Negotiations of Postcolonial and Feminist Theory in Jane Austen's 'Love and Freindship' and *Mansfield Park*

Franchesca Davis
"Studies in Narrative" - Rutgers University Newark

While all of Jane Austen's works have been subject to literary debate since their publication, in recent decades these debates have been centered more frequently around themes of imperialism or feminism. These two theories, moreover, are regularly set up against each other as two sides of an argument. That is, critics utilizing these theories tend to approach Austen's work as though it were a battlefield on which only one line of thought can survive; either her writing is imperialist or it is feminist, but it cannot be both. As Sarah Morrison explains in her article "Of Women Borne: Male Experience and Feminine Truth in Jane Austen's Novels," Austen is either viewed "as a conservative upholding the values of the landed gentry in the last eighteenth century or as a subversive who undercuts the very premises upon which English society rests" (Morrison).

The first stance Morrison presents is most representative of critics utilizing postcolonial theory, stemming from Edward Saïd's work, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), in which he argues that Austen is unthinking in her references to Antigua and the slave trade, taking for granted the colonial holdings which support the English country manor of Mansfield Park, thereby "systematically help[ing] to gain consent for imperialist policies" (Fraiman, 808). The second takes up a feminist line of thought, following such theorists as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar who argue in their landmark book *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) that Austen despite her "ladylike discretion" is "rigorous in her revolt against the conventions she inherited" from male authors (Gilbert, 119-120). Austen, therefore, reinvents the conventions and stereotypes of male writers to expose and critique the patriarchal order which is used to define and confine women. So in the simplest of terms, one theory argues she upholds the social order, while the other claims she subverts it. When presented in this fashion, the two theories are at odds with each other and appear contradictory in nature. Thus, the battle lines are drawn and critics must choose a side.

However, while we cannot know for certain the inner workings of Jane Austen's consciousness or her literary intent, we can, and do, know that she was both a woman and English, each of which is a defining element to one of the warring theories. Yet despite her Englishness being the key to post-colonial theorists and her womanly stature being paramount to feminists, the two characteristics existed within Austen simultaneously. Both are elements of

Austen's single identity and cannot be distilled from one another. Therefore, when critics attempt to separate Austen's Englishness and her femininity to further their postcolonial or feminist argument the results fail to contain the same depth as Austen's own texts. Ironically, both sides fail to acknowledge the other and yet neither side can account for all aspects of Austen's writing. Both imperialist and feminist critiques thereby fall short of a well-rounded and conclusive argument. It is only by attempting to combine both of these literary theories and considering Austen's works through both filters that a more insightful view which considers the social order can emerge.

Betty Joseph suggests a similar concept in regards to the East India Company in her work *Reading the East India Company, 1720-1840; Colonial Currencies of Gender*. She claims that "when women appear in the colonial archive as low-ranking and unqualified subjects, they not only bring forth historical contests that have been buried or disguised, but also expose the order imposed by systematizing thought" (Joseph, 29). While historical in nature, her work can still be related to Austen's literary texts by considering the ways in which both imperialist and feminist aspects of her novels together can expose the social order, particularly when considering that "the production of a literary text is ultimately a symbolic act […] it is unmistakable evidence of a different kind of historical event – that of cultural imagining" (Joseph, 28). Therefore, by applying Joseph's technique of simultaneously employing postcolonial and feminist theories to Austen's early unpublished and untamed piece of juvenilia, *Love and Freindship*, and her more disciplined, mature novel *Mansfield Park*, rather than artificially distilling the two discourses, a thorough understanding of Austen's ability to expose the hegemonic images of society while bringing to the surface the underlying universal truths about human nature can be created.

To begin with, while in *Mansfield Park* Austen "forgoes the entertainments that foreigners can provide" (Southam), in *Love and Freindship* the main character and narrator of the story, Laura, is absurdly worldly. She states "my father was a native of Ireland and an inhabitant of Wales; My Mother was the natural Daughter of a Scotch Peer by an Italian Opera-girl – I was born in Spain and received my Education at a Convent in France" (Austen, *Love*, 76). The main character in the story, then, is not naturally British but a mix of Celtic and European. The key point: Laura is not English. This is an important distinction to make as Great Britain's imperialistic endeavors not only occurred in the Caribbean or East Asia, but also on the very island itself and its close neighbor, Ireland. The importance of England versus Britain is highlighted in the beginning of *Love and Freindship* when Laura claims "Isabel had seen the World" (Austen, *Love*, 77). But the 'World' to these women seems to consist of only England. The

only locations which Isabel had visited were London, Bath, and Southampton, all places within southern England. While clearly meant to be taken in a satirical vein, being followed as it is by Isabel's warnings to Laura about the "insipid Vanities and idle Dissipation" of London and the "Stinking fish of Southampton," (Austen, *Love*, 77), it none-the-less demonstrates a narrowness of attitude about the world.

To a certain extent, then, the outrageous adventures which occur in *Love and Freindship* can be understood as ridiculing those conquered cultures, particularly the Scottish. For instance, when the hero of the story is introduced, Laura explains that "the noble Youth informed us that his name was Lindsay – for particular reasons however I shall conceal it under that of Talbot" (Austen, *Love*, 79). In other words, the narrator changed the name of her future husband from a very traditional noble Scottish name to an eminently English one in order to fit with her romantic notions of what a hero should be. While it is evident that this was done by Austen for comic effect, parodying the romantic idea that if a woman was the image of perfection she could expect "most beautiful and moral young man" to come claim her (Doody, xxvii), it also demonstrates the colonial discourse underlying the whole of the text.

As the story continues the other Scottish characters of the text are portrayed as, at best, crude and improper and, at worst, outright villains and thieves. For instance Macdonald, Sophia's relation, after having invited the homeless and destitute women into his home is still viewed from the women's perspective to be untrustworthy and contemptible. In spite of his charity he is declared by Laura and Sophia to be a "vile […] Wretch" (Austen, *Love*, 94). Moreover, he has his daughter elope on the women's encouragement and his money stolen from him. Justifying their theft of Macdonald's money by their dislike of him, which needs no justification, the two women insist on their innocence. Laura goes so far as to proclaim on behalf of Sophia, who is hastily replacing a banknote into the drawer from which she took it, that she is "justly-offended" by the "ill-grounded Accusations of the malevolent and contemptible Macdonald" (Austen, *Love*, 94). Highly satirical in tone, the passage is laughable, ridiculing the premise that the heroines are virtuous, as well as concepts of female perfection. Consequently, the parody is primarily concerned with perceptions of feminine sensibility. However, the humor relies on the stereotypical conceptions of the Scottish as barbaric, thus perpetuating English hegemonic ideals.

Furthermore, at the end of the story, Laura goes to Edinburgh in search of any remaining family. She finds this in her deceased husband's father, Sir Edward, who "desired [she] would

accept from his Hands of four Hundred a year" (Austen, *Love*, 105). To this offer Laura writes that she "graciously promised that I would [accept the money], but could not help observing that the unsympathetic Baronet offered it more on account of my being the Widow of Edward than in being the refined and amiable Laura" (Austen, *Love*, 105). The suggestion here is that the Scotsman is again unfeeling and barbaric in his gesture of generosity, so much so that it is hardly generous at all. Again, Austen utilizes satire through the passage's suggestion that it is actually Laura who is the generous one in her acceptance of such an offer to ridicule feminine vanity. The text throughout, then, is highly ironic in its intentions. However, to relay them, Austen constantly falls into stereotypes and further what were hegemonic concepts of the Scottish as barbaric and Other.

Each of these scenes though, has more in common than their uncivil representations of Celtic citizens. The other key element in each episode is the women themselves. Laura and Sophia are shown to demonstrate throughout the text what can only be described as fits of "tender sensibility" (Austen, *Love*, 95). Moreover, these fits are not applauded, but used to reproach romantic discourses of femininity through blatant sarcasm. As much as the men are shown to be unsympathetic, the women equally exhibit signs of arrogance and vanity. Constantly referring to their own beauty and accomplishments, the women move from relative to friend, manor to country cottage, taking advantage of others' hospitality with a presumptuous sense of entitlement, asserting that their virtues make them deserving of assistance. As Gilbert and Gubar note, they "make a cult of passivity […] defining their virtues and beauty in terms of their physical weakness and their susceptibility to overwhelming passions" (Gilbert, 118).

But their 'virtues' in reality correlate to only what they tell each other about themselves versus any real moral thought or sensible conduct. Consistently ungrateful, their picaresque adventures escalate from mere incivility to outright criminal activities. From Laura and Edward's bold departure from his aunt's house, to Sophia and Laura's theft of Macdonald's money, to Laura's unappreciative acceptance of Sir Edward's living, the text is replete with satirical instances of feminine vanity. The two women "pride themselves not only on their frailty but also on those very 'accomplishments' that insure it" (Gilbert, 118). By basing their merits off of their ability to react dramatically to emotional situations, they represent the duality of English civil society and the romantic expectations of womanly conduct.

Encouraged by society to understand their value only through their reflection in men "their narcissism is inextricably linked to masochism" (Gilbert, 118). Moreover, the two women are

selfish and deceitful as a result of the “traditional notion that women have no other legitimate aim but to love men” (Gilbert, 118). Acting their way through predetermined plots, Laura and Sophia are caught between their reliance on men for survival and the expectations of patriarchal society, leaving them with an inability to express authentic feeling (Gilbert, 118-119). They become actors, caricatures, presenting the front which society demands, while simultaneously hiding from the reality which they are faced with. In many regards, they can be seen as forerunners to the duplicity in Mansfield Park, particularly the Crawfords.

But rather than a moral lesson on how women should behave, the text is a social critique. By exposing the conflict between romantic notions of femininity and the social mores of male dominance Austen forces the two sides to compound into a grotesque, almost violent, farce, the culmination of which is Sophia’s death. After the ridiculous reunion and death of Laura’s husband Edward, Sophia takes ill from having lain in the wet grass during her fainting fit. Warning Laura to “avoid the imprudent conduct” which lead to her end, Sophia dies with the final words of “Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint – “(Austen, *Love*, 99). It is an absurd scene and yet it also reflects on what this rigid social structure can do to women - and the psychological harm which can come from it.

Importantly, then, it is men who control the two women’s lives. It is not just that Macdonald and Sir Edward are Scottish which makes them so unfeeling, but also their sex. They are men with direct influence over the women. So as presumptuous and arrogant as Laura and Sophia are, their survival also depends on them receiving assistance from these men. Thus, irrational as it seems when they react to Laura’s grandsire abandoning them by fainting, the sentiment behind it is legitimate. Destitute and lacking independence, the women have no choice but to rely on male relations for protection. All of these episodes, therefore, were meant to parody the romantic novels and sensibilities perpetuated in Austen’s day.

But in doing so, the text also demonstrates the very way in which women were trapped and controlled by the patriarchal society. With few exceptions (Laura’s putting herself and Sophia into a carriage to find their husbands being one) the women are stagnant without men. At the beginning of the text, Isabel is mocked by the author for considering herself ‘worldly’ when she had only seen parts of England. Yet, in many regards, it was the world to women. Such is her reliance on men that Laura’s adventure cannot even begin until Edward appears at her doorway to whisk her away to the greater world. A woman’s understanding of the world, therefore, was controlled and limited by what men would allow her to do and experience. Women thought of

the world as only England, because it was the only culture they knew. They understood their own femininity in fainting fits because that is all their education allowed them to think. The association of England being equivalent to the world, then, is not just a result of colonial discourses, but also of masculine ones.

Concepts of imperialism and feminism, therefore, are inextricably linked in Austen's texts. Austen ridicules the social system limiting women, however in doing so, she also falls into the standard stereotypes of foreigners, thus in her own way perpetuating imperialistic images of English culture. She challenges the social structure, while at the same time utilizing the invisible discourses of it, demonstrating her own limitations because of it. Yet even in her juvenilia, underneath the untamed satire, there are elements of the universal truths which make Austen's work continue to resonate with readers. The Scotsmen, Laura and Sophia, and even Austen herself are each caught up in social structures which define and limit them. However, as Sophia's dying words suggest, you can "run mad" but if you succumb thoughtlessly to society's duality and "faint," the result will only further limit your potential happiness. These are concepts which Austen only begins to toy with in *Love and Freindship*, but which truly come to fruition in Mansfield Park.

In comparison to *Love and Freindship*'s riotous romps across the British terrain, *Mansfield Park* is stationary and calm. Moreover, Austen does a complete reversal in representations of Other and foreign. Whereas *Love and Freindship* left broken Scotsmen in its wake after its blatant and open abuse of them, one has to look to the fringes of *Mansfield Park* to discover mentions of the Irish, Antigua or slavery. It is because of this very marginalization that many postcolonial critics see a direct correlation between the events of the manor to events of the Empire; between Mansfield Park and Sir Thomas's Antigua slave holdings. It becomes a "site for construct[ing] the nation as an 'imagined community'" (Munjal). However, this viewpoint tends to ignore the very nature of Austen's adult writing: the irony, subtlety, and the precision with which every sentence is constructed.

For instance, whereas in *Love and Freindship* young Austen seems to unwittingly fall into hegemonic ideas of the Scottish as barbaric in order to further her points of feminine sensibilities, the sole mention of foreigners, in this case the Irish, in Mansfield Park feels more purposeful. During the outing to Sotherton, Henry Crawford attempts to smooth over Maria's jealous feelings by explaining away his flirtations with her sister Julia. He tells her "I could not have hoped to entertain you with Irish anecdotes during a ten mile drive" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 80).

There is a definite suggestion in this explanation that Irish jokes are somewhat immature and bawdy, only good for entertaining younger sisters, but too unsophisticated for mature young ladies. Moreover, Austen does not provide the details of the Irish anecdotes, nor does she suggest them as appealing or meant for approval in *Mansfield Park*. On the contrary, rather than unconsciously utilizing stereotypical comedic representations, as she did in *Love and Freindship*, the mention of the Irish in the text appears calculated and intended for censure. Furthermore, it is meant to articulate more than what is being said.

It is significant that it is Henry Crawford who was telling the jokes and that it was Maria who was jealous of their listener. Given their illicit affair at the end of the book, the fact that Mr. Crawford finds entertainment at the expense of others is a kind of foreshadowing and meant to demonstrate his lowness of character and sensibilities. It can be argued, therefore, that Austen again makes use of the dominant hackneyed representations of colonized people to further her point. However, while in *Love and Freindship* the use of these representations appears to be the result of 'systemized thought,' to use Joseph's term, their presence in *Mansfield Park* has the purposeful weight of literary device behind them. Her use of 'other' evolves from a simplistic means of adding humor and emphasis to satire, to a symbolic representation of a person's character. Thus, while Austen still exploits the typical colonial discourse to further her own agenda, in *Mansfield Park* there is some evidence to suggest that she attempts to not further those images as acceptable.

It is not her comments on the Irish, however, which make Mansfield Park arguably Austen's most controversial work. Rather, it is the infrequent, but ever present, mentions of slavery which appear throughout the book which prompted Saïd to assert that "Austen sees the legitimacy of Sir Thomas Bertram's overseas properties as a natural extension of the calm, the order, the beauties of Mansfield, one central estate validating the economically supportive role of the peripheral other" (Saïd, *Culture*, 79). In this light, Sir Thomas is representative of the Empire, dispensing his dominance equally at home and abroad: at Mansfield and his holdings in Antigua. During his absence Mary Crawford even mocks the way in which nothing seems to be able to be accomplished with him gone. Imitating Pope, she declares "Blest Knight! Who dictatorial looks dispense/ To children affluence, to Rushworth sense" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 131). Mary's aunt more seriously comments that his "fine dignified manner […] keeps every body in their place" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 131). The impression is that Sir Thomas instills order and structure over Mansfield the same as the British Navy would to a colonized land.

Similarly, when Fanny asks her uncle a question about slavery, postcolonial theorists understand this to be another example of how Austen's text legitimizes colonization through off-handed references. Moreover, that Fanny's question is met by "a dead silence" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 159) is taken to represent the silence on the topic by the landed gentry. However, as Southam argues, the silence following Fanny's question on slavery could also be attributed to the awkwardness and embarrassment that the addressing of such a subject would cause. In asking about the slave trade directly, Fanny forces into the open the morality of the Bertram family's means of living and the social structure which supports it. Furthermore, as with the mentions of the Irish, Austen does not provide details or any images at all, of slavery or Sir Thomas' business in Antigua. This suggests that rather than taking slavery as axiomatic, Austen utilizes imperialist concepts to suggest further meaning, coming as it does on the heels of the theater episode. Moreover, despite Edmund's claim that it would have "pleased [her] uncle to be inquired of farther," (Austen, *Mansfield*, 159) the silence also represents the silence in a woman's education in regards to political or worldly matters. It is only through asking her uncle questions that Fanny can learn about the greater world. Whether or not he chooses to answer them, and how he chooses answers them, controls her outlook and understanding of those topics.

Susan Fraiman attempts to negotiate these aspects of *Mansfield Park* when she argues that slavery functions "not as a subtext wherein Austen and Sir Thomas converge but […] as a trope Austen introduces to argue the essential depravity of Sir Thomas's relation to other people (Fraiman, 813)." She therefore understands slavery and Sir Thomas's colonial holdings as a kind of metaphor for the paternal practice of exchanging daughters, through marriage, for male status and wealth. She claims that Austen's writing "exploit[s] the symbolic value of slavery, while ignoring slaves as suffering and resistant historical subjects (Fraiman, 813)." To Fraiman, therefore, Austen is still guilty of imperialist plots, but she uses them to suggest a feminist critique to the social order. Fraiman does not, however, acknowledge the change which has overcome Sir Thomas while he was away. While his actions and attitude toward other people before he leaves for the Caribbean may be classified as depraved, upon his return his main concern is spending time with his family. He even gives Maria an opportunity to back out of her engagement claiming he would "act for her and release her" despite the fact that it was an alliance he "would not have relinquished without pain" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 161). These actions suggest that Sir Thomas is not completely void of human compassion, which may then suggest that relating the way Sir Thomas treats his slaves to his the way he treats his daughters may be too extreme.

Moreover, Saïd's postcolonial argument relies on demonstrating that upon Sir Thomas's return there was a "complete restoration of order" (Mee, 77) and even more importantly, that there was order before his departure. However, before Sir Thomas's removal from England, his daughters are shown to be "deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility," qualities Sir Thomas did not know were in want because he was not an "outwardly affectionate" father (Austen, *Mansfield*, 14). So despite the fact that Sir Thomas was "active and methodical" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 153) in his disassembly of the theater and resumption of "his seat as master of the house" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 153), any order which was returned can be understood as merely cosmetic. The seeds of the disorder which bloomed upon Sir Thomas's absence were planted well before his departure. Fanny even comments that "it does not appear to me that we are more serious than we used to be; I mean before my uncle went abroad" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 158).

Mansfield Park is shown throughout the novel as being anything but calm and orderly. While it may appear so on the surface in comparison to Fanny's time in Portsmouth, Mansfield is in reality rife with jealousy and hypocrisy. Given Maria's adulterous affair with Henry Crawford and Julia's elopement at the end of the novel, the suggestion is that rather than restoring order, Sir Thomas continues to remain "damagingly distant from the emotional and moral lives of his family" (Mee, 77). Had he been more conscious of the moral state of his daughters he would have noticed and acted upon the dubious events of his absence. When considered in this light, the drawing of a direct correlation between the manor and colonial holdings might even suggest a subversive reading of the text, exactly opposite to Saïd's conclusions.

Austen's continuous subtle mentions of the slave trade, therefore, while not necessarily representing an upholding of British civil society or a straightforward literary trope, do fall into hegemonic discourses, thus contribute to the image of Empire in the minds of its citizens. As with the mentions of the Irish, though, the mentions of the slavery and Antigua appear calculated and meant to create deeper meanings within the text. After all, for the purposes of the plot, Sir Thomas could have gone anywhere in the world, but Austen sent him to a colonized and dominated island. So while there is strong evidence to suggest that Austen did not mean slavery to be viewed as moral or acceptable, its presence within the novel again represents Austen's own inability to escape from the cultural images which surround her to relay her social critique.

Yet it is these very social structures within which Austen finds herself that are also a key element of her writing on a more conscious level. It is for this reason that the theater scene becomes such a central moment in the text. It exposes the tensions which were always present at Mansfield Park, but could only be explored under a pretense of acting and with the Master being absent. With the exception of Fanny and Edmund, who eventually does consent, all of the young people at Mansfield are thrilled at the idea of putting on a play amongst themselves. The irony of the scene is that each of the members, for their own individual reasons, wants to try their hand at 'acting' in order to stop acting. The sociality obligations and expectations placed on each of them limit what they can say to one another even within their relatively private party.

As Maria recognizes when she echoes Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, saying "I cannot get out," (Austen, *Mansfield*, 120) that while women as slaves may be too strict a representation, women within the text are none-the-less still very much confined by the patriarchal society surrounding them. Much as Sophia and Laura find themselves caught in the duality of English civil society, expected to act in ways opposed to genuine feeling, the women of Mansfield Park are constricted by the polite rules defining their status. Thus, for the women in particular, the acting out of *Lovers' Vows* becomes a means of expressing their true desires. Society demands that women remain passive, waiting on the inclinations of men, before they can demonstrate their emotions. It is only through the pretense of acting, therefore, that Mary can be so bold as to demand "What gentleman among you am I to have the pleasure of making love to?" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 117). As Gilbert and Gubar note Mary "enters into the rehearsals with vivacity […] precisely because it gives her the opportunity to dramatize, under the cover of the written script, her own amorous feelings towards Edmund" (Gilbert, 164) which she is otherwise not at liberty to do. For Maria as well, the scene becomes a means for her to express her desire for Mr. Crawford. Fanny even notes Maria "acted well – too well" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 134), thereby suggesting that she was not, in fact, acting at all but expressing genuine emotions for perhaps the first time in the text.

This forced duality, however, is not limited to the women, but is present in all of the characters in the theater episode. For Tom it is the chance to play at not being the Master. He is eager to take on any and all of the small roles, from the Cottager to the Butler. When the play is finally chosen he states "here is a rhyming butler for me – if nobody else wants it – a trifling part, but the sort of thing I should not dislike" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 108). While downplaying his eagerness for the part as being obliging, it is apparent that Tom also shows zero aspiration for any of the major parts in the play. These small roles are completely opposite to the reality in

which Tom lives. As the eldest son, Tom is expected to take over as Master after his father, including the holdings in Antigua, becoming the future Sir Thomas Bertram. Yet, it is a role in which he clearly does not relish having, previous to this point, demonstrated himself to be irresponsible and selfish. After having been sent home early from Antigua, Tom has nothing but "pleasures in view, and his own will to consult" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 93). If one continues the direct parallel between the country manor and Antigua holdings, Tom's rejection of his responsibilities can be understood as more than just straightforward selfishness, but also a rejection of colonial policies.

Yet, Tom is caught up in the social structures which support these policies as much as the women of Mansfield Park are caught in the patriarchal forces which surround them. Even though Tom has more legal rights and is less confined than either Fanny or his sisters, he still has little choice over his future occupation, a condition of which he is clearly resentful. When Mrs. Norris attempts to force him into a game of cards he exclaims to Fanny that her expression of asking left him "no possibility of refusing! That is what I dislike most particularly […] to have the pretense of being asked, of being given a choice" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 98). Even Maria is allowed to make the conscious choice, within the confines of her status, to marry Rushworth. This confinement leads Tom to attempt to refuse, to indulge in narcissistic and destructive habits, and to rebel against the obligations English society demands of him. The rigidness of the social order can therefore be detrimental to the men as well as the women.

But as his sister Maria learns when she destroys her character in going off with Mr. Crawford, to engage in active rebellion against the larger forces of the social order leads only to individual suffering and punishment. Thus, the older Bertram siblings are a broader contrasting point to the Crawford siblings, opening up the social critique of *Mansfield Park* from one centered on women to one expressing universal truths, regardless of gender. The two sets of siblings represent alternate means of living within the structures they find themselves. One set rebels against the social order, while the other willing succumbs to it, acting out the civil rules without genuine feeling. Both sets are punished, albeit unequally. As Austen explains, "in this world the penalty is less equal than could be wished" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 382). Therefore, the rebels are punished more severely with a life-threatening illness and becoming an outcast, whereas the Crawfords suffer on an emotional level, each recognizing too late the superiority of taste and principles in their prospective love interests now lost. Moreover, Maria's punishment is more complete being that she rebelled as a woman, so while the other characters have hope for improvement, her offense cannot be recovered from.

But Austen does not punish her characters for their divergence from the social order, but rather for selfishness. Each of the major characters of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny and Edmund excluded, have demonstrated their overwhelming self-indulgence leading them to become "entangled by [their] own vanity" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 382). Indeed, neither Mr. Rushworth nor Sir Thomas broke any social taboos, yet they do not escape censure. We are told that Sir Thomas, "was the longest to suffer" having recognized the "errors of his own conduct" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 376) being motivated by monetary gain. Similarly, Mr. Rushworth could "excite little pity" having known of Maria's love for Mr. Crawford and married her anyway, acting on "the indignities of stupidity and the disappointments of selfish passion" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 378).

Moreover, at the conclusion of the novel, Tom "had suffered, and he had learnt to think […]. He became what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 376-377), apparently falling back into societal expectations. Given that Tom is meant to take over the colonial holdings, this shift does, in many ways, uphold and validate the authority of the landed gentry. But it also suggests that for this happy conclusion to come to fruition, he must give up his selfish ways and recognize his responsibilities to others. For it is not just that the Bertram's rely on the Antigua estate, but that they all, including Edmund and William, rely on Tom for their wellbeing.

Fanny alone comes to the end unscathed. One of the few characters in the novel able to express genuine emotion without civil pretenses, she is presented as a foil to Mary Crawford. She is silent and observant, able to see through the charades of Mr. Crawford, while Mary is talkative, insensitive, and lively, expressing "the general opinion" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 90). Both are in love with the same man and both are limited in their ability to express their love. As with the sets of siblings, each represents a possibility in how to respond to the society which confines them. For Fanny, the possibility is succumbing to her timid nature and becoming increasingly passive, accepting unthinkingly patriarchal dominance. Epitomized in Lady Bertram, this outcome is ridiculed in how she languishes away her life on the couch, making passivity an indulgence, and caring more for her pug than her children. She has become "quite resigned to waiting" (Austen, *Mansfield*, 136). For Mary, there is the possibility of becoming compliant in the opposite manner. Rather than becoming physically passive, becoming morally so, acceding, as Laura and Sophia do, to the duality of civil society, selfishly living out its rules without consideration of true feeling or moral consequences. Mary has the possibility of being ruled by vanity and economic motives, as embodied in Mrs. Fraser, who "took three days to consider"

(Austen, *Mansfield*, 292) her future husband's proposal of marriage, valuing everyone's opinion but her own.

Yet despite her timidity, Fanny's actions demonstrate her ability to remain faithful to her convictions, express her emotions faithfully, and treat others with respect. For this she becomes the image of perfection and the "moral model for all the other characters" (Gilbert, 165). She withstands the onslaught of the theater group's entreaties to act, her aunt's harassments, Mr. Crawford's unsteady character, her uncle's admonishment upon her refusing to marry Mr. Crawford, and finally Edmund's failure in judgment. She manages what the others cannot in balancing her defiance and recognition of the limits placed on her by society. While feminine convention restricts her ability to act to that of refusal, she uses it to her full advantage, always keeping in mind unselfish responsibilities toward others, without compromising her own happiness. Thus, in refusing to marry for social advantage she challenges the social system, thereby "exposing its flimsy values" (Gilbert, 165).

All of the characters of Mansfield Park, therefore, represent a facet of society, both in the different ways it constricts people, as well as the possible ways of reacting to it. Men and women alike are bound by the social structures which surround them, be it the male dictated discourse of imperialism or the feminine discourses of the domestic sphere. Thus the text becomes not about women or imperialism, but about treating others with an unselfish regard and sense of responsibility. She reflects on human nature and the universality of these limitations and the modest possibilities available through the importance of how one chooses to act within those cages. To either actively rebel and attempt to deny the social order's existence, as the Bertrams do, or to unthinkingly submit to social demands, as the Crawfords do, results in one form of punishment or another. The only way to happiness is to find a balance within the limitations presented.

Both *Mansfield Park* and *Love and Freindship* offer narratives of men and women caught in a culture replete with double standards in both their representation of foreign and women. They cannot escape these forces, nor can they deny them. Even Austen is trapped, critiquing the social order while at times falling into its discourses. The most that is available for each character is to choose how to react to the biased restrictions placed on their life. Therefore, to limit the debate to either postcolonial or feminist considerations is to cheapen the texts by relating them to only a certain percentage of the population. But considered together, the two theories present Austen as a powerful voice who, while being both a woman and English, wrote

about universal truths within the limitations of her own sphere, exposing both the irony and the hypocrisy of it. Through her texts she suggests how best to negotiate these social limitations, regardless of gender or race, reminding readers to “Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint” (Austen, *Mansfield*, 99).

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Austen, Jane. *Catharine and Other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) Ed. by Margaret Doody and Douglas Murrary

Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park* [1814] (London: Bantam Books, 1983)

Secondary Sources

Despotopoulou, Anna. "Fanny's Gaze and the Construction of Feminine Space in Mansfield Park" (The Modern Language Review, July 2004)

Doody, Margaret. "Introduction" in *Catharine and Other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) Ed. by Margaret Doody and Douglas Murrary

Fraiman, Susan. "Jane Austen and Edward Said: Gender, Culture and Imperialism" (Critical Inquiry, Summer 1995)

Gilbert, Sandra M., Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979)

Joseph, Betty. *Reading the East India Company, 1720-1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

Mee, John. "Austen's Treacherous Ivory: Female patriotism, domestic ideology, and Empire" in *Postcolonial Jane Austen: Postcolonial Mappings* ed. Park, You-me; Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari. (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2000)

Munjal, Savi. "Imagined Geographies: Mapping the Oriental Habitus in Three Nineteenth-Century Novels" (Postcolonial Text, 2008)

Morrison, Sarah. "Of Women Borne: Male Experience and Feminine truth in Jane Austen's Novels" (Studies in the Novel, Winter 1994)

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: First Vintage Books, 1993)

Southman, Brian. "Jane Austen's Englishness: Emma as national Tale" (Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal, 2008)