomas’ far too authoritative and unaffectionate pedagogy results in his ultimate inability to properly maintain his domestic government. Not only is he often physically absent in the West Indies, but Mansfield Park is marked by the absence of respect and recognition of the paternal authority on the part of the eldest son, whose debts prevent Sir Thomas from retaining the Mansfield living for Edmund. Despite his attempt to make Tom realize the harm that his lifestyle is doing to the estate, Tom finds a number of excuses to ignore him. Overall, it is not affection that governs Sir Thomas’ attitude toward his children but rather his anxiety: “although he was a truly anxious father,”³² he saw his daughters “becoming in

26. Thomas Gisborne, *An enquiry into the duties of men in the higher and middle classes of society in Great Britain, resulting from their respective stations, professions, and employments*, 2 vols. (London, 1811), Vol.1, p. 480.

27. Austen, p. 13.

28. Austen, p. 259.

29. Gisborne, p. 491.

30. Austen, p. 187.

31. Austen, p. 294.

32. Austen, p. 20.

person, manner, and accomplishment every thing that could satisfy his anxiety”;³³ “though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him.”³⁴ His anxiety is not only about his children’s future but also about his patriarchal power in general, which is effectively undermined by the worsening economic condition of the estate, brought about by the Napoleonic Wars (as well as economic difficulties in the West Indies). As Joseph Litvak observes, although for his own theatrically subversive purposes, *Mansfield Park* is “certainly one of the most anxious novels written. Anxiety may be the condition of all narratives, but here it seems especially acute.”³⁵ It is the programmatic task of the novel’s conservative project to promote Mansfield as the site of “a hope of the domestic happiness,”³⁶ despite its underlying anxiety and forces from outside, by the fictional restoration of the paternal authority, a restoration that could only be facilitated by foregrounding such an *ideological construction* as Fanny. For it is to Fanny that Sir Thomas is to be obliged for his transformation from the emotionally distant patriarch into the affectionate domestic father, a figure that is structurally necessary to secure his dominant position within both domestic and social historical contexts. It appears that it is not the “asexual” marriage of Fanny and Edmund that makes the resolution of the novel “happy,” since it can be probabilistically calculated in advance thanks to Fanny’s having Edmund as the only intimate companion at hand in her isolated existence at Mansfield. It is rather the reactivation of the paternal authority of Sir Thomas that fulfills the novel’s ideological mission. It is precisely thanks to the incorporation of Fanny into the Mansfield family as an absolutely legitimate member that Sir Thomas finally realizes the proper duties of the “ideal father.”

Thus, once all the undesirable characters are expelled from Mansfield Park (and from *Mansfield Park’s* plot as well) and desirable comfort is finally achieved (“Here was comfort indeed!”³⁷), Sir Thomas gradually comes to an understanding of what has been missing in his plan for the education of his children:

Something must have been wanting *within*. . . He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. To be distinguished for ele-

33. Austen, p. 21.

34. Austen, p. 20.

35. Litvak, pp. 4–5.

36. Austen, p. 436.

37. Austen, p. 429.

gance and accomplishments – the authorized object of their youth – could have had no useful influence that way, no moral effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them. . . .

Wretchedly did he feel that, that with all the cost and care of an anxious and expensive education, he had brought up his daughters without understanding their first duties, or his being acquainted with their characters and temper.³⁸

In this passage on the proper task of moral education, Sir Thomas identifies its active principle as the instilling of the sense of duty that would in turn govern his daughters' inclinations and disposition. Furthermore, that active principle requires self-denial and humility; that is, for the educated *activity* comes from without (from the educator), while *passivity* from within. This practice is to be exercised *daily*, not theoretically but, as we should infer, *bodily*. The result of such an inculcation of duty is the disposition, which is a subjection of the denied/humiliated self to the internalized moral agency from without facilitated by affection, or 'affectionate infection,' namely love (given that tempers and inclinations are involved in the process). The father must love his children if he wants to instill that desirable sense of duty in their minds and thereby retain his paternal authority. The "moral effect on the mind" is therefore the selfless selfhood practiced bodily and daily with the ultimate devotion to the educator.

4

Throughout the novel Sir Thomas does not have a chance to practice his educational strategy on any of his children except Fanny, who is a surrogate daughter adopted through the benevolent act of patronage. As Clara Tuite observes, "the adoption of the poor niece is a function of the master's charity which throughout the eighteenth century changed from being a patriarchal duty to an individual action, as the aristocratic familial structure changed from patriarchy, which retained ties of kindred, to patriliney, a structure that reduces kin to the line of descent."³⁹ That is, the adoption of Fanny is to be viewed as the relatively widespread kinship practice of the period that served for the domestic purposes of the aristocratic family. Her "Cinderella-

38. Austen, p. 430.

39. Clara Tuite, *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 104.

like” career is therefore the novel’s ideological plot of female upward mobility: she is adopted from the periphery to the center of the aristocratic family in order to improve its moral ambience and facilitate the reconstruction of the paternal regime at Mansfield. Hence, the successful scenario of female upward mobility is predicated upon a number of her familial, social, and psychological characteristics: she must be a cousin to the son of the adopting family (which marks the transition of the marriage market from exogamy to endogamy); she must be of lower social status (which asserts the interclass relationship at the expense of the same-class one); and, finally, she must be selfless for the purpose of the inculcation of the sense of duty to which the aristocratic generation of the period turned out to be immune. As Tony Tanner describes Fanny’s portrait, “Fanny is weak and sickly . . . timid, silent, unassertive, shrinking and excessively vulnerable . . . almost totally passive . . . a girl who triumphs doing nothing. She sits, she waits, she endures. . . [Her promotion] into unexpectedly high social position . . . seems to be a reward not so much for her vitality, as for extraordinary immobility. . . She is never, ever, wrong.”⁴⁰ The list of such characteristics of the ultimate absence of life, or energy, can be extended: she does not have a fire in her room, she often suffers from headaches, she can’t walk for too long because of her fatigue, etc. *To be* nothing and *to do* nothing is Fanny’s price for being always right, for being the “perfect model of woman” that cannot be born but *produced* by the patriarchal machinery (gone awry) for the sake of domestic happiness. Clara Tuite describes Fanny as the “channel or vessel; she does not inherit, she is consumed and drawn in and chewed up by the line in order to correct and restore the smooth operations of patrilineal inheritance.”⁴¹ Completely emptied of herself, she is charged with the historical mission to transmit the ideological message of domestic felicity. In other words, she is not a Cinderella but rather a *scapegoat* supposed to atone for the crisis of the aristocratic family. It is precisely because of her fidelity to the conservative project of the preservation of “the continuity of the male estate”⁴² (as well as nation and empire, as Edward Said would argue⁴³) that she cannot marry Henry (whose anti-domesticity is manifested in his flamboyant promiscuity), which is mistaken by Sir Thomas for the unexpected irruption of individualism. As he exclaims,

I had thought you peculiarly free from willfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women. . . . But you have now shewn me that you

40. Tanner, p. 143.

41. Tuite, p. 153.

42. Ellen Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel, 1684–1814* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 50.

43. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 80–97.

can be willful and perverse, that you can will and decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you – without even asking their advice. You have shewn yourself very, very different from anything that I had imagined. . . . You do not owe me the duty of a child.⁴⁴

What Fanny shows Sir Thomas is exactly what Sir Thomas ought to expect, provided he is more consistent in pursuing the project of the preservation of the aristocratic family via domesticity, where he himself is to be converted into an *affectionate* father from an *anxious* one. In her rejection of Henry, Fanny is more than ever right, just as she is “never, ever, wrong”⁴⁵ in her persistent abstinence from any manifestation of spontaneous activity. Quite on the contrary, according to the ideological framework of the novel’s plot, it would be ultimately “perverse” if Fanny had married Henry, for she cultivates her sense of duty (or domestic super-ego) through the daily practice by incorporating it on the bodily/unconscious level. She does not know what she is doing because she is not supposed to know, since she is a hollow vessel for the transmission of systematically installed values.

Given that the marriage of Fanny and Henry is absolutely improbable according to the programmatic plot of the novel (which is, to repeat, the *insemination* and preservation of duty rather than its *dissemination*), the narrator, nonetheless, playfully teases the reader with such an impossible possibility: “Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward – and a reward very *voluntarily* bestowed. . . .”⁴⁶ That Henry doesn’t fit the straightjacket of the novel’s happy ending is evident enough, yet the narrator grants him a “missed opportunity” of domestication (which he does not really need), which might be called a wish-fulfilling fantasy of conservative ideology. Had *Mansfield Park* been written at the time of John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* or Tom Tykwer’s *Lola Rennt*, it might have had two or even three alternate (not necessarily happy) endings, for the ideological constraints have become looser and at times invisible nowadays. But at Austen’s time, the power/knowledge apparatus would not permit such a narrative frivolity, namely the alternative alliance of Henry as “bad domestic example”⁴⁷ and Fanny as the exemplar of domesticity, precisely because to avoid such an alliance is the first and foremost task of the novel’s plot. In order to maintain the novel’s ideological consistency, the narrator squeezes this alliance out into the domain of “missed opportunities,” that is, the

44. Austen, p. 294.

45. Tanner, p. 143.

46. Austen, p. 434, my emphasis.

47. Austen, p. 433.

domain of “failures” that do not fit the required ideological profile. And yet, it is Fanny who is a failure due to her blind subjection to the daily practice of self-denial, while the Crawfords, who continue to fascinate the reader with their demonic vitality, would hardly complain about the “missed opportunity” of domestication generously granted by the omniscient narrator.

5

What would have happened if the marriage of Henry and Fanny had really taken place? To answer such a question we would need to consider Austen’s notions of the probable and the improbable. As Clara Tuite observes, *Mansfield Park*’s proximity to the genre fairy-tales, such as Cinderella, where the interclass contact is didactically represented as mutually improving, increases

its realist burden of the probable. This burden dictates arguing for the naturalness of what seems unnatural (surrogacy) and the probability of what seems improbable – in this case the education of the poor into the ways of the rich, and the marriage of the poor into the class of the rich. . . Realism as practiced by Austen involved eradicating the unnatural and the improbable, but also naturalizing what seemed unnatural. The realism of the genre of domestic realism in this sense offered great opportunities for the presentation of the natural as *corrected nature*.⁴⁸

That is to say, the narrative technique of naturalization (i.e. converting *the unnatural/the improbable* into *the natural/the probable* and vice versa) is considered to be one of the major literary achievements of Austen. Yet, Tuite takes for granted the fact that the direction of (un)naturalization is overly dictated by the dominant ideological regime that authorizes its own notions of “the natural” and “the unnatural.” It is, of course, a commonplace in Austen criticism that her work is predicated on the Burkean conservative ideology⁴⁹ that promotes English social and political stability rooted in “proud submission” and “dignified obedience”⁵⁰ against the “dust and powder of individuality”⁵¹ of the French liberals. In Austen’s narratives, the Burkean propaganda of

48. Tuite, p. 110.

49. See, for example, Avrom Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park: An Essay in Critical Synthesis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967); Alistair Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen’s Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971); and Marilyn Butler, “*Mansfield Park*: Ideology and Execution.”

50. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 76.

51. Burke, p. 96.

domestic values is most effectively channeled through the “culture war” between the middle class aristocracy and the rebellious metropolitan dandyism, where the former as the novel’s protagonists incessantly satirize and patronize the latter as its antagonists. But the satire and correction issued from the *ideologically* dominant class (such as Fanny in *Mansfield Park* or Mr. Knightley in *Emma*) does not imply the adequate representation of its opponent. Quite on the contrary, the protagonist’s moral judgment and satiric critique of the antagonist proceeds from the effective failure of the former to represent the latter adequately, which is due to the unsurpassable epistemological gap between the two. Neither Fanny nor Mr. Knightley can comprehend the Crawfords and Frank Churchill respectively, and while failing to comprehend them, they criticize them for their epistemological inaccessibility and thereby manifestly betray their own ideological complicity. Both the Crawfords and Frank and Jane, therefore, escape their judgmental characterization while producing misperceptions and contrasting readings of themselves (e.g. conservative and radical).

The true identity of the novel’s antagonists is even more shrouded in uncertainty by the omniscience of the narrator, whose ideological commitment to the dominant class is made apparent by the open expression of sympathy for the protagonists (“My Fanny,”⁵² “poor Sir Bertram”⁵³). Compared to Austen’s other works, *Mansfield Park* is known for its extremely high use of free indirect discourse resulting in a “greater psychological depth of character”⁵⁴ as well as a “growing inner consciousness”⁵⁵ of the novel as a whole. Yet the increased use of free indirect discourse, where the narrator’s authoritative perspective penetrates and absorbs the inner workings of the characters’ minds, which marks Austen’s mastery of psychological realism, also implies increased ideological control over the entire novel. In this regard, the narrator condemns Henry as “thoughtless and selfish from prosperity and bad example.”⁵⁶ Even though Henry is presented as a careless libertine in the beginning, the narrator does, nonetheless, show that he has “moral taste enough to value”⁵⁷ Fanny. However, Henry’s glimpse of reformation offered by the narrator serves only as a pretext for his later failure, which definitively proves his lack of moral integrity. As the narrator tells us, he could have done better, but “the temptation of immediate pleasure was too strong for a mind unused to make any sacrifice to right.”⁵⁸

52. Austen, p. 427.

53. Austen, p. 428.

54. Louise Flavin, “*Mansfield Park*: Free Indirect Discourse and the Psychological Novel,” *Studies in the Novel* 19.2 (1987) 137–59, p. 137.

55. Flavin, p. 156.

56. Austen, p. 108.

57. Austen, p. 218.

58. Austen, p. 434.

The only character who escapes the narrator's censorship is Mary Crawford, who, despite her cynicism and rebellious confidence, is allowed to express herself directly.⁵⁹ And yet, exempted from the narrator's judgment, she is still removed from the novel's happy ending. Even though she is "no villain,"⁶⁰ she is not rewarded by marriage either, which only intensifies her charismatic and enigmatic presence. As D. A. Miller demonstrates, there is an abundance of irony, ambiguity, and fascination about Mary Crawford in the novel, but what is really needed is the "knowledge of her real character."⁶¹

Therefore, Austen's most fascinating characters prove to be constitutively enigmatic, or opaque, as they are essentially under- or misrepresented: they are either removed from the plot by the ideologically (probabilistically) committed narrator as the undesirable causes of social discomfort or distorted through the epistemological lens of the ideologically dominant protagonists. Even in their self-representation they prove to be ungraspable, for they are always changeable, unpredictable, impulsive, and deliberately theatrical.

To overcome the predicament of the *opaque* representation of the novel's antagonists caused by the ideological censorship of the marriage plot, I would propose shifting the focus from the level of representation / interpretation to that of the functional / pragmatic analysis of force interaction presented in Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. According to Nietzsche's calculus of active and reactive forces, which measures the expression of impersonal (non-human) life beyond moral evaluations, we would no longer consider the characters' ideological affiliation as a key factor of their identity. Instead of looking at how a certain character manifests him/her-self in life, we would need to focus on how life as such manifests itself through a character. The more life expresses itself through a character, the more dynamic, mobile, mutable, ungraspable, *imperceptible*, and essentially subversive s/he is. In *Mansfield Park*, the Crawfords could be seen to stand for the Nietzschean ideal of active forces, while ascetic Fanny stands for that of reactive ones. And yet, reactive forces, which are the forces of obedience, adaptation and form-receiving, are necessarily to be viewed *in relation* to active forces, which are those of domination, transformation, and form-giving. Without active forces, Deleuze argues, "the reactions themselves would not be forces."⁶² In history, however, the original hierarchy of forces is *inverted*: reactive forces are dominant, while active ones are dominated.

59. Flavin, p. 152.

60. Susan Morgan, *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 148.

61. Miller, p. 183.

62. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 41.

According to Deleuze/Nietzsche, the triumph of reactive forces in history, where active forces are turned back against themselves and thereby separated from what they can do, results in the becoming-reactive of *all* forces that is responsible for the formation of reactive psychology (*ressentiment*, bad conscience, ascetic ideal) that constitutes the essence of modern man. The task of the genealogist is therefore to reestablish the original hierarchy of force relations and show how active forces are systematically neutralized and deprived of their manifestation in history. In this regard, *Mansfield Park* is to be viewed as the genealogical account of the intricate dynamic of active and reactive forces operating in early-nineteenth-century England, where the marriage of active and reactive forces is posited and entertained as a veritable possibility yet eventually dismissed as historically improbable by the current ideological regime.

Had the miraculous possibility of the marriage of Henry as aristocratic *flâneur* and Fanny as lower-middle-class loner at Mansfield been introjected into the probabilistic order of *Mansfield Park*'s plot, it would have exploded the entire ideological construction of the novel. And yet, if within *Mansfield Park*'s narrative frame such matrimonial confusion appears to be virtually impossible, within the unframed "reality," or "life" as the field of forces, subjected to chance (rather than political program), expression (rather than repression), self-affirmation (rather than self-denial), contamination (rather than purification), openness (rather than closure), and ex/en-dogamic promiscuity (rather than endogamic fidelity), it would seem quite "natural," if not *inevitable*. For Fanny being the epitome of vacuity and stillness, Henry serves here as her complementary missing part of vitality and mobility. In life rescued from ideological imprisonment such a perfect opportunity for the inter-circulation of energy between them would be impossible to prevent. But the novel's authoritative narrator demonstratively polices each and every deviation from the prescribed ideological scenario and thereby exposes the novel's ideological commitment to our "subversive questioning."⁶³ Even if a deviation is allowed, it is done only for the purpose of its correction and the reinforcement of control. At times it appears that the narrator, or probably Austen herself through the voice of the narrator, suggests that a little more pressure of life, or perseverance (*conatus*), would suffice to break through the wall of preservation ("Would he have persevered. . ."⁶⁴), but in the novel the final push towards a vitalistic openness is always cut off by the narrative closure.

63. Emily Auerbach, "The Liveliness of Your Mind: Pride and Prejudice" in *Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), 111–49, p. 112.

64. Austen, p. 434.

Consider, for instance, the ending of Volume 1 where Fanny is about to cross over the threshold of the ideological frame when she is finally convinced to participate in the rehearsal.

Fanny could not say she did not – and they all persevered – as Edmund repeated his wish and with a look of even fond dependence on her good nature, she must yield. She would do her best. Every body was satisfied – and she was left to the tremors of a most palpitating heart. . . . They *did* begin – and being too much engaged in their own noise, to be struck by unusual noise in the other part of the house, had proceeded some way, when the door of the room was thrown open, and Julia appearing at it, with a face all aghast, exclaimed, “My father is come! He is the in the hall at this moment.”⁶⁵

This passage exemplifies the climactic clash of the opposite forces of the novel’s narrative, that of repression / negation and of subversion / affirmation. The narrative demonstrates the effective force of collective perseverance on the one hand and the inability to proceed further on the other: the movement of life is arrested via the installation of the figure of the father. And yet, even if the theater is pulled down, a revolution of forces prevented, and paternal authority reinstated, forces of life, pleasure, enjoyment, and expression are not excluded from Mansfield (for their pulsation animates the slow progression of the plot which is itself supposed to repress them) but are rather spread out in myriad forms of insurrection which are vigilantly kept in check until they are utterly cut off by the marriage closure that celebrates the stasis of domestic comfort.

65. Austen, p. 159.