

---

Stabilizing the Family System at Mansfield Park

Author(s): Paula Marantz Cohen

Source: *ELH*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Autumn, 1987), pp. 669-693

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2873226>

Accessed: 01-02-2018 23:03 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*The Johns Hopkins University Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *ELH*

## STABILIZING THE FAMILY SYSTEM AT MANSFIELD PARK

BY PAULA MARANTZ COHEN

*Mansfield Park* is Jane Austen's one novel in which the life of the family takes precedence over the life of the individual. Other Austen heroines spring into relief against the background of their families, but Fanny Price recedes. She shrinks, clings, and hides herself. Her "favorite indulgence" is "of being suffered to sit silent and unattended to."<sup>1</sup> She is stubbornly a part and not a whole. Lionel Trilling, among the first and most eloquent critics to recognize that Austen's concerns in this novel were different from those in her other novels, notes a resemblance between Clarissa Harlowe and Fanny Price.<sup>2</sup> Yet his conclusion that Clarissa and Fanny are Christian heroines who embody an orthodoxy that subsumes the self under its principles fails to take into account the context of family interaction within which these heroines acquire their value.

Family theorists Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and Geraldine M. Spark argue that beginning in the eighteenth century there was a vacuum created with the loss of a sense of divine justice; to fill this vacuum, they maintain, a family "justice system"—a ledger of family debts and credits—developed, in which "family debts function like a kind of 'original sin'."<sup>3</sup> In literature Clarissa initiates such a family justice system: scapegoated to death by her family, she becomes the source of the most radical of all debts and brings into being the greatest possible attempt at restitution through guilt. In her role as martyr to the family, Clarissa is therefore a *replacement of*, not, as Trilling claims, a *return to* Christian belief and values.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the dynamic of scapegoating and guilt by which Clarissa acquires meaning for the Harlowe family is the same dynamic that would provide the domestic novel—the dominant literary genre of the nineteenth century—with a replacement for the anchor of belief that gave previous literary genres their unity and persuasive power. Tony Tanner has observed that what "holds the great bourgeois novel together" is "a tension between law and sympathy" toward the female's act of transgression.<sup>5</sup> If we pursue the ideological and psychological implications of his terminology

we find that he is defining the scapegoating-guilt dynamic: “law,” understood as patriarchal law, scapegoats the female, and “sympathy” arises from the internalized guilt that the sternness of patriarchal law engenders in those who wield it. In most nineteenth-century novels, the triumph of law or the triumph of sympathy tips the balance to the tragic or to the conventional happy ending. In *Mansfield Park*, however, a perfect balancing of these two forces produces a utopian ending that sets it apart from other novels of the century.

Jane Austen began work on *Mansfield Park* in 1811, and the novel was published soon after its completion in 1814. It is the fourth of Austen’s six completed novels and the first novel following her hiatus from novel-writing, a period when, according to her most recent biographer, she emerged from a state of loneliness and depression with “a renewed sense of equanimity and stability.”<sup>6</sup> Well into her thirties, she was now reconciled to the prospect of remaining tied to her family for the rest of her life. It seems fitting that, once marriage had ceased to be a possibility for her, Austen should choose to write a family romance. But *Mansfield Park* not only marks a nodal point in Austen’s personal history, it also is a significant moment in the history of the novel, for it stands as a kind of pure derivative of Richardson’s *Clarissa* in its treatment of the dynamics of family life. If *Clarissa* plays Christ to the modern family, Fanny can be called her most adept imitator, one whose role is both less extreme and more deeply recessed in the family. Fanny is more colorless than *Clarissa* because, unlike her predecessor, she need not go “all the way”—her role as scapegoat has been integrated into a family interactive structure that knows how to check itself. Richardson’s myth of the scapegoated heroine has been adopted in *Mansfield Park* not to produce a violent conclusion like that of *Clarissa*, but to prevent just such a conclusion.

In the following pages I will examine how in *Mansfield Park* Jane Austen fashioned a model of family life in perfect equilibrium. Her closing vision of the Bertram family as sealed and immutable is what the nuclear family, insofar as it defines itself as a closed system, aspires to be. The history of the nineteenth-century family and of the nineteenth-century novel is, I believe, a struggle to achieve this equilibrium and, ultimately, to come to terms with its impossibility. *Mansfield Park* is that unique moment in Austen’s canon and in the literature of the century when such an equilibrium is successfully imagined. My discussion relies on the analytic

tools of *family systems theory*, and assumes a view of the family in which individual behavior has meaning only when studied in relation to the behavior of all other family members.<sup>7</sup> Used in conjunction with and as a critique of psychoanalytic theory and alongside recent theories of history and anthropology, family systems ideas provide a new perspective from which to trace the evolution and analyze the structure of the nuclear family. This approach has special applicability to *Mansfield Park*, a novel about a family, written at a crucial juncture in the social history of the family, by an author whose world was defined by the boundaries of family life. I will divide my treatment of the novel into seven parts, each of which analyzes a facet of the family system as it comes to be structured and stabilized at Mansfield Park.

#### I. THE INITIAL TRANSACTION

Fanny Price is brought to Mansfield Park at the beginning of the novel as the result of a transaction between the Bertrams and the Prices. Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram have offered to “undertake the care” of a child from the “large and still increasing” brood of Lady Bertram’s poor, overburdened sister, Frances Price, who had long ago married beneath her and moved from the neighborhood. The offer is a gesture of reconciliation between households that had been estranged for many years. It is conducted in writing, with Mrs. Norris, the energetic, intrusive sister, serving as epistolary intermediary. To Mrs. Price’s surprise “that a girl should be fixed on, when she had so many fine boys” (48), the eldest Price daughter is stipulated. In all these particulars the introduction of Fanny into the Bertram household bears comparison to a marriage transaction as Claude Lévi-Strauss describes its function in an elementary kinship system.<sup>8</sup> According to Lévi-Strauss, the exchange of women in marriage is the basic transaction by which a structured relationship between families is established, opening each family to a wider community and thus beginning the process of civilization.

Of course, the transaction in Austen’s novel, while it involves the relocation of a female, is also an inversion of the lateral and historical extension implied by Lévi-Strauss’s model. Although Fanny is sent to live with virtual strangers, she nonetheless goes from her mother’s house to her aunt’s and, in this sense, is sent not *across* families but *within* her own family. She is also a child of ten, not a marriageable young woman, at the time of the transaction, and she enters the Bertram family under the express admonition that a mar-

riage *not* take place: Sir Thomas must first be persuaded that there is no danger “of cousins in love, &c” before he will agree to her care, and Mrs. Norris allays his fears by assuring him that the prohibition of incest will operate to prevent a marriage of cousins who have lived together as children: “It is morally impossible” (44).<sup>9</sup>

As it happens, however, Mrs. Norris’s pronouncements concerning the impossibility of a marriage between cousins carry negative prophetic weight. For one thing, she fails to consider that the existence of the incest taboo itself signals an attraction strong enough to make the taboo necessary. (The narrator suggests this elsewhere when she refers to the sharing of early experiences as “a strengthener of love, in which even the conjugal tie is beneath the fraternal” [244]). More important, Mrs. Norris does not foresee a new affective order for the family in which a marriage between cousins, far from being impossible, will perform a much-needed structural role. To understand the structural role of incest in this novel, it is helpful to refer back to Lévi-Strauss’s explanation of the origin of the incest prohibition in primitive society. “The prohibition of incest is where nature transcends itself,” he writes. “It sparks the formation of a new and more complex type of structure and is superimposed upon the simpler structures of physical life through integration. . . . It brings about and is in itself the advent of a new order.”<sup>10</sup> In *Mansfield Park*, this process takes place on a more evolved level: an exchange occurring within the family superimposes upon the first order structures that Lévi-Strauss describes a second order of complexity through integration. The order based on the prohibition of incest thus yields to a new order in which incest is structured into family relations.

George Bataille has written that “the taboo does not alter the violence of sexual activity, but for disciplined mankind it opens a door closed to animal nature, namely, the transgression of the law.”<sup>11</sup> It also, we might add, links desire to transgression. Fanny enters the Bertram family under terms which suggest both marriage and its prohibition—a set of contradictory injunctions that recalls the dynamic of the Oedipus complex. This dynamic will in fact produce Fanny’s desire and anchor her securely to the family. The Bertrams, for their part, will discover that the dynamic of scapegoating and guilt toward Fanny as the weakest, most unassertive family member ultimately becomes necessary to the stability of their life as a family. As we shall see, the personal dynamic and the family dynamic interlock to reinforce each other.

## II. THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRANSACTION

Fanny's move from her mother's house to her aunt's is also a move from one style of family life to another. The Prices are a large, loosely knit family characterized by conventional role requirements and a porous connection with society. Life in the Price household is noisy, disorderly and continually being disrupted as members leave and return, and as messages from the outside are sent and received. Mr. Price has authority not in himself (he is drunken and largely absent) but in his title as father—his place at the domestic hearth is as often occupied by one of his cronies as by himself since he is interchangeable with them, all privileged in a limited sort of way by simple reason of age and sex. In the Price family, Fanny's role is also defined according to traditional conventions: as eldest daughter, she serves as mentor to the younger children and helps with the chores. Yet her usefulness does not prevent her mother from valuing only the male children (and, predictably, from favoring the eldest son). When Fanny returns to Portsmouth after her long absence, she finds that her mother's interest in her is short-lived: "The instinct of nature was soon satisfied," explains the narrator, "and Mrs. Price's attachment had no other source" (382).

As this maternal response demonstrates, "the instinct of nature" would have little binding power in the Price family were it not for the conventional roles by which family members come to know and relate to each other—and marriage supplies the essential structural foundation for the development of these roles. Furthermore, were daughters not to marry (and sons go off to sea), caring for so many random lives would be too great a burden for a harried, incompetent Mrs. Price and a drunken, irresponsible Mr. Price, whose personal inadequacies become calamitous on a small income. By turning their daughter over to others, the Prices therefore gain the practical advantages of a marriage transaction—they lighten the daily load of familial responsibility. At the same time, however, by exchanging Fanny within the family rather than waiting to forge a link with a new family, they undermine the elementary kinship structures that make families like their own possible. In this sense, Fanny's passage from her mother's house to her aunt's is historically significant and expresses that shift in the nature of family life actually occurring at the time Austen wrote. The Bertrams, Fanny's new family (though really an extension of her

old one), is the kind of insular and inbred (nuclear) family fated to replace outer-directed families like the Prices.

Superficially, wealth and social position are what separate the Bertrams from the Prices. At Mansfield Park the responsibilities of housekeeping and education lie with the servants and the governess; the family (with the exception of the father) is left free to engage in less functional pursuits and to cultivate more ornamental personal accomplishments. In this context, the play that the Bertram children stage during their father's absence is a form of conspicuous consumption and a means of demonstrating the family's separation from lower-class families like the Prices through what Thorstein Veblen termed "vicarious leisure."<sup>12</sup> Yet what originates in class difference also corresponds to more far-reaching changes in the structure of the family as a social institution. Thus the play is not only an expression of the vicarious leisure of upper-middle-class children, it also denotes that "surge of sentiment" which Edward Shorter claims is responsible for the formation of the nuclear family itself.<sup>13</sup> Although the artificial and unbridled emotion of the play is an example of sentiment lacking a suitable object, the affective tendencies that the play celebrates (and carries in its wake among the actors) nonetheless connect it to a more modern set of values. When Tom Bertram asserts that he "can conceive no greater harm or danger to any of us in conversing in the elegant written language of some respectable author than in chattering in words of our own" (151), he recognizes a relative equivalence in the two discourses that suggests an analogy between the play and his own life in a modern family.<sup>14</sup>

At Mansfield Park, Fanny's familial role is substantially altered. She is now youngest rather than eldest daughter, and where she once occupied herself through being useful, she now finds only the facsimile of useful work: performing trivial messenger duties between the house and the Parsonage or holding Lady Bertram's yarn. Ultimately, it is not these attempts at literal usefulness that solder her to the Bertram family, but the relational role she comes to perform among them, a role that favors the development of affective ties. When she visits her original family toward the end of the novel, she is less disturbed by their lack of affection for her (this does not surprise her given her long separation from them) than by their lack of "curiosity to know her better" (383)—the necessary foundation for affection. It is not so much that time and distance

have brought about a shift in loyalties, but that her new family, by virtue of its interactive structure, induces emotional loyalty where her original family, with its easily permeable surface relationships, does not: “in her uncle’s house there would have been a consideration of times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention toward every body which there was not here” (376).<sup>15</sup>

The differences between the Bertrams and the Prices thus have implications that transcend the differences in economic and class status that separate them (although the development of a more modern family structure can be seen to issue out of conditions associated with wealth and privilege). The Prices, though occupying a lower socio-economic position, still conform to the traditional conventions of title and status; the Bertrams, though still technically linked to primogeniture, are in the process of establishing a new internalized “justice system”—they operate according to the characteristic of the nuclear family, that “the ability to manipulate is based not only on one’s legitimate status in the system but on one’s special relationships to other members of the system.”<sup>16</sup> Thus Sir Thomas looks to Edmund, his younger but more judicious son, whenever a question of judgment arises. We see these new values expressed by Fanny herself who, in opposition to Mary Crawford’s insistence that “Mr Bertram” sounds well, counters with her preference for the proper name: “To me, the sound of *Mr* Bertram is so cold and nothing-meaning—so entirely without warmth or character!—it just stands for a gentleman, and that’s all. But there is nobleness in the name of Edmund. It is a name of heroism and renown—of kings, princes, and knights; and seems to breathe the spirit of chivalry and warm affections” (224). Although her language suggests nostalgia for an imagined past, Fanny’s preference really places her in advance of Mary, for it connects her to the affective world of individual and familial as opposed to social relations, and denotes a refusal to accept the traditional hierarchy by which the eldest son is favored (since “Mr” and “Miss” affixed to the last name were reserved for eldest children). Significantly, Maria—“Miss Bertram”—will be literally canceled from the family and replaced by Fanny despite the conventional precedence she holds as eldest daughter, and Tom—“Mr Bertram”—will be thematically canceled from the novel by the very persistence with which his position and his life are preserved without being infused with value. Not only will Tom Bertram’s illness lack any element of

heroism or drama, but his recovery will rob him of even the limited distinction of dying and giving value to the status of eldest son by bestowing it upon his younger brother.

The clear preference for younger over eldest children reflects a general tendency in this novel to favor the diachronic over the synchronic. It denotes, that is, the displacement of a linear historical model of the family expressed through blood and inheritance by a systemic model expressed through the personal interaction of "a small kin-group usually living in one house."<sup>17</sup> Where the former would necessarily concern itself with the individual as the latest in an evolutionary line (in *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, Elizabeth and Darcy can be viewed as the best stock available from their respective classes), the latter conceives of the individual as part of a system, and hence gaining value only in relation to others (thus Fanny Price's "price" goes up as the novel progresses and her context of relations changes). Ruth Bernard Yeazell has similarly observed that the novel's impulse is to supplant what she calls "temporal ordering" with "spatial frameworks," but finds in this drive to deny history a resemblance to a pre-Christian tradition, to "the domestic religion of ancient Rome."<sup>18</sup> When viewed within the context of a history of the family, however, the spatial frameworks that Yeazell notes describe a relational system that is precisely modern rather than ancient.

### III. THE LAWS OF THE FAMILY SYSTEM

Throughout the novel, Austen calls our attention to the internal laws that govern the Bertram family system. When the Bertram girls leave for the marriage trip, we are told that there opened "a chasm which required some time to fill up. The family circle became greatly contracted" (218). In referring to Edmund's imminent taking of orders and settlement at Thornton Lacey, Sir Thomas notes that "his going, though only eight miles, will be an unwelcome contraction of our family circle" (255). Edmund Bertram's primary objection to the theatricals, and the spur that makes him agree to take part, is the fear that an outsider will be asked to join the group and be "domesticated among us—authorized to come at all hours—and placed suddenly on a footing which must do away all restraints" (175); his object, he explains, is "to confine the representation within a much smaller circle than they are now in the high road for" (176). Edmund understands that the family's successful operation depends upon restraints related both to the lim-

ited number of members and to the patterned quality of their interaction. What he fails to see is how profoundly the family circle has been disrupted already, first through his father's absence, and then, in an attempt to bridge that chasm, in the introduction of the Crawfords. Similarly, when Sir Thomas hears of Maria's engagement, he fails to deduce its negative effects on the family. Instead, he rationalizes his daughter's impending marriage as a gain for the family: "A well-disposed young woman, who did not marry for love, was in general but the more attached to her own family, and the nearness of Southerton to Mansfield must naturally hold out the greatest temptation, and would, in all probability, be a continual supply of the most amiable and innocent enjoyments" (215). Like Edmund in the case of the play, Sir Thomas views the family's continued integrity with too much complacency; he can justify Maria's marriage as being, not the loss of a daughter, but the gain of a strengthened and enriched family system. But an introduction of new material like that represented by either the Rushworths or the Crawfords can only be disruptive, since it fails to take into account the interactive structure of the family, for which any change must have important consequences. No change, in other words, is "amiable and innocent."

If life at Mansfield Park experiences disruption, however, it also struggles to establish equilibrium. The mistakes in judgment and interpretation on the part of Edmund and his father are efforts which, like the random attempts at combination and exchange that characterize any unstable system, reflect a movement through trial and error toward the goal of stability. Thus every change that affects the family gives rise to a counteraction, and as that action fails to establish the desired balance, another alternative is sought: Sir Thomas's trip to the West Indies leads to the introduction of the Crawfords to the family; his return results in their temporary exclusion and the marriage of Maria to Rushworth; this leads to the absence of the daughters (Julia accompanies Maria on her marriage trip), brings Fanny into prominence, and sets in motion the courtship of Fanny by Henry Crawford; her rejection of Crawford precipitates his return to Maria and their elopement, which provokes the rupture of Edmund and Mary, which leads finally to the union of Edmund and Fanny—the point at which the family (and the novel) stops, having achieved its goal of stability.

The drive to achieve the stability of a closed system is a drive to "improve" the family. Unlike the superficial attempts at landscape

improvement that the novel presents as the latest fad among families of the period, this familial improvement is not superficial or faddish but occurs on a deep structural level. Mary Crawford, who *is* superficial and faddish, and thinks patrilineally, is on the wrong track when she declares that “every generation has its improvements” (115). On the contrary, familial improvement in *Mansfield Park* can be viewed as a kind of relational eugenics that focuses on the quality of the interactive bond rather than the quality of the blood line. It seeks a core dynamic so perfectly controlled and so durable that it can assure the perpetual stability of the family system.

#### IV. THE ORIGIN OF FANNY’S ROLE IN THE FAMILY SYSTEM

Fanny is first introduced into the Bertram family as if to mark her exclusion from it. Her attic room, her sitting room without a fire, and her neglect and abuse at the hands of family members are constant reminders to her that she is, in Mrs. Norris’s words, “the lowest and last” (232). Nor is this role simply imposed upon her. When Fanny first meets her new family, she graphically acts out the part of outsider: “Afraid of every body, ashamed of herself . . . she knew not how to look up and could scarcely speak to be heard, or without crying” (50). Yet by virtue of her outsider status alone, Fanny immediately establishes a place in the Bertram family system. “Small of her age,” “exceedingly timid and shy,” her difference from her “well-grown,” “forward” cousins places their privilege and their handsomeness into relief, and difference of person and address becomes the starting point from which other more subtle differences can be discerned and cultivated. It soon follows that she becomes a means by which the Bertram girls can measure their accomplishments, Mrs. Norris can express her ingenuity, Lady Bertram can refine her lethargy and dependence, and Edmund can practice the moral theories of his chosen vocation. At the same time that she helps define these individual identities, she also serves to define the family as a family: where she is one and alone, they have an identity in combination; where she has been torn from her relations, they are secure in each other and rooted in their home.

Mary Crawford perceives a paradox in Fanny’s position when she observes that Fanny seems, socially speaking, neither “in” nor “out.” But her emphasis is wrong in assuming that the ultimate

goal for Fanny lies in social rather than familial relationships (that she must move from being “in” to being “out”). As an outsider within the Bertram family, Fanny is both “in” and “out” at this point in the novel, but the direction in which her role tends, inconceivable to a “worldly” creature like Mary Crawford, is not toward the outside, but toward the inside, through the forging of internal ties and the binding together of the family. The novel traces the conventionalization and assimilation of this outsider role until it becomes part of the central internal dynamic of the family system.

#### V. PATTERNS OF INTERACTION IN THE FAMILY SYSTEM

I have already noted that when Fanny first arrives at Mansfield Park she appears to have no place. Only when Edmund comes across her sobbing on the attic stairs does she form the connection that will sustain her for most of the novel. Edmund supplies one part of the dynamic by which she will be anchored to Mansfield Park: he feels guilty for his family’s part in neglecting and exploiting her. Edmund seems to be functioning under a sense of the “debt” incurred by his family in relation to Fanny, and he therefore strives to make up the balance. Nonetheless, his attentions are usually short-lived and are never really enough to prevent others from continuing to treat her badly—nor are they meant to be. Moreover, when Mary Crawford appears on the scene, Edmund ceases to act solely to reduce the “family debt” in relation to Fanny and himself embodies the scapegoating-guilt dynamic. The episode in which he borrows her horse so that Mary Crawford can ride and forgets to return in time for the usual morning ride that serves Fanny as her only exercise is a typical example of this dynamic. When he finally discovers that during their time away Fanny has been overtaxed by her aunts and developed a headache, his guilty reaction is immediate: “Vexed as Edmund was with his mother and aunt, he was still more angry with himself. His own forgetfulness of her was worse than anything which they had done. Nothing of this would have happened had she been properly considered” (103). Yet this assumption of guilt does not prevent him from performing a similar act of thoughtlessness soon afterward when he leaves Fanny to pine alone on a bench for an hour while he and Mary stroll together on the grounds of Rushworth’s estate. His earlier guilt now seems to function more as a payment for the right to

scapegoat Fanny again than as a deterrent against the repetition of the crime.

Curiously, the dynamic in which Edmund makes Fanny suffer, then suffers guilt for her pain so that he can be free to make her suffer again (a pattern that other family members enact in a more routine way) proves to be precisely the pattern calculated to attach Fanny to the family. The narrator goes to some length to explain this:

though her motives had been often misunderstood, her feelings disregarded, and her comprehension under-valued; though she had known the pains of tyranny, of ridicule, and neglect, yet almost every recurrence of either had led to something consolatory; her aunt Bertram had spoken for her, or Miss Lee had been encouraging or what was yet more frequent or more dear—Edmund had been her champion and her friend—he had supported her cause, or explained her meaning, he had told her not to cry, or had given her some proof of affection which made her tears delightful—and the whole was now so blended together, so harmonized by distance, that every former affliction had its charm.

(173–74)

As this passage makes clear, it is not pleasure alone, but pleasure as the consolation for pain that combines to produce that “charm” that binds Fanny to Mansfield Park. Thus with each instance in which she is neglected by Edmund in favor of Mary Crawford, Fanny feels envy, and for each crumb of compensating attention she is overwhelmed with a surge of gratitude that acts to cancel the envy and balance her negative feelings. In the incident with her horse, for example, Edmund’s “sudden change” from neglect to solicitude brings Fanny such joy that it “made her hardly know how to support herself” (104).

In keeping with this pattern, Fanny repeatedly finds her pleasure throughout the novel not in unconditional gratification but in something far more mixed. When asked by Sir Thomas to begin the dance given in her honor, she shrinks back: “The distinction was too great. It was treating her like her cousins!” (281); when offered a necklace from Mary Crawford’s collection, she instinctively chooses the one which “Miss Crawford least wished to keep” (265); and when she inadvertently beats her brother at cards, her disappointment prompts Edmund’s exclamation: “Poor Fanny!

not allowed to cheat herself as she wishes!" (252). Even when Sir Thomas grants her her wish to breakfast with her brother on the morning of his leave-taking and then, against her inclination, invites Henry Crawford to join them, she cannot be disappointed; as the narrator explains: she "was more disposed to wonder and rejoice in having carried her point so far, than to repine at the counteraction which followed" (285).

At this point a Freudian argument would postulate the psychic structure from which Fanny's masochistic behavior could be said to spring. An argument based on family systems theory, however, is concerned not with postulating deep structure but with analyzing surface pattern, with tracing how Fanny's need to experience pain so as to savor consolation allows her to fit into the family and makes her increasingly valuable to its operation. As I have already noted, Fanny is initially "fixed" at Mansfield Park under conditions that at once suggest a desire for something (marriage with her male cousins, resemblance to her female cousins) and assert the forbidden nature of such a desire. Early in the novel, Sir Thomas makes these conditions plain to his sister-in-law in arranging to take Fanny into his home. "There will be some difficulty in our way, Mrs. Norris . . . as to the distinction proper to be made between the girls as they grow up; how to preserve in the minds of my daughters the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a Miss Bertram . . . It is a point of great delicacy" (47). The attitude toward the family that Fanny must be taught, according to Sir Thomas, is simply the mirror image of the family's attitude toward her. Both scapegoating and guilt on the part of the family, and desire and the injunction against desire in Fanny, are mutually cancelling attitudes that assure a controlling balance. Little does Sir Thomas know at this point that his "delicate" idea will end by fashioning for him "the daughter that he wanted" (456) and usurp the role of his natural daughters.

For this to happen, however, Fanny and Sir Thomas, the weak and the powerful, the outsider and the insider, must achieve an interactive relationship. Prior to the father's return from the West Indies, Fanny is confined to the periphery of the family system, interacting with individual family members to strengthen their role identity, but not functioning within the family in a consistent way.

A relation to the father is necessary for her place in the family system to take on comprehensive meaning.

VI. THE CORE DYNAMIC OF THE FAMILY SYSTEM: FANNY AND SIR THOMAS

Almost immediately upon his return, Sir Thomas's relationship to Fanny is placed in the foreground. For one thing, his sudden arrival gratuitously saves her the embarrassment of once again responding to pleas that she act in the play. This coincidence functions symbolically in the novel: she has lost her original "champion," Edmund, to the sway of Mary Crawford, and the father will now replace the son as savior and protector. Sir Thomas, for his part, shows a new consideration for and awareness of Fanny upon his arrival. "But where is Fanny?", he demands after greeting his family, "Why do not I see my little Fanny?"; and on perceiving her, came forward with a kindness which astonished and penetrated her, calling her his dear Fanny, kissing her affectionately, and observing with decided pleasure how much she was grown." To her, we are told, "his manner seemed changed; his voice was quick from the agitation of joy, and all that had been awful in his dignity seemed lost in tenderness" (194). He asks about her family and comments upon her looks ("he was justified in his belief of her equal improvement in health and beauty"), and she in turn registers him: "on having courage to lift her eyes to his face, she saw that he was grown thinner and had the burnt, fagged, worn look of fatigue and a hot climate, every tender feeling was increased" (194–95). This scene of greeting enacts a reversal that signals the new interactive balance toward which the family will move for the remainder of the novel. There is a mutual acknowledgement on the part of Fanny and Sir Thomas of their roles as daughter and father while the conventional nature of the roles is undermined by new elements of awareness: the weak and yielding daughter is presented to Sir Thomas's eyes as "healthy" and "pretty"; the strong, authoritative father appears to Fanny as "thin" and "worn." The physical appearance of the two characters counters the conventional symbolism of their roles in this mutual recognition scene, as it displays the weakness that must accompany power and the power that must accompany weakness for the family system to exist in equilibrium. One is reminded of Nina Auerbach's thesis that the Victorian imagination ascribed powerful and threatening forces to women despite, or perhaps because of, the frailty and passivity of

the conventional female stereotype of the period.<sup>19</sup> If Austen can ever be said to imagine vampirism, it is in this scene where the timid daughter presents a rosy face to the wasted visage of patriarchal authority. Only it is not clear who stands in the position of victim here and who is the vampire, since both characters, in a sense, inhabit both roles.

For as we read this novel the terminology of “above” and “below,” of “inside” and “outside,” by which we might at first place Sir Thomas and Fanny if we were locating them within a more traditional family hierarchy, becomes ambiguous, ineffective at locating power or its absence. As the novel progresses, we begin to see Sir Thomas and Fanny as engaged in a dialectic of above and below in which these positions have only relative meaning and are always in the process of shifting. When Sir Thomas begins to scapegoat Fanny concerning her rejection of Henry Crawford, he can only go so far; her very timidity makes him averse to tyrannical dictation. Fanny, on her side, is left “in a glow of gratitude” (321) at having escaped the severest treatment. Thus, her stubbornness arouses his severity, but the timidity with which she expresses her stubbornness inspires him to yield, and his yielding inspires her gratitude and a greater willingness to do his bidding. Had Henry Crawford not disqualified himself as a marriage partner for Fanny, one wonders what the outcome would have been, since the dialectical interaction of Sir Thomas and Fanny would have moved each closer to the acceptance of the other’s viewpoint. This self-correcting dynamic reflects that “improvement” upon familial role behavior that allows the Bertrams to preserve and strengthen themselves as a family despite the loss of Maria (unlike the Harlowes, for example, who destroy themselves).

In other ways, Fanny and Sir Thomas are a perfect fit. While her cousins are bored by the quiet evenings at home that their father favors, Fanny enjoys just this kind of insulated domesticity. “The evenings do not appear long to me,” she confides to Edmund, “I love to hear my uncle talk of the West Indies. I could listen to him for an hour together. It entertains *me* more than many other things have done—but then I am unlike other people I dare say” (212). Her “unlikeness,” which had at first marked her as an outsider to the family, now appears to make her the character most like (and liked by) the father, and hence the one nearest to the center of the family. Fanny herself suspects that she risks taking such a central place and holds back the expression of her interest in Sir Thomas’s

stories. "I thought," she explains, "it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their [her cousins'] expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel" (213). She has now implicitly exchanged the outsider's role for the insider's, and instead of "setting off" her cousins, is set off by them.

With Sir Thomas's notice, Fanny's life in the family also changes appreciably: she gets a fire in her sittingroom, she is allowed to dine out, she is given a ball in her honor. All these concrete advantages demonstrate the difference between acknowledgement by the son, who has no real power, and acknowledgement by the father, who can make Fanny an integral part of the family system. I would argue further that it is through the father's interaction with Fanny as a daughter that the son's interaction is validated and his marriage to her made possible. The patriarchal sense of justice in this novel therefore passes from son to father—that is, from the periphery to the center of the family system.

The shift from son to father is also significant in that it reverses the order assumed by the Oedipal model. In a conventional family romance, the law would pass from the father to the son as the final marriage approaches. But the central interaction in this novel is not between father and son but between father and daughter, since the daughter, as conventionally weaker and less consequential, can accept a position of power in weakness that complements rather than usurps the father's place of weakness in power. We are not dealing, then, with the production of a new family and a new order as we would if we were assuming an Oedipal *quid pro quo* (the son gives up his desire for his mother in exchange for not being castrated so that he can one day create his own family and replace his father in a new context). Fanny and Sir Thomas are brought together in this novel to actually make over in improved form the family that begins the novel: the notion of family as the generational extension of an original family is discarded in favor of a reconstituted family of origin. Although Fanny and Edmund marry, it is under the eye of the father who, we are told, was "chiefly anxious to bind by the strongest securities all that remained to him of domestic felicity" (455). It is indeed he who has the idea for the marriage, he who "had pondered with genuine satisfaction on the more than possibility of the two young friends finding their mutual consolation in each other for all that had occurred of disappointment to either" (455). In his reference to consolation for pain, Sir Thomas's rea-

soning also suggests that the married couple fits into the family system in the same way that Fanny did alone: Edmund is subsumed within the daughter's role. At the same time, there is a curious blending of the son into the father as the narrator finds it hard to distinguish where Edmund's joy ends and Sir Thomas's begins: "the joyful consent which met Edmund's application, the high sense of having realised a great acquisition in the promise of Fanny for a daughter, formed just such a contrast with his [Sir Thomas's] early opinion on the subject when the poor little girl's coming had been first agitated, as time is for ever producing between the plans and decisions of mortals, for their own instruction, and their neighbors' entertainment" (455). Syntactically, Edmund's relation to Fanny in the sentence is swallowed up by his father's relation to her, and Edmund's role is reduced to that of mediator in bringing father and daughter together.

Thus Sir Thomas, through the mediation of his son, finds not his true heir but his eternal complement in a daughter who can remain attached to the family. The tie that binds Sir Thomas and Fanny, the result of a constructed (rather than a "natural") father-daughter relationship, is the basic dyad around which the "improved" family is crystallized at the end of the novel.

#### VII. MARIA'S ROLE IN THE FAMILY SYSTEM

Maria Bertram's role in the family system contrasts interestingly with her brother Edmund's and with Fanny's. Originally, Maria and Edmund occupy places in the family that are comparable. Maria is eldest daughter, Edmund is second son; the disparity in their positions is equalized by the difference in their sex. Edmund at one point calls for Maria to act upon her role as eldest daughter and be his moral counterpart in condemning the play ("in this matter it is *you* who are to lead. *You* must set the example" [164]); but she refuses. Despite being temporarily misled by Mary Crawford, Edmund always redirects his desire back to the family; its integrity is paramount to him and he accepts the role of surrogate and intermediary for his absent father. Maria, on the other hand, directs her desire away from the family. Her marriage to Rushworth is an expression of rebellion against the conventionalized relationship with the father that Edmund and Fanny embrace so willingly: "She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed. The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely necessary" (216). Liberty from the father is pre-

sented here as a pathological desire that first propels Maria into an unsuitable marriage and then into an adulterous affair. In committing adultery, she refuses both the original daughter's role and the incestuously structured form of marriage in which the son/son-in-law can be made a surrogate and intermediary for the father (as happens not only with Edmund but eventually with Julia's husband Yates). In this sense, Maria is the real threat to the family in the novel, since she disregards its boundaries and seeks new, unauthorized alliances.

In another sense, Maria's transgression is not threatening but empowering to the family. To see this it is necessary to look beyond the more superficially obvious differences between Maria and Fanny to a deeper point of resemblance. When Fanny hears of Maria's adulterous elopement, she reacts with revulsion: "the whole family, both families connected as they were by tie upon tie, all friends, all intimate together!—it was too horrible a confusion of guilt, too gross a complication of evil, for human nature, not in a state of utter barbarism, to be capable of!" (429–30). But the imagery Fanny uses to express her revulsion suggests that Maria has engaged in incest, precisely the "crime" that Fanny will eventually commit with impunity. Although Maria's adultery seems the very opposite of incest—a turning away from the family rather than turning toward it—Fanny's reaction helps expose the link between them. Murray Bowen has noted in his work with families that "the person who runs away from his family of origin is as emotionally dependent as the one who never leaves home."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Maria, who was "less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed," and for whom "the liberty which his absence had given was now absolutely necessary," defines herself as completely in relation to her father as Fanny does, only Maria's self-definition depends on the absence of the father and on the lifting of his repression rather than on his presence and his restraint. Her concept of "liberty" therefore relies on his restraining presence to mark it as liberty. Maria is thrown (throws herself) outside the family, but this "outside," far from being a cauldron of primal passions, is a place that the family—expressed through the mutual fit of patriarchal authority and daughterly devotion—defines as the outside; it is an "id" to which the family assigns what is no longer of use.<sup>21</sup> By this reasoning, the outer-directedness by which the primitive family, according to Lévi-Strauss, is opened up and begins the exchange upon which civilization is built takes on the

appearance of a relative “barbarism,” while the more civilized relations appear to be those contained within the intimate enclosure of the family itself. If the taboo of the traditional family was incest, the taboo of the nuclear family is disloyalty—Maria’s “barbarous” crime.

There is still another potential symmetry between Fanny and Maria’s roles. At the beginning of the novel, Frances Price, Fanny’s mother, had been expelled from the family system much as Maria is at the end. Mrs. Price is the original “insider” turned “outsider” whose outsider child is brought back inside the family. Maria, then, symbolizes the possible recurrence of the cycle—did she perhaps have a daughter by Henry Crawford? At the same time that that possibility is raised, however, it is cancelled out, for what might have been left open is closed. The place in the Bertram household that Maria vacates is immediately supplied by her cousin Susan whose function, I believe, is to mark where a gap could have been and to fill it up. Austen does with Maria Bertram what Tony Tanner says nineteenth-century bourgeois society tended to do with the adulterous female who so threatened its family model. As he explains: “the unfaithful wife is, in social terms, a self-canceling figure, one from whom society would prefer to withhold recognition so that it would be possible to say that socially and categorically the adulterous woman does not exist.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Maria’s identity seems to diminish as she embraces new roles—retreating, as it were, from daughter to wife to mistress to social exile. Fanny’s identity, on the other hand, enlarges as she comes at the end of the novel to occupy the trinity of roles of daughter, sister, and wife.<sup>23</sup> The maternal role, however, is significantly missing, or at least receives no explicit reference in that picture of “the happiness of the married cousins . . . secure as earthly happiness can be” (456) that ends the novel.

If the novel refuses to project Fanny into a maternal role it also correspondingly cuts her connection to the child she once was. Mrs. Norris, the busy-body aunt whose idea Fanny’s adoption originally was, is expelled with Maria from the family system at the end of the story. With Mrs. Norris gone, Fanny’s origin can now be effectively forgotten, and the thematic extension of the family system beyond its immediate form is therefore edited away. Finally, the family contracts geographically as well: not long after

Fanny and Edmund's marriage, the Mansfield living becomes vacant and the couple moves into the Parsonage, settling in immediate proximity to the great house occupied by their parents.

The last paragraph of the novel records a vision of perfection as the heroine sees the final transformation of pain into consoling pleasure: the Parsonage, "which under each of its two former owners, Fanny had never been able to approach but with some painful sensation of restraint or alarm, soon grew as dear to her heart, and as thoroughly perfect in her eyes, as every thing else, within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park, had long been" (456). With this final transformation, the dynamic of pain and consolation, and reciprocally, of scapegoating and guilt, collapses into itself; we arrive at that point of convergence of opposites that makes the closing image of the novel seem a kind of frozen tableau. The family as it emerges at the end of *Mansfield Park* appears to be in such a perfect state of equilibrium and to have closed itself off so completely to the outside as to become a static configuration. A generational succession gives way to a system of fixed relations.

In positing a fundamental shift in the mechanisms of power from the classical to the modern age, Michel Foucault describes this shift as a move from an order of law and lineage to a technology of sex in which sexuality polymorphously saturates all relations. Foucault also observes that it is in the family that the older relations based on alliance and the new relations based on sexuality come together, bolstering each other by means of the incest taboo. The prohibition of incest, he claims, is a "means of self-defense, not against an incestuous desire, but against the expansion and implications of this deployment of sexuality which had been set up, but which among its many benefits, had the disadvantage of ignoring the laws and juridical forms of alliance."<sup>24</sup> Austen's novel waives this particular self-defense. She does, however, defend against the threat of that barbarous lack of structure that both Lévi-Strauss and Foucault see as making the prohibition of incest necessary, for she structures incest into the family through the codification of a father-daughter interactive bond.

The vision that emerges at the end of *Mansfield Park* is the expression of a wish to remain anchored to the family of origin, to annex all needs to this nuclear family and close off all access and egress. For Jane Austen, this is hardly a surprising wish. Living at home in a family that social conditioning had taught her to love above all else, Jane Austen was also a member of a society that

gave status only to married women. The logical solution to this double bind would be to marry inside the family, a wish-fulfillment whose expression is especially suited to the structure and closure afforded by fiction. Moreover, by providing a space for the author to realize this wish, fiction provides us with access to a model of the perfectly closed nuclear family, uncontaminated by outside influences. Jane Austen's vision of familial interaction at the end of *Mansfield Park* corresponds, that is, to what Max Weber, in his effort to establish the equivalent of a scientific method for sociological study, termed an "ideal type," one of those "forms of human behavior, which . . . involve the highest possible degree of logical integration because of their complete adequacy on the level of meaning." Weber compares such logically integrated forms to "a physical reaction [calculated] on the basis of an absolute vacuum."<sup>25</sup> The Bertram family in its final, circumscribed form exists as if in such a vacuum; it possesses that "highest possible degree of logical integration" only achievable when all external and extraneous factors have been eliminated.

In her critique of Lévi-Strauss and Freud, Gayle Rubin notes that both offer interpretations of the sex/gender system that assume a fundamental asymmetry between the sexes, with women occupying the lesser role.<sup>26</sup> In both Lévi-Strauss's kinship model, where the woman is a "gift" between families, and in Freud's Oedipal model, where the woman is "castrated" and hence diminished in relation to her brother, an asymmetry in which the female is shortchanged is built into male-female interaction. But an examination of the "ideal type" of the family system as Austen renders it in *Mansfield Park* demonstrates the potential transformation of this asymmetry in the nuclear family. Fanny's weakness becomes power in weakness, Sir Thomas's power becomes weakness in power; at the conclusion of the novel, they are shown to complement each other as relative equals in a dialectic in which they become virtually identical. The complementarity/identity they share overcomes not only sexual asymmetry but generational asymmetry as well. When traced to its logical end, however, this complementarity/identity of father and daughter introduces a new asymmetry in the relation of brother and sister and of husband and wife, an asymmetry in which the female position gains dominance.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it might be argued that Freud imaginatively grasped the asymmetry implicit in the structure of the nuclear family (in which the daughter gains precedence over the traditional son and heir)

and introduced the notion of castration, a physically based theory of female subordination, to cancel and reverse this asymmetry.<sup>28</sup> (That Freud's own legacy was passed on through his daughter becomes especially ironic in this context.)

The theme of (symbolic) female castration would pervade the attempt in nineteenth-century literature to "save" the nuclear family as a patriarchal institution. At the same time, the basic instability implicit in the structure of the nuclear family would also become an increasingly important theme for Victorian novelists as they began to confront female power and explore new patterns of interaction within the family system.

*Drexel University*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Mansfield Park*, ed. Tony Tanner (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 234. Citations in parenthesis refer to page numbers in this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Lionel Trilling, "Mansfield Park," in *The Opposing Self* (New York: Viking Press, 1955).

<sup>3</sup> Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and Geraldine Spark, *Invisible Loyalties: Reciprocity in Intergenerational Family Therapy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 72, 89.

<sup>4</sup> I am using the term "replacement" here much as Jacques Derrida uses the term "supplement": "It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void" [*Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), 145].

<sup>5</sup> Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), 14.

<sup>6</sup> John Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984), 155.

<sup>7</sup> Work in family systems theory was pioneered by Gregory Bateson and colleagues (the Bateson group) at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Palo Alto, California, in the 1950s. The original work concentrated on schizophrenics and their families and was presented in the groundbreaking paper by Bateson, Don D. Jackson, Jay Haley and John H. Weakland, "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia" (1956; reprinted in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* [New York: Chandler Publishing Co., 1972]). Family systems theory has since been applied to neurotic as well as schizophrenic disorders; however, it has not been used in any consistent way to critique the nuclear family itself, as I am attempting here.

Talcott Parsons's *Social Structure and Personality* (New York: The Free Press, 1964) offers many sociological insights into family systems, although his methodology tends to involve forcing Freudian concepts into the systems model.

<sup>8</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. J. H. Bell, J. R. von Sturmer and R. Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> The question of what constitutes incest and why the prohibition of incest operates in certain instances and not in others is a relevant one here. The historian Randolph Trumbach (*The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* [New York: Academic Press, 1978]) has contributed some useful observations on the specific meaning of variations in the taboo in relation to the English aristocracy. He notes that by the eighteenth century aristocratic first cousin marriages were being sanctioned, where they

had previously been prohibited, to assure that the inheritance remained within the family (hence bolstering the patriarchal law of primogeniture). Yet ironically, as this paper shows, sanctioning first cousin marriage also encourages the conception of the family as a closed system, conducive of personal as opposed to social/historical relations, and, in this sense, the aristocratic defense would prove antagonistic to traditional patriarchal law. This may also help account for the fact that the nuclear family developed as early as the seventeenth century among the aristocracy but not until the nineteenth century among the working class (see Lawrence Stone, *The Family: Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* [New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1976]). (In addition, as argued in this paper, the increased leisure of the upper classes would have encouraged the earlier development of affective ties characteristic of the nuclear family.)

The Bertrams present us with an interesting case as regards the taboo on marriage between cousins as Trumbach discusses it. Not members of the aristocracy as such, the Bertrams are nonetheless landed gentry and thus partake of what Tony Tanner has termed the “aristocratic attachment to the land” (Introduction to *Mansfield Park*, 11), which would tend to align them with the aristocracy on matters of incest between cousins (i.e., they would sanction it). At the same time, a marriage between cousins would only make patriarchal sense if it occurred between the children of male relations and not, as in the Price-Bertram case, between a son and the wife’s sister’s daughter, since here neither party is preserving anything through the marriage (see further discussion of this in note 27 below). Moreover, to the extent that the Bertram’s values oppose the values of Mary Crawford’s London, they would tend to be more attached to traditional biblical views on the subject of incest. Trumbach further notes that even among the aristocracy, marriage between cousins, though sanctioned, was discouraged, and that middle class authors still assumed that it fell within the taboo. Thus, given that Austen was a middle class clergyman’s daughter, that the Bertrams are also of the middle class (and hence likely to be sensitive to the taboo to at least some extent, as Mrs. Norris’s early reaction indicates), and that Fanny comes to live with the Bertrams at the age of ten and is placed on the footing of daughter and sister, the issue of incest must be considered a relevant one in discussing this novel.

<sup>10</sup> Lévi-Strauss, 24–25.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Tanner, *Adultery*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899).

<sup>13</sup> Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1975). Historians have used a variety of terms to describe the interpersonal relations characteristic of the nuclear family. Among the most often cited is Lawrence Stone’s “affective individualism,” which, though essentially synonymous with Shorter’s “sentiment,” places an undue emphasis on the individual according to my systems perspective.

<sup>14</sup> Play-acting in *Mansfield Park* functions like the reading of gothic novels in *Northanger Abbey*; both provide the characters with structures that are both like and unlike the “proper” structure of experience. In both novels, Austen seems to be using these structures as a means to arrive at a new place from which they can then be discredited and discarded. In this sense, the play and the gothic novels function like therapeutic “transforms,” patterns used by family therapists to exaggerate and thereby expose unhealthy patterns of behavior while also supplying the random “noise” necessary for the fashioning of new patterns (see Bradford Keeney, *The Aesthetics of Change* [New York: The Guilford Press, 1983], 169). Thus, for the family system at *Mansfield Park*, the play must be passed through in order to arrive at a new, improved structure for family experience. (Of course, Fanny Price, unlike Catherine Morland, never enters the “improper” structure, she only observes it; however, her remaining outside the play while being inside the family functions as

a marker of her position in the Bertram family system, a position that will be discussed in sections IV and VI of this essay.)

<sup>15</sup> Note that Fanny's critique of life at the Price's versus life at the Bertram's, with its emphasis on placement and pacing, sounds like a critique of bad versus good stage direction; as noted above, Fanny, while she never participated in the play, was its most attentive audience.

<sup>16</sup> Fred Weinstein and Gerald M. Platt, *The Wish to Be Free: Society, Psyche, and Value Change* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), 15.

<sup>17</sup> Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), 11.

<sup>18</sup> Ruth Bernard Yeazell, "The Boundaries of Mansfield Park," *Representations* 7 (summer 1984): 133–52.

<sup>19</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> Murray Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy," *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice*, ed. Philip J. Guerin (New York: Gardner Press, 1976), 84.

<sup>21</sup> In line with this interpretation I should like to note the observation of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their critique of the Oedipus complex that the form which crippled desire takes is precisely that of a theater, by which they mean Freud's Oedipal drama: "The unconscious ceases to be what it is—a factory, a workshop—to become a theater, a scene and its staging" (*Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane [Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983], 55). In like fashion, we can say that Maria's adulterous passion is structured like the play earlier in the novel. Both serve the family as a staged unconscious in opposition to which, or by the repression of which, acceptable, "conscious" relations can be carried on.

<sup>22</sup> Tanner, *Adultery*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> The trinity of roles may suggest that Fanny is by herself the Trinity of the family, but this would be an oversimplification of her "saving" function in the novel. The true Trinity of the Bertram household, as this essay shows, involves the father, the daughter, and the father-daughter synthesis (achieved by way of the son). In their critique of the Oedipus complex Deleuze and Guattari write: "It will hardly come as a surprise to learn that Oedipus as a structure is the Christian Trinity, whereas Oedipus as a crisis is a familial trinity insufficiently structured by faith . . ." (82). In the reformulated Trinity of *Mansfield Park*, the "crisis" is by-passed and the family comes to rest in the "structure" as the daughter remains within the family—tied to the father through the intermediary of the son.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 109.

<sup>25</sup> Max Weber, *Basic Concepts of Sociology*, trans. H. P. Secher (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1980), 52.

<sup>26</sup> "The asymmetry of gender—the difference between exchanger and exchanged—entails the constraint of female sexuality," explains Rubin with respect to Lévi-Strauss's model. As for Freud's model, she writes that "[t]he Oedipal complex confers male rights upon the boy, and forces the girl to accommodate herself to her lesser rights" (as part of her recognition of her castration). See Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210.

<sup>27</sup> Parsons provides a pertinent observation when he notes the tendency which anthropologists have discerned in primitive societies for "the asymmetrical type of cross-cousin marriage which rests primarily on marriage with the mother's brother's daughter" because "if the masculine role is more instrumental than the feminine in the sense I have discussed, then men should have more direct and important anchorages in the extended kinship groupings than the women" (65). Trumbach makes a similar point in his discussion of the incest taboo among the eighteenth-century

aristocracy, noting that the rarest cousin marriage was that between a woman and the son of her mother's sister, since this was least likely to have meaning in terms of preserving family name or property. Yet Austen's novel corrects this patriarchal asymmetry by having Fanny, the mother's sister's daughter, enter the family and, ultimately, marry the son. This is indicative, I think, of a shift away from the more primitive male anchorage of the extended kinship groupings to the nuclear family, where the female will take on a central stabilizing role.

<sup>28</sup> It does not seem especially relevant to me whether Freud did, in fact, espouse biological determinism as many feminist critics maintain, or whether, as Juliet Mitchell has argued, his work is really an analysis of a culture in which female anatomy is a signifier of biological inferiority (*Psychoanalysis and Feminism* [New York: Vintage Books, 1975]). Read either way, Freud's work can be understood to reflect a need on the part of society to cancel and reverse the potential for female domination implicit in the structure of the nuclear family.