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Abstract: In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, characters become a form of currency to be exchanged through marriage in order for others to gain power and wealth. Fanny Price, repeatedly objectified in this way, manages to realize the inherent value that she possesses as a woman and accesses a measure of agency in order to transcend the mercenary ideologies of the novel. Her marriage allows her to recognize herself as being equal to her husband, Edmund Bertram, and join him in owning their property. Thus, Fanny and Edmund represent a new ideology that is founded on love and equality rather than profit.

"I cannot act!":

Fanny Price's Divergent Ideology in *Mansfield Park*

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Sir Thomas's treatment of his daughters in the final chapters of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* demonstrates the economic forces that construct the novel's ideology and entrap its characters. After Maria Rushworth's affair with Henry Crawford (and, consequently, the failure of her marriage to Mr. Rushworth), she and Mrs. Norris remove themselves to a private establishment, shut away amongst little society. Julia Bertram and Mr. Yates humbly ask for forgiveness from Sir Thomas Bertram and begin to repair the damage inflicted upon their characters following their elopement. Reflecting on the outcomes of his daughters' marriages, Sir Thomas determines that there has been a "grievous mismanagement" of all the "cost and care of an anxious and expensive education" (363-64). Sir Thomas regrets that the cost of his daughters' education resulted in marriages that were not advantageous to his family. He manages to find some solace in

this regret after discovering that Mr. Yates's estate was more (and his debts less) than initially expected, allowing some recompense for Julia's hasty marriage.

Sir Thomas's greatest comfort, however, lies in his acquisition of Fanny Price for a daughter once Edmund asks his permission to marry her. He quickly determines that "Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted" and recognizes how his "charitable kindness" throughout all these years had been rearing a "prime comfort" for himself (371). Indeed, with the disappointment of his daughters' marriages, Sir Thomas takes comfort knowing that Fanny is a valuable "repayment" after becoming his daughter (371), "prizing" her good principles and temper (370). Thus, Sir Thomas's final evaluation of his daughters is largely determined by their economic situations. Since Mr. Yates possesses more fortune than he initially presumed, Sir Thomas knows Julia will be provided for, though he seems disappointed that she has not elevated her social position through this marriage. As for Maria, Sir Thomas must continue to protect and provide for her by securing her every comfort and encouraging her to do right. He does no more than this and will not agree to help her secure another marriage, not wishing to introduce "such misery in another man's family" (365). In the end, Maria and Julia are subject to Sir Thomas's economic scrutiny; however, Fanny Price's refusal to act, to participate in the novel's ideology, allows her to retain her inherent self-worth and eventually obtain equality in her marriage with Edmund Bertram.

In the beginning of *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas is only capable of thinking of Fanny in terms representing her economic value. When

she arrives at Mansfield Park, she is exposed to the materialist values held by Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris, Maria, and Julia, all of whom consider Fanny to be ungrateful and inherently useless to the Bertram household. When Edmund buys a mare intended solely for her use, Fanny is able to take control of the economic language Austen integrates into the novel; however, Fanny does not use the language in the same manner as the other characters. Instead, she learns to appreciate an individual's inherent value. Fanny's refusal to act in the performance of Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows* demonstrates her disapproval of the immoral dalliances taken up by the household after Sir Thomas is called away to look after his colonial estate in Antigua. Refusing Henry Crawford's offer of marriage ensures that Fanny is not willing to sacrifice her morality for an advantageous marriage. Ultimately, she refuses to act in the ideology that drives the novel. Instead, she upholds her moral principles in order to ensure the survival of her inherent value. Many critics have imagined Fanny Price as representing an ideal femininity – she is obedient, submissive to orders, and is often observing the actions of those around her rather than taking action herself – but I propose that reading Fanny Price's character this way severely limits the potential of Austen's protagonist. Instead of imagining Fanny's inaction as a form of submission, I would like to suggest her "inaction" is, itself, a form of action that expresses agency. Indeed, Fanny demonstrates Austen's own personal discrepancy with the treatment of marriage in the early nineteenth century.

Critics trying to understand Fanny's role in the novel often turn to the contemporary cultural values which Austen supports or rejects. D.W. Harding describes Austen's novels as a form of satire that sought to instill a "regulated hatred" for social relationships found in everyday life (350). Harding believes that Austen's purpose, as a novelist, was to create "unobtrusive spiritual survival" without creating direct conflict with those around her (351). Similarly, Dorothy Van Ghent describes Austen's method as a dissection of "the monster in the skin of the civilized animal" (106). Both Harding and Van Ghent emphasize Austen's attempts to destabilize the dominant ideology of British society. More specifically, Van Ghent traces Austen's "mercantile and materialistic" vocabulary in *Pride and Prejudice* as a way of reflecting the interests of a culture defined by materialistic interests (109). Van Ghent claims Austen is unable to break away from this language; therefore, she develops "spiritually creative" protagonists that are able to discover the "fertility of honest and intelligent individual feeling" (111), despite being a part of British materialistic culture. Harding and Van Ghent provide a foundation for understanding how Austen uses her novels to comment on contemporary culture, especially in regards to marriage.

Later critics, meanwhile, have aligned *Mansfield Park* (and Fanny, in particular) more closely with Austen's criticism of moral and social values, examining Austen's treatment of economy and morality, largely in response to Edward W. Said's treatment of the novel. Said argues that Austen uses *Mansfield Park* to defend Britain's right to colonial possessions in order to "establish social order and moral

priorities" (62). Said traces Fanny's significance to the Bertram estate alongside Sir Thomas's estate in Antigua. While Sir Thomas tends to his "colonial garden," Said believes it is inevitable that "mismeasurements" will occur since Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris are without parental authority (86). Fanny is the only one who refuses to act in the performance of *Lovers' Vows*, consciously knowing right from wrong and aware that Sir Thomas would ardently disapprove of this behavior. While Said reasons that Fanny "cannot participate" in the play because of her moral consciousness, I believe her inaction constitutes an expression of authority that has been largely overlooked by Said and other critics. While it is true that Fanny is alienated, distanced, and fearful throughout the novel, her refusal to act in *Lovers' Vows* represents Fanny's refusal to act within the larger ideology of the novel.

Said believes Fanny is eventually transformed into a "directly participating" member of the Bertram estate (87). Recent criticism supports this notion by considering Fanny as a type of commodity capable of being transformed to assist in the Bertrams' economic situation. Eileen Cleere suggests that Fanny's "inherently amorphous" position as Sir Thomas's niece can easily be "invested" and "converted" from "poor relation to daughter, sister, or, possibly, wife" (122), and Fraser Easton claims that Fanny refuses to accept her experience as a woman in these financial terms (472). While I am in agreement with Easton's take on Fanny's refusal, he believes that Fanny transforms into a "defender of common life and plebian resistance" (483), whereas I would suggest that her transformation is

largely for herself. She has transformed by refusing to engage in the materialistic culture of the novel in order to maintain her "independent moral life" (Menon 156). Jane McDonnell notes that Fanny's "sudden uprooting" from her home and her change into an "object of charity" establish a discrepancy between her "place" in the novel and her own "internal history" (201-2). These critics argue that, despite being uprooted from a meek existence, Fanny remains "steadfast" (Wainright 98) and "demure" (Menon 156), located in a "submissive alliance with the conventionally virtuous people of the story" (Harding 357). But, although Fanny remains true to her moral convictions, her inactivity is not merely an act of submission. Rather, Austen uses Fanny's inaction to undermine the prevalence of economy in nineteenth-century marriage.

In *Mansfield Park,* Austen uses Mary Crawford to satirize contemporary views of marriage. Mary declares, "I would have everybody marry if they can do it properly; I do not like to have people throw themselves away; but everybody should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage" (34). Mary's statements provide a constructive framework for the economic ideology that is reinforced by marriage during the nineteenth century. It is not enough that people should marry, as Mary prescribes, but they should marry *as soon as* marriage offers an advantage. With Mary's declaration serving as a framework, Austen allows the reader to focus on Fanny's choice to diverge from the constricting rules of this ideology rather than simply portraying a marriage between Fanny and Edmund (which will eventually offer her an advantage). Easton claims the "act of

marriage inextricably links the destiny of women with that of property . . . but unlike many of Austen's heroines . . . Fanny does not marry an estate or fortune" (472).

Instead of marrying Edmund for his fortune, she marries him out of gratitude for helping her rise beyond her objectification. Mary's notion of marriage helps develop the conflict Fanny faces as she tries to shake off the assumption that she is simply an object waiting to provide economic advantage to someone else. David Graeber's analysis of marriage takes this discussion further by allowing us to understand that not only will Fanny be treated like currency – as she is exchanged in the novel – but that the terms of her exchange also require that she (or someone) pay something back to Sir Thomas. If Fanny functions as a type of social currency within the human economics of *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas desires to take care of her not simply so that his conscience might be at ease. He is, of course, not interested in her inherent value as a woman (or as his niece) but in the moral and economic value that she might add to his estate under her obligation of repayment for the debt that she owes him.

Although Sir Thomas's decision to take Fanny into his household is one of economy, and of the promise of an increased moral reputation, Graeber historicizes the development of women as objective currencies before Austen's time period. Graeber bases his assertion on the consideration that all human interactions are matters in which people are giving one thing for another, resulting in human relationships founded on principles of debt. Graeber deploys the terms "social currencies" and "human economics" to describe currencies that

are used to negotiate between cultural exchanges (130). Graeber uses these terms when explaining how, traditionally, money has been used to arrange marriages; more specifically, he argues, the presence of a dowry reduces a woman's value to the equivalent of the currency for which she is being exchanged. Graeber's analysis helps to explain why marriage has evolved into a relationship of creditor and debtor, rather than husband and wife. Although Sir Thomas does not receive a dowry when he agrees to take Fanny into his home, she is still a form of social currency, one that can later be exchanged to increase the value of the Bertram estate.

Sir Thomas first objectifies Fanny when he and Mrs. Norris discuss what is to be done to help his relatives. When Sir Thomas tries to determine how to improve Mrs. Price's situation, he only considers how he, himself, might benefit. He has an interest, "from principle as well as pride" (3), to see that those connected with him are in "situations of respectability" (4). This consideration concludes the conversation between Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris, and they agree to undertake the care of one of Mrs. Price's daughters in order to relieve her of the "charge and expense of one child entirely out of her great number" (5). Although the Bertrams can easily and economically accommodate Fanny, she has become a financial burden to the Price family. Mrs. Price pleads for assistance, emphasizing her "large and still increasing family," a husband who is unable to work, and a "very small income to supply their wants" (4). Fanny is considered a financial burden to her immediate family, but, for Sir Thomas, the action will improve his moral reputation, making the cost

to undertake her insubstantial. This decision is reached after weighing the costs and benefits of the action. As a result, Fanny’s fate is determined by her usefulness, with no consideration of the effect such an uprooting might have on her as a person. Not only do Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris, and Mrs. Price commodify Fanny, but they also create a debt which Fanny will eventually be obligated to repay.

As a niece and a cousin, Fanny is expected to stay outside of the immediate Bertram family circle, despite having added moral value to the family, and Sir Thomas is upfront about the distinction that is to be made between his daughters and Fanny, stating unequivocally that “[t]heir rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different” (9). When she is first brought to Mansfield Park, Fanny is overwhelmed by the grandeur of the house and of the family: “Afraid of every body, ashamed of herself, and longing for the home she had left, she knew not how to look up, and could scarcely speak to be heard, or without crying” (11). Mrs. Norris, who considers this an upfront rejection of the generosity Sir Thomas has shown her, scolds Fanny for her unhappiness, increasing Fanny’s misery by believing it a “wicked thing for her not to be happy” (11). As a result, Fanny begins to suppress the sadness and anxiety that she feels in order to please her aunts and Sir Thomas. She is instructed to demonstrate her gratitude to Sir Thomas for agreeing to take her under his care. She thus abandons her internal emotions, which further objectifies her as it prevents her from expressing her true self.

Fanny is not only traded away from her family into Sir Thomas’s prosperity but is also told to ignore the feelings that arise as a result

of this separation. She thus begins to lose a sense of her inherent value by overlooking her feelings and enduring Maria and Julia’s treatment. Though the sisters attempt to befriend her, their efforts are in vain:

> They could not but hold her cheap on finding that she had but two sashes, and had never learnt French; and when they perceived her to be little struck with the duet they were so good as to play, they could do no more than make her a generous present of some of their least valued toys, and leave her to herself, while they adjourned to whatever might be the favourite holiday sport of the moment, making artificial flowers or wasting gold paper. (12)

Maria and Julia evaluate their cousin based upon the material value that she lacks, not her character. Having only two sashes and not knowing French represent a lack of value that the Miss Bertrams find inexcusable, as they consider material value above all else. In response, they separate themselves from Fanny by gifting her with toys that no longer have any value to them. We can look at this gift-giving as a representation of the Bertrams’ evaluation of their cousin which will persist throughout the novel: like the old toys, Fanny has no value to them. Therefore, the sisters are readily able to dismiss her from their considerations, further reducing her status to that social currency within the human economics of *Mansfield Park*. Cleere argues that, unlike Fanny, Maria and Julia are, in their position as daughters, emblems of their father’s economic worth and important extensions of his power; when they become marriageable, their value

will increase as they promise family aggrandizement through exchange (118). Fanny is often "mortified" by the way that Maria and Julia treat her, but she learns to think "too lowly of her own claims to feel injured by it" (16). The distinction made between Fanny and the Bertram family adds to the devaluing process of Fanny's person. It is not until Edmund finds his cousin crying on the attic stairs that Fanny begins to rediscover her inherent value.

When Edmund first notices Fanny's distress, he considers her feelings instead of thinking of her as simply "the little girl who was spoken of in the drawing room when she left it at night, as seeming so desirably sensible of her peculiar good fortune" (12). He begins to conceive of her in terms different from those of the rest of his family: Sir Thomas wonders when his charitable kindness will be repaid; Mrs. Norris repeatedly scolds Fanny for her lack of gratitude; Maria and Julia reject her for possessing no material value; but Fanny's gratitude to Edmund establishes a foundation for their relationship that continues to grow throughout the novel. When Edmund helps Fanny send a letter to her brother, her response leads Edmund to consider her an "interesting object" (14). However, he "talked to her more, and from all that she said, was convinced of her having an affectionate heart, and a strong desire of doing right," and he begins to think of Fanny outside of the terms that his family has outlined for her (14). Fanny believes she is not permitted to express her feelings because they have been ignored or she has been scolded for not displaying feelings that correctly reflect gratitude for her good fortune. When Edmund realizes the truth of her character, he initially

thinks of her as an object, demonstrating how he, too, is caught up in the ideology that presents itself throughout the novel, but he soon recognizes that there is more to Fanny than what he initially believed, allowing him to think beyond this ideology. Edmund's recognition of Fanny's inherent value is necessary for her to consider her own value. After he validates Fanny's feelings, Fanny becomes more comfortable in the presence of the Bertram family. However, in spite of these steps forward, Fanny's improvements do nothing for Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris but remind them of their "benevolent plan" to use her for economic advantage (15).

Even though Edmund's initial recognition of Fanny's feelings allows her to reconsider her inherent value, Sir Thomas negates the possibility of any further improvement for Fanny's self-esteem when his economic circumstances reinforce his conception that she is to, one day, provide economic advantage for his family. Instead of thinking of Fanny as simply adding moral value to his reputation, he is now forced into a position of thinking about the economic burden she has placed on him. Sir Thomas expects Mrs. Norris to "claim her share in their niece" after Mr. Norris's death (19). By describing Mrs. Norris's "share" in Fanny, it is clear that Sir Thomas still evaluates Fanny's worth in economic terms. Despite his charitable investment, Sir Thomas thinks he can transfer his responsibility for Fanny to Mrs. Norris in order to alleviate his current economic burden:

> [A]s his own circumstances were rendered less fair than heretofore, by some recent losses on his West India Estate, in addition to his eldest son's extravagance, it became not

> undesirable to himself to be relieved from the expense of [Fanny's] support, and the obligation of her future provision. (19)

When Sir Thomas first thought of taking Fanny into his household, he considered the moral value that she would add to his conscience, but, in this moment, because of the change in his economic circumstances, he is simply thinking of her in terms of the cost that he incurs while keeping her. Mrs. Norris meets Sir Thomas's proposal of transferring Fanny into her care with the same economic deliberation: "Here am I a poor desolate widow . . . with barely enough to support me in the rank of a gentlewoman . . . I *must* live within my income, or I shall be miserable" (23-24, emphasis in original). Mrs. Norris's protestations end the possibility of this proposed transfer, but the episode shows that, despite Fanny's perceived improvements, she is still measured and objectified in terms of her economic value and thus vulnerable to Sir Thomas's economic circumstances.

Edmund once again saves her from the aftermath of this objectification. While he earlier sent a letter to relieve Fanny's distress, this time he buys a mare, solely for her use. Mrs. Norris insists that buying a new horse after the old grey pony died is an unnecessary expense to add to Sir Thomas's "unsettled" income (29). Edmund, however, determines that he will buy a horse himself and decides to place Fanny in "almost full possession of her" (29). Edmund not only grants Fanny a measure of happiness by providing her with a horse but also, I argue, gives her the means to participate

in the economy of the novel by maintaining ownership of the horse. After this gift, Fanny is able to wield the economic language that previously defined her:

> She regarded her cousin as an example of everything good and great, as possessing worth, which no one but herself could ever experience; and as entitled to such gratitude from her, as no feelings could be strong enough to pay. Her sentiments towards him were compounded of all that was respectful, grateful, confiding and tender. (30)

When she considers Edmund's "worth," however, she gives new meaning to the term, thinking of him in a way that no one "but herself could ever experience." Instead of needing to "repay" Edmund for this gift, she acknowledges the feelings that the gift has inspired in her as repayment enough. In this moment, Fanny participates in an exchange that is driven not by economic motive but by sentiment.

While I believe that Edmund's gifting of the horse is the pivotal moment in Fanny's initiation into the ideology of the novel, Michie claims that this moment comes later, when Fanny is introduced as the belle of the ball. At the ball given in Fanny's honour, Michie argues, Sir Thomas forces the distinction between his daughters and Fanny to collapse and places Fanny within "an arena of self-interested exchange" (14-15). While Michie makes a strong argument about the role Sir Thomas plays in placing Fanny in this "arena of exchange," I propose, instead, that it is the scene in which Edmund gifts her the horse that reveals considerably more about Fanny's evolving character. At the ball, Fanny feels uncomfortable and leaves before

the night is finished; Sir Thomas places her in the situation, and she retreats from it. By contrast, when Edmund gives her de facto ownership of the horse, Fanny deploys the economic language of the situation, and, once in control of this language, she chooses to discard it, to revel instead in the feelings she has for Edmund. Fanny believes the best way to show her gratitude is through love, not by placing herself in debt to Edmund as she does with Sir Thomas. Fanny’s ownership of the mare becomes central to her character, especially when that ownership is threatened by the arrival of Mary Crawford, and she is able to assert the power she has recently acquired as the practicing owner of the mare.

By actively participating in the ownership of the horse, Fanny begins to realize her agency. Edmund asks Fanny if she might allow Mary to ride the mare for a half-hour before she, herself, rides out, and Fanny is “almost overpowered with gratitude that he should be asking her leave for it” (53). Edmund grants her the authority to decide whether or not she approves of the plan. Consequently, when Fanny is kept waiting longer than the proposed length of time, she takes action by walking out to remind Edmund of their agreement. She assesses Edmund’s slight towards her in terms of the effect that it has on the mare: “She began to think it rather hard upon the mare to have such a double duty; if she were forgotten the poor mare should be remembered” (54). Fanny is capable of excusing that she might have been forgotten, but she refuses to forget the horse, demonstrating her interest as its owner. When we consider Fanny’s previous experiences, her “owner,” Sir Thomas, thinks only of the

advantage Fanny will provide him. But Fanny refuses this kind of evaluation when considering her role as owner of the mare. She considers not the inconvenience she, herself, experiences as a result of the delay but the health of the mare above all, just as Edmund acted benevolently towards her when he found her crying soon after her arrival at the Bertram estate. Easton's essay argues that Fanny refuses to interpret her marriageability as a woman in financial terms, and, similarly, she refrains from thinking in financial, or self-interested, terms when considering the "poor mare's" situation. In doing so, Fanny is able to rise above the moral corruption of the economic ideology driving the actions of the novel's other characters.

When Fanny refuses to act in *Lovers' Vows*, her position outside the ideology of the novel becomes even more apparent. Said describes Henry Crawford's suggestion of the play as making Franny's disconcertment "polarizingly acute," which is emphasized further when she "cannot participate" in the theatrical space (86). Said's use of the phrase "cannot participate" is paramount in my analysis of Fanny's character. When pressed by Tom Bertram to act in the play, Fanny's response warrants an interpretation different from that which Said has provided: "'Me!' cried Fanny, sitting down again with a most frightened look. 'Indeed you must excuse me. I could not act any thing if you were to give me the world. No, indeed, I cannot act'" (115). Said's claim that Fanny cannot *participate* in the play suggests a different meaning from her refusal to *act*. If Fanny is unable to participate in the play, then it is implied that she is excluded from the activity itself; however, by claiming that she cannot act, she tacitly

admits that she *could* participate in the play were it not for her inability to act. By this point, Edmund has helped Fanny discover her inherent value and provided her with a means of ownership by gifting her the mare, and Fanny has tapped into the same economic language that the others have used throughout the novel. She is comfortable exercising her ownership over the horse, and, with the assistance of Edmund, she chooses how to use economic language so that she might give more credence to the inherent worth of the individual, rather than simply choosing to exercise economic authority for her own self-interest. When Fanny chooses not to act in the play, she chooses not to act in the corrupt ideology that is motivating and shaping the relationships among the young people in *Mansfield Park*.

Fanny's refusal to act within the ideology of the novel becomes even more apparent in a discussion with Sir Thomas, when she tells him that she has no intention of marrying Henry Crawford. Since his return from Antigua, Sir Thomas has suddenly become very fond of Fanny. Cleere believes that this is because he has finally realized that Fanny is not a drain on the economic and sexual strength of his family but a site of potential productivity that must be nourished, protected, and improved (123). And his view changes significantly in light of Mr. Crawford's proposal. Sir Thomas is baffled that Fanny would refuse a man who offers her so much advantage: "There is something in this which my comprehension does not reach. Here is a young man wishing to pay his address to you, with every thing to recommend him; not merely situation in life, fortune, and character" (247). Sir Thomas's response to Fanny's refusal mirrors Mary's declaration of

the purpose of marriage – a purpose which Fanny chooses not to accept. Sir Thomas is unable to comprehend how Fanny might make this decision based upon her feelings rather than the economic advantage the marriage promises her. Like Mary, Sir Thomas believes Fanny should think only of the economic advantages that marriage offers. He thus tries to repudiate Fanny's judgment by claiming that she could not possibly know what her feelings are towards Mr. Crawford, but Fanny remains resolute in her decision. Sir Thomas characterizes this as a flaw of her character he did not believe she possessed:

> I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shewn me that you can be willful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself. (249)

Sir Thomas does not realize that Edmund has helped Fanny transform to such an extent that she should be able to make this decision for herself. By allowing Fanny to acknowledge her feelings and practice the means of ownership, Edmund gives Fanny the ability to assume the role of determining her own fate. She refuses Mr. Crawford and stands by her decision despite reproaches from Sir Thomas, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris, Mary, Edmund, and the very philosophy of the novel itself. She evaluates Mr. Crawford's character and determines that she will never marry him. I believe that, at this point in the

novel, Fanny has fully realized her capabilities as a driving force within the Bertram family. No longer is she forced to consider herself in the terms provided her; she is now capable of developing her own terms to govern how she will live at Mansfield Park.

After her refusal, Sir Thomas decides it might be best for Fanny to visit her childhood home in Portsmouth. While he hopes the trip might lead Fanny to miss attentions she received from Mr. Crawford, it is more important to acknowledge that he hopes Fanny will miss the power she possesses over him: "Sir Thomas, meanwhile, went on with his own hopes, and his own observations, still feeling a right, by all his knowledge of human nature, to expect to see the effect of the loss of power and consequence, on his niece's spirits, and the past attentions of the lover producing a craving for their return" (288). He does not realize that he errs in this evaluation, for the same forces that drive Sir Thomas do not drive Fanny. She denies the role that society has determined for a woman in her position and refuses to marry for economic gain. Instead, she holds onto her love for Edmund, an affection that has evolved from her initial feelings of gratitude, respect, and tenderness. Even when she is tempted to exploit her power over Mr. Crawford in order to escape the disappointment she finds in Portsmouth, Fanny refuses to use this power to her advantage: "To be finding herself, perhaps, within three days, transported to Mansfield, was an image of the greatest felicity – but it would have been a material drawback, to be owing such felicity to persons in whose feelings and conduct, at the present moment, she saw so much to condemn: (342). Fanny recognizes that, through her

power over Mr. Crawford, she might once more be in Mansfield Park, but she also considers the debt that would have to be repaid to the Crawfords for accepting their offer to take her away from Portsmouth. Once again, this demonstrates Fanny's understanding of the social economics that motivate the actions of the novel's other characters. By accepting the Crawfords' offer, Fanny stands to lose the position of power that she has gained over Mr. Crawford by refusing his proposal of marriage. Should she accept the offer to be returned to Mansfield Park, she would find herself in another position of debt to a man, similar to her relationship to Sir Thomas.

Despite the recognition of her agency, Fanny slips back into her passive role as object of the Bertram family when she finally returns to Mansfield Park. She feels slighted by Sir Thomas for not being asked to return at a time when she could have been "of service to every creature in the house" (339). Fanny's desire to return to Mansfield in order to be useful might seem to contradict my argument that her agency and self-worth have been realized and developed throughout the novel. But it is important to acknowledge that Fanny here determines her usefulness to the Bertrams in her own terms, not in the terms of anyone else:

> To all, she must have saved some trouble of head or hand; and were it only in supporting the spirits of her aunt Bertram, keeping her from the evil of solitude, or the still greater evil of a restless, officious companion, too apt to be heightening danger in order to enhance her own importance, her being

> there would have been a general good. She loved to fancy how she could have read to her aunt. (339)

Even though Fanny might have been of service to them, she is willing to perform this service for the general good, not merely because she has been called to Mansfield Park to be useful to others. Fanny finds satisfaction in her ability to be useful to the family by determining for herself what form that usefulness will take. In this moment, Fanny shows that she has truly become an authoritative subject – no longer a passive object – able to assert her agency and exhibit ownership, similar to her command of the mare Edmund gifted her. Fanny realizes her use, and she determines both where she might be useful and the terms which define that usefulness.

Edmund recognizes these changes in Fanny, and they contribute to his growing affection for her. When he realizes that Fanny might be the best woman for him, Edmund specifically distinguishes her from Mary, as "it began to strike him whether a very different kind of woman might not do just as well – or a great deal better; whether Fanny herself were not growing as dear, as important to him in all her smiles, and all her ways" (369). By this point, Edmund has come to understand Mary's character and economic motivations after learning, from Fanny, of Mary's interest in the possibility that Edmund might inherit Sir Thomas's fortune should his brother succumb to illness. By contrast, instead of being motivated by the economic advantage that marrying Edmund would offer, Fanny loves him for the role that he has had in helping her realize her inherent value and, subsequently, developing a sense of ownership over herself.

Fanny's development inspires a change in Sir Thomas, too, which comes to overrides the ideology of marriage Mary presents earlier in the novel. When Fanny and Edmund declare their intent to marry, Sir Thomas does not refuse them for economic reasons; instead, he considers the feelings that they have for each other:

> Sick of ambitious and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper, and chiefly anxious to bind by the strongest securities all that remained to him of domestic felicity, he had pondered with genuine satisfaction on the more than possibility of the two young friends finding their mutual consolation in each other. (370-71)

Sir Thomas realizes that a marriage motivated by "mercenary connection" would not satisfy the security of his household. But, while Sir Thomas's realization that Fanny is the "daughter he always wanted" (371) might leave the reader optimistic for a change in his general mindset, he is not yet able to conceive of Fanny, as an individual, outside of economic terms. He imagines her to be a "great acquisition" as a daughter and considers her marriage to Edmund a "rich repayment" of his "charitable kindness" (371). Thus, despite his changed attitude regarding her marriage, it seems that he is incapable of escaping the broader ideology driving the novel. Accepting her as a daughter, Sir Thomas has had to renegotiate Fanny's economic value, and, by the end of *Mansfield Park,* as Cleere argues, Fanny has ultimately been converted into a product of capitalism rather than a person worthy of affection (115). Her

marriage, in Sir Thomas's eyes, fulfils the debt owed to him from first accepting her into his household.

Lady Bertram's actions support Cleere's final evaluation of Fanny when she opposes the marriage between Fanny and Edmund until it is agreed that Susan shall take her place. Graeber believes that the only suitable exchange value for a woman is that of another woman; until that exchange occurs, all one can do is to acknowledge the outstanding debt (132). When Susan stays at Mansfield Park, she becomes "the stationary niece" (371). As a replacement, Susan fulfils the same "useful" duties for the Bertrams once provided by Fanny (371). Of course, there is no evidence in the text to suggest that Fanny brings Susan to Mansfield Park specifically in order to fill her place, for, if she had, Fanny would have acted according to the novel's economic ideology, driven by self-interest, rather than adhering to her steadfast morality. I would speculate that Fanny's decision to bring Susan to Mansfield Park is a calculated move, but it is motivated by a desire to release Susan from the disappointment and drudgery of Portsmouth rather than secure Fanny's own freedom to marry Edmund. Nonetheless, the exchange of Fanny for Susan brings economic advantage to Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram: they gain a daughter that helps to re-establish the family's moral identity as well as a niece that might later enter into an advantageous marriage should Sir Thomas find himself in economic duress in the future. However, while Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram are incapable of diverging from the dominant ideology, I believe, unlike Cleere, that Fanny has become more than merely a product of capitalism. When

Austen provides a glimpse into Fanny and Edmund's future married life, Fanny is described as an equal to Edmund, not simply a form social currency that upholds the Bertram name.

Although Fanny has found an escape from the novel's ideology, Susan's fate serves as a reminder of how difficult it was to contest cultural expectations of marriage in Austen's time. Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram remain limited in their ability to develop a different approach to marriage and human economics, yet Fanny manages to change despite the lack of progress in the novel's other characters. Edmund agrees that Fanny has a "mental superiority" over him, but, like Sir Thomas, Fanny is still "an object to him of such close and peculiar interest" (370). How far, then, has Fanny actually come? The final pages of *Mansfield Park* give little speculation about Fanny's feelings after her marriage, but, importantly, Austen describes Fanny and Edmund's future as being bound by their equality: "Equally formed for domestic life, and attached to country pleasures, their home was the home of affection" (372). This is a far cry from Fanny belonging to Edmund as his wife. Nonetheless, after marriage, Fanny can no longer entirely control the terms by which she exists, but Austen reinforces the idea that she is equal to her husband. Future acquisitions are not simply *his* but *theirs*. Prior to her marriage, Fanny declares her inability to act within the ideology of the novel, and, by the end, Fanny and Edmund have, together, created a new ideology, one in which a woman's value is not determined by her economic usefulness but by her inherent value as a person.

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