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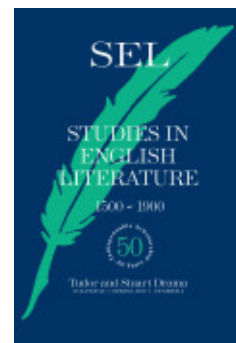
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Ordination and Revolution in *Mansfield Park*

MICHAEL KAROUNOS

Now I will try to write of something else;—it shall be a complete change of subject—Ordination.

—Jane Austen¹

Nearly two hundred years after the writing of *Mansfield Park* (1814), scholars still debate the meaning and degree of emphasis in Austen's famous quotation that the novel was about "ordination." It is suggested here that a too-narrow application of the meaning of ordination solely to Edmund Bertram has stymied fruitful research. The following reading advances an interpretation that explains Austen's comment in new terms and supports Austen's claim that the novel is about ordination. The meaning of ordination was not restricted in 1814 to the meaning of assuming a religious office, nor, indeed, was that its primary definition. A glance at the OED demonstrates that trees, animals, and ideas may all be ordained. *Sub*-ordination, as a disposition of ranks or in reference to a hierarchical order, is implicit in the understanding of the term, and only after considering the range of meanings—and especially the primary meaning that Austen would have understood in its fullness—may we arrive at a better understanding of her much-quoted, much-misunderstood, and always-controversial statement that *Mansfield Park* is about ordination. There are two meanings of the word that are essential to understanding the novel, and while both concern Edmund,

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the argument here suggests that Austen applies the concept and mechanism of ordination foremost to the estate of Mansfield Park and to the person of Fanny Price. Ordination, as I believe Austen meant it, is a process of both ordering and ordaining. What is ordained in *Mansfield Park* is not only the estate but also its hierarchy, and the person to be ordained first—in fact as well as in degree of importance—is Fanny Price. Subsidiary to the discussion of ordination is the argument that the concepts of ordination, improvement, and restoration have their antithetical counterparts in subordination, innovation, and revolution.

Also, for there to be an ordering, there must first be a disordering and in the universe of *Mansfield Park* disorders of various kinds “infect” not only Ecclesford (culturally), but the domains of Norfolk and London (morally), Sotherton (spiritually), Portsmouth (familiarily), and Mansfield Park (socially).² While the causes are all local to Mansfield Park, the mode of disseminating infections is the feverish activity whose substance consists of innovative ideas foreign to Mansfield Park. The innovations have their roots in an English Jacobinism, which was inimical to the institutions of church and state and was blamed by many writers of the time for the decadence of the gentry, among other things. The social drama within the novel, much like the action in *Lovers' Vows* (1798), is representative of the greater ideological struggle represented by advocates of the French Revolution on the one hand and by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) on the other. It is from Burke's *Reflections* that the metaphors of “mode” and “substance” are borrowed in order to illuminate the disorder in *Mansfield Park*.

I. MODES OF REVOLT

On this principle the *succession of the crown* has always been what it now is, an hereditary succession by law; in the old line it was a succession by the common law; in the new by the statute law, operating on the principles of the common law, not changing the *substance*, but regulating the *mode* and *describing the persons*.

—Edmund Burke³

Mode here is used in its sense of both aspect and operative process. The various modes of revolt employed in *Mansfield Park* range from the trivial arrangement of furniture to modes of move-

ment and social interaction. They are most evident when—in reference to the Burke excerpt above—Austen is “describing the persons” who inhabit its various principalities. Their mode of behavior defines the substance of their character and Austen stages her drama in the implicit context of the French Revolution, the Regency Crisis, and the principle of the “succession of the crown” in the management of the state/estate.

Roger Sales observes that “it was commonplace for writers in the 1790s and later on to make connections between the government of the estate and that of the state itself. This allows *Mansfield Park* to be read as a Condition-of-England novel that debates topical issues such as the conduct of the war and the Regency Crisis.”⁴ Alistair M. Duckworth uses Burkean thought to highlight issues of estate, improvement, and preservation in the novel, and he touches further on issues pertaining to the social, moral, and religious implications of “improvement.”⁵

Mode is an important precept, as reflected in the passage from the *Reflections* that heads this section. The two conditions necessary to the stability of the state/estate concern substance and mode. The proper mode depends upon regulating the manner and the velocity of change but not at the cost of changing the substance, whether of manners (that is, morals) or estate. One example of changing the substance in an innovative mode occurs when Tom Bertram defends himself against Edmund’s accusation that he is taking undue liberties with Sir Thomas’s home: “‘His house shall not be hurt. I have quite as great an interest in being careful of his house as you can have; and as to such *alterations* as I was suggesting just now, such as moving a book-case, or unlocking a door, or even as using the billiard-room for the space of a week without playing at billiards in it . . . Absolute nonsense!’” (p. 127; emphasis added).

William Cowper, perhaps Austen’s favorite poet, wrote in “The Task” (1785) that improvement is “the idol of the age,” and Austen certainly satirizes the improving spirit of Henry Crawford, Mr. Rushworth, and Mrs. Norris.⁶ Cowper meant landscape improvement, but Duckworth cites Burke’s crucial distinction that “improvements were not to be confounded with innovations; the meaning of which was always odious, and conveyed an idea of alterations for the worse.”⁷ That Tom Bertram’s use of “alteration” may indeed be taken as a synonym for “innovation” is understood by Edmund, who rejoins: “‘The *innovation*, if not wrong as an innovation, will be wrong as an expense’” (p. 127; emphasis added). Duckworth elaborates on the distinction between improve-

ment and alteration: "To 'improve' was to treat the deficient or corrupt parts of an established order with the character of the whole in mind; to 'innovate' or 'alter,' on the other hand, was to destroy all that had been built up by the 'collected reason of the ages.'" ⁸ Alteration in the novel is almost always a change for the worse. ⁹ Furthermore, "improvements" as "alterations"—changes where none are needed or where they are harmful—are most strongly advocated by Mrs. Norris and Henry Crawford who are both "excessively" fond of improving (pp. 53, 61).

Tom's willingness to make changes likely stems from a newfound sense of power he experienced in Antigua as a slave holder, but just as the estates suffered from mismanagement in Sir Thomas's absence, so does Mansfield Park. Upon his return without his father, Tom naturally fills the vacuum of power with the kind of immoral management he learned in Antigua. He both justifies and indicts himself by saying, "And as to my father's being absent, it is so far from an objection, that I consider it rather as a motive" (p. 126). In addition to highlighting the issue of absenteeism, this passage shows Tom usurping Sir Thomas's power in a mode of premature succession.

Joseph Lew quotes from Henry Brougham's argument that association with the slave industry gave Englishmen "a love of uncontrolled power over individuals" and that they were thought to undergo a political "contamination" as a result. ¹⁰ Tom seems to demonstrate the slave holder's love of power when he haughtily informs Edmund that he will "take care that [Sir Thomas's] daughters do nothing to distress him. Manage your own concerns, Edmund, and I'll take care of the rest of the family" (p. 127). His patriarchal appropriation of Sir Bertram's daughters as his own property is an indication of a slave holding mentality. Again Lew notes Brougham's critique of Englishmen abroad who were "indulging, at their expence, every caprice of temper or desire." ¹¹ In Tom's case, this is borne out by his previous assertion that he has "no fears, and no scruples" in undertaking any kind of role, regardless of the moral implications (p. 126).

There are also strong echoes here of Burke's attacks on the disastrous confiscation and mismanagement of the resources of the French aristocracy and the Catholic church. The irony lies in the subversive appropriation of the estate's prerogatives and resources for the ostensible purpose of benefiting the estate, as in the construction of the stage. In its clearest form, such parasitical appropriation is manifested by Mrs. Norris who conducts occasional raiding *sorties* on the property of Mansfield Park, stealing odd bits of curtain, food, and other supplies.

Such motions of self-important activity have the power to effect convulsive changes in the stability of a healthy social order as well as in the physical order of the estate as state. Such an instance can be seen when Fanny reflects that she wishes she could be near Lady Bertram to keep her from “the evil of solitude, or the still greater *evil* of a *restless*, officious companion” (p. 432; emphasis added)—a reference to Mrs. Norris who thinks that “[s]he must be the doer of every thing” (p. 253). Implicit here is an illustration of the novel’s negative poles of movement: the “evil” of stagnation juxtaposed against the “evil” of “restless” activity. Such a disastrous combination reflects the consequences of a lack of correction on the one hand and the presence of innovation on the other.

Moving—whether of objects, people, or morals—constitutes a revolution in the sense of a restless turning. In *Sanditon*, Austen wryly notes that “rotatory motion is perhaps to be attributed the giddiness and false steps of many.”¹² Her ironic linguistic construction avoids the word revolution, but the sentiment is all the more noticeable for its disguise. Motion and revolution as an emblem of “false steps” finds its completion in a giddy turning over of ideas, the most radical possible change since it threatens the basis of the social order: civil laws and moral conduct. Mary Crawford, speaking of the cessation of religious services at Sotherton, drolly opines that “[e]very generation has its improvements” (p. 86). Furniture, people, morals, and ideas all undergo a revolutionary upheaval that introduces disorder into the estate, into relationships, and into the psychological well-being of individuals.

This metaphor of revolutionary circulation throughout the civil, religious, and moral institutions of the novel is an ideological expression that contrasts radical innovation with a conservative philosophy of gradual change. What Fanny calls the evil of Mrs. Norris’s impatient restlessness has an antecedent in Mary’s comment that she “‘must move . . . resting fatigues me’” (p. 96). Another example of antisocial restlessness is Henry Crawford, who has a propensity to move great distances—literally and morally—from one place to another and freely admits that he has a great dislike “[t]o any thing like a permanence of abode” (p. 41). His invasiveness models a kind of penetration. As W. A. Speck says of the Crawfords, they “represent the intrusion of an alien and sinister influence like that of Frank Churchill and Willoughby.”¹³ Since the importance of place is essential to Austen’s characters, her description of Crawford’s aversion to

“permanence” typifies the evil of moral movement as moral alteration, as when Fanny observes of him that he was “every thing to every body” (p. 306). Similarly, Tom’s analogue to this moral failing is found in his speech: “I take any part you choose to give me, so as it be comic. Let it but be comic, I condition for nothing more” (p. 131). A comic role allows for the greatest compass of moral and physical alteration in a character and emphasizes Tom’s earlier boast describing himself as free of either “fear” or “scruples.” On the other hand, Fanny and Edmund epitomize stability and are the only ones who oppose the movement—physical and moral—suggested by the staging of the play.

Lew provides an interesting insight into English anxiety about the potential transformation in morality from Englishmen’s contact with the degraded conditions of slavery in the West Indies. Lew cites William Harvey’s then-current theory of the circulation of blood as a metaphor which extended to English anxieties over the circulation of populations and immorality.¹⁴ Lew writes that “[b]y sending a character to the West Indies, novelists implicitly encoded what appears to be a violation of the law of conservation of character.”¹⁵ As we shall see later, the Burkean principle of conservation is one that Tom violates. Never a very good person, he returns from Antigua a worse one.

The disordering of the estate and its people has its motive in Tom’s opportunistic usurpation of a factually and figuratively absent authority. Unlocking Sir Thomas’s door is a symbolic invasion of the estate’s sanctuary that finds its counterpart in the circumvention of the locked gate of the ha-ha by Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram. Their act foreshadows the adulterous circumvention of the metaphorical locked gate of matrimony and represents a significant circulation across moral boundaries. Movement as a mode of change is given sociological meaning in the novel and is reflected in the observation by Duckworth that “[t]he difference is, of course, the difference between the two revolutions: the English had introduced ‘improvement’ with their revolution, the French ‘innovation’ and ‘alteration’ with theirs.”¹⁶ Such a semantic distinction between revolutions is not lost on Austen, who shrewdly introduces a French influence to complete the analogy and mark the difference in the change of modes. Sales elaborates on the connection between French culture and the Crawfords: “Henry and Mary Crawford are associated with French manners and mannerisms . . . The Crawfords, with their French phrases and salon morality, are seen by Roberts as representing the threat that is posed to the political house by a decadent rul-

ing class. If the estate and therefore in turn the state are unable to resist their considerable charms, then there may be a revolution as there was in France."¹⁷ The Crawfords' introduction to Mansfield Park as part of a decadent ruling class results in a change in the mode of social interaction. Although Duckworth and Sales grasp the connection between the novel's domestic action and its political import, and although many writers have noticed the Burkean strain in the book, I would further suggest that the conversion of the estate specifically from a place of order (reading) to one of disorder (acting) is Austen's parable of revolution within the estate. The physical disorder of the estate is a prelude to its social disorder. Only after the billiard room has been converted into a theater, for instance, is it possible for *Lovers' Vows* to be performed. Of *Lovers' Vows*, Elaine Jordan observes that "Jane Austen did not encounter Kotzebue's work directly but in the much altered translation by Mrs. Inchbald."¹⁸ Marilyn Butler makes an issue of Mrs. Inchbald by describing her as a "Jacobin" author,¹⁹ a theme on which Avrom Fleishman elaborates by noting that "Mrs. Inchbald was intimately connected with Thomas Holcroft, Robert Bage, Charlotte Smith, and other writers who carried the ideals of the Revolution into English literature."²⁰ Thus we have the convergence of a foreign play condemning the aristocratic classes in an "altered" translation by a "Jacobin" writer and acted by characters associated with French decadence in morals and manners. Such happy coincidences did not come to a writer like Austen by accident.

Burke observes of the French that "[r]ather too much countenance was given to the spirit of innovation, which soon was turned against those who fostered it, and ended in their ruin."²¹ In the same manner, an excess of freedom in the absence of a responsible ruler allows the spirit of innovation to prevail at Mansfield Park and results in the ruin of Maria Bertram and Henry and Mary Crawford. Tom—whom Sales amusingly terms "a lord of misrule"²²—introduces innovations that corrupt his sister, alter the house, mar the floor, and result in unnecessary expenses; he also introduces a scene painter (a superficial innovator) from outside the estate who, significantly, "made five of the under-servants idle and dissatisfied" (pp. 190–1). Sir Thomas later dismisses the revolutionary scene painter, but the damage done at the social and moral levels is permanent.

When Sir Thomas returns and condemns "the impropriety of such a scheme among such a party, and at such a time," he burns every copy of *Lovers' Vows* and has Mansfield Park "re-

stored to its proper state" (p. 187). Unfortunately, Sir Thomas accomplishes the ordination (ordering) of the estate too late. The restoration of the lawful ruler reverses the physical revolution (disordering) in the state, but it cannot correct the revolution in the modes of morals and conduct that has occurred within its citizenry. Damage has been done to the character of the servants, and to Tom, Maria, and Julia, which cannot be rectified merely by an institutional correction.

II. THE MODES OF ORDINATION

Ordination. I. 1. a. The action of ordering, arranging, or disposing in ranks or order; the condition of being ordered or arranged; an arrangement or disposition.

—OED²³

Austen's assertion that the subject of *Mansfield Park* should be ordination has long baffled scholars as an attribution of too much significance to an event of too little importance. Scholars have either acknowledged the reference and moved on, contradicted its emphasis, or ignored it altogether. Lionel Trilling writes that the statement "startles us" but concedes that "the most unsympathetic reader of *Mansfield Park* would scarcely describe it as being about ordination. Yet the question of ordination is of essential importance to the novel." Trilling's argument centers in Fanny as a "Christian heroine" and Edmund's choice of profession.²⁴ R. W. Chapman dryly notes that "Ordination can hardly be called the 'subject' of *Mansfield Park*; but the plot turns largely on Edmund Bertram's choice of a profession which did not suit Mary Crawford's ambitions."²⁵ John Halperin explains that Austen's statement is neither predictive nor definitive but is simply an indication that she had not thought the novel entirely through at that point and that ordination is indeed a theme. Halperin emphasizes that "Edmund's decision to be ordained over her [Mary Crawford's] objections is an important statement of his—and the novelist's—values."²⁶

Feminist critiques by Nina Auerbach and Claudia L. Johnson eschew traditional interpretations in favor of readings that alter the book's received meaning in new ways. In Auerbach's term, Fanny is a type of "Romantic monster," comparable not only to Mary Shelley's creation but also to Grendel, "vampires," and "other literary monsters."²⁷ Johnson reads the novel allegorically as a

parody, both of “conservative myth” and “the structures of conservative fiction.”²⁸ She compares it in this respect to gothic works such as Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* and concludes that the novel “closes with a vengeance of reactionary formulas derived from conservative fiction.”²⁹

The issue of succession was not solely a conservative theme, for it occupied the entire country in a debate between opposing philosophies of change. Thus, what Tom characterizes as a minor physical alteration involving the movement of the bookcase is represented by Austen as emblematic of a moral turn for the worse in the cultural state/estate of Mansfield Park. For Sir Thomas’s volumes of sermons to give way to *Lover’s Vows* constitutes a revolutionary change in the canon, undermines the principle of law, and demotes the traditional role and moral authority of the gentry in the management of the state/estate. The consequence of Tom’s disordering is that the values of reading and learning (typified by Fanny and Edmund) are subordinated to the values of performing and spectating (typified by Tom, Maria, the Crawfords, and Mrs. Norris). From reading and learning may come correction and improvement, but performing and spectating can only result in improvisation (as innovation) and indolence, the twin evils of an unhealthy society.

Significantly, the revolution in the estate has its origin—as do all unpleasant things in Austen—in a locus outside the estate: Tom Bertram notes that his “friend Yates brought the infection from Ecclesford” (p. 184). Although this is an important detail, equally important is Tom’s explanation that “it spread as those things always spread you know, sir—the faster probably from *your* having so often encouraged the sort of thing in us formerly” (p. 184). There are two significant points here: the prophylactic effect of a strong ruler is weakened by Sir Thomas’s leaving the estate for Antigua, which permits the infectious substance to enter; and Tom implies that Sir Thomas himself is responsible for encouraging a mode of flirtatious behavior that enables innovation to circulate into the social substance of the household.

Mr. Yates and Tom Bertram represent the decadence of Regency gentry who are addicted to horse racing, gambling, and drinking, and who are likely to hold Whiggish, French-influenced political sympathies. Austen may even have known of the sharp distinction between types of gentlemen and beliefs that her favorite prose writer, Samuel Johnson, described in a conversation with James Boswell: “The prejudice of the Tory is for establishment; the prejudice of the Whig is for innovation.”³⁰ Similarly, in

a letter to Cassandra Austen, the author makes the following comment on a guest: “*He is as raffish in his appearance as I would wish every Disciple of Godwin to be.*”³¹ For Austen, a person’s dress is a political statement and to be “raffish” (as in the conduct of Mr. Crawford, Mr. Yates, and Tom Bertram) is synonymous with being a Godwinian Jacobin, that is, socially and/or politically subversive.

Sales argues that Tom is Austen’s representation of the Regency Crisis of 1810–12 and that his character can be read as a fictional type for the Prince Regent.³² Yet the Regency Crisis is but a part of the larger international anxiety caused by the French Revolution in civil and social customs. If it were just a matter of a national crisis, then the fictional action could be contained entirely within the state/estate of Mansfield Park. That this is not the case is demonstrated by the number and variety of boundary violations: Mr. Yates’s “infection” comes from Ecclesford; Henry Crawford brings his peculiar brand of social infection from Norfolk; Henry and Maria violate the moral and physical boundaries of Sotherton Park; Tom gets sick and nearly dies when he goes to Newmarket to carouse and gamble; Maria goes to London scandalously to lose a husband; and Julia goes to London scandalously to acquire one. Transgressive circulations of people inevitably result in harm.

The distinction between manners (or mode) and conduct is central to the novel’s epistemological structure and is exemplified in Edmund’s speech on the responsibilities of a clergyman. Significantly, the conversation between Edmund and Mary takes place after they have left the decrepit chapel at Sotherton, which serves as a metonym for the moribund condition of religion in the state/estate. Here, too, we find a close parallel in Burke’s writing, “[n]othing is more certain, than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization, have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles; and were indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion.”³³ Having seen the disrepair of the form of religion at Sotherton as “an improvement,” Mary next launches an attack on the spirit of religion in the person of the clergy. Edmund rises to the defense: “And with regard to their influencing public manners, Miss Crawford must not misunderstand me, or suppose I mean to call them the arbiters of good breeding, the regulators of refinement and courtesy, the masters of the ceremonies of life. The *manners* I speak of, might rather be called *conduct*, perhaps,

the result of good principles” (p. 93). Edmund’s point is that conduct is rooted in principles, while manners reflect a superficial mode of civility that is malleable and can serve as a mask for immorality. In this, Edmund’s distinction agrees with Immanuel Kant’s, who observed that “there may be manners (conduct) without virtue, politeness without good will, decorum without modesty.”³⁴ Mary’s inability to understand the difference between manners and conduct, between courtesy and principle, is her downfall. Edmund’s summation of her character at the end of the novel is devastating: “Her’s are faults of principle, Fanny, of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind” (p. 456). Blunted, corrupted, vitiated—these faults all stem from subordinating right principles, good conduct, and the practice of religion to the artificial courtesies, decadent manners, and what Edmund calls the luxurious “ceremonies of life.”

Perhaps Austen is illustrating Burke’s philosophical distinctions because those two principles are what the revolutionary Crawfords undermine: Henry’s vicious conduct repeatedly violates “the spirit of a gentleman,” while Mary repeatedly condemns “the spirit of religion.” Austen makes Mary’s religious beliefs clear with two of her statements: “every thing is to be got with money” (p. 58) and “[a] clergyman is nothing” (p. 92). Mary’s worship of money and denigration of the clergy constitutes the classic Christian definition of conflict between Mammon and God. Unlike the biblical Mary, Mary Crawford does not choose that which is better. Moreover, her self-love seems idolatrous, as when she says, “I am something like the famous Doge at the court of Lewis XIV; and may declare that I see no wonder in this shrubbery equal to seeing myself in it” (pp. 209–10). Austen thus strengthens the character’s anticlerical identification by associating her with the decadent manners of the French court. But more importantly, she casts Mary’s vanity into the form of a pagan self-idolization that subordinates nature and religion to an inordinate love of self, a fault of which she is fully aware and not interested in remedying, a fault reflected by her insistence that “[s]elfishness must always be forgiven you know, because there is no hope of a cure” (p. 68).

As Fleishman notes, Austen “was a child of her class,” which “identified itself politically with its patrons, the landed gentry.”³⁵ Fleishman further observes that England’s fear that “the French Revolution would spread to England caused a cultural reaction which lent a conservative cast to much of English Romanticism.”³⁶ Associated as they are with everything French and fashionable in

both taste and manners, it is evident that the Crawfords represent a revolutionary assault on the twin principles of tradition and religion and on the persons representing those principles: Fanny and Edmund. Austen's moral language is unequivocal in regard to the Crawfords' conduct. Of Mary, Edmund says, "[s]he does not *think* evil, but she speaks it" (p. 269); and of Henry, the narrator says, "[b]ut such were his habits, that he could do nothing without a mixture of evil" (p. 302). These statements reflect performative traits characteristic of the Crawfords and, in Kantian terms, define people who have "manners (conduct) without virtue." Tellingly, the tally of characters of whom Austen writes that they were in some way "evil" is four: Mrs. Bertram, Mrs. Norris, and the Crawfords, who collectively represent the extremes of decay and innovation. The multiplication of evil in *Mansfield Park* cannot be overstated; in all the other novels, only Willoughby in *Sense & Sensibility* is alluded to as "evil."³⁷

Austen answers the threats to religion and the established order with the novel's twin statements of ordination: Fanny comes out on the twenty-second, and Edmund is ordained during Christmas week. The significance of this symbolism is to associate their joint coming out as a mutual anointing that foreshadows their later marital union as a Burkean "succession." These two acts—Edmund's ordination into the clerical class and Fanny's superordination into the upper class—confirm their moral fitness to be rulers of the estate as Burkean correlatives of the spirits of gentility and religion. Additionally, Austen takes pains to show that Edmund would rectify in his own person (as a metonym for the clergy in general) the worst faults of the clergy epitomized in the character of Dr. Grant. This, too, is a kind of revolution, but it is a revolution of a half degree, a slight turn of the screw that, according to Burke, is necessary in society: "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risque the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve. The two principles of *conservation* and *correction* operated strongly at the two critical periods of the Restoration and Revolution, when England found itself without a king."³⁸

Preservation of the state/estate depends upon conservation through gradual correction and not through innovation, such as when Edmund contrasts his views on improvement by stating that beauty should be "acquired progressively" (p. 56). The principle of conservation applies to individuals in the novel, as reflected in Lew's previously quoted observation on the law of the

conservation of character. Social stagnation results in decadence, but its remedy must be gradual improvement in the substance of the gentry and not by a radical alteration to their mode of conduct as represented by *Lovers' Vows*. This is seen clearly in the ordination of Fanny. Concurrently, we see the wider corrective that the extraordinary social subordination of every other young person (and Mrs. Norris) in the novel represents. Even Julia, Tom, and Mr. Rushworth are diminished either by their personal behavior or by their associations with the Crawfords. Again, these demeaning social changes reflect the theme of ordinating movement in the moral sphere of the state.

Acting is an important element in the mode of movement that directly affects the ordination of individuals within the group. The one occasion in the novel when Fanny consents to act occurs when Mary asks her to play the part of Anhalt. In an affirmation of the novel's valuation of reading over acting, of judicious action over restless activity, Fanny responds: "I will do my best with the greatest readiness;—but I must *read* the part, for I can *say* very little of it" (p. 169). Austen's emphasis on "read" is meant to draw a distinction between the improving performance of reading versus the altering performance of acting. By acting in such a play, the other characters confuse their own shifting moral identities with the identities of the immoral characters in the play. They become valueless shape shifters, creatures of moment and movement allied with the effects of alteration, innovation, and revolutionary changes in the estate.

When Mrs. Grant is unable to perform the role of the Cottager's Wife, Fanny is importuned to take her place. Symbolically, this is fitting because the part is that of a commoner. Just as the other roles are reflections of the immorality in the lives of the Mansfield Park players, the part of the commoner Wife seems naturally to fall to her whom Mrs. Norris characterized as "the lowest and last" (p. 221). Fanny's refusal to be subordinated results in Mrs. Norris's caustic comment that she should cooperate "considering who and what she is" (p. 147). The implication that Fanny is as common as the Cottager's Wife strikes everyone as a great insult. Mary comes to her rescue and shifts the question of Fanny's social status by "supposing Fanny was now preparing for her *appearance* as of course she would come out when her cousin was married" (p. 147).

It is not coincidental that Austen intertwines the themes of acting, social status, and coming out in this context because an "appearance" is a mode of ordination, both in order and in the

conference of status. Thus, for Fanny to play this part would be subordination, the fault that pertains to all of the other characters who subordinate their morals in varying degrees of inappropriate behavior. The difference is that Fanny rejects a demeaning, public representation of her character while the others embrace it. This performative conundrum was understood by John Keats whom Trilling cites as writing that the poet must be concerned only with "subordinating his own being to that of the objects of his creative regard" and that a poet cannot have "character," "self," or "identity."³⁹ Similarly, the romantic "creative regard" of Mr. Yates, Mr. Rushworth, Maria, and the Crawfords results in subordinating their "being" socially as well as morally; consequently, four of the five are alienated from the estate of Mansfield Park.

What is significant for Fanny is that Mary asks her to "*read*" the part just as Henry asked her to "*read*" the part (pp. 190–1); in both cases, Austen carefully distinguishes between the two modes of conduct. The distinction of reading as opposed to acting in Fanny's principled rejection demonstrates a refusal on her part to assume a fictive mode that is superficially performative and morally transitory. Fanny will not and does not act in an inappropriate play with men outside the family. Though it would give the appearance of equality to be on the same social stage with the others, in actuality it would constitute a false ordination, an innovative change to her mode of representing herself, but harming her actual position in the family. It would confirm Mrs. Norris's denigration of her as a servant and make her more susceptible to Henry's class predation in the mode of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. Lastly, acting a false appearance is directly parallel to being false in appearance; each necessitates the subordination, in Kantian terms, of virtue (substance) to manners (mode). Consequently, acting falsely, whether in life or on stage, is the transgressive mode most characteristic of the Crawfords and the one avoided at all costs by Fanny.

As mentioned before, Fanny's ordination is central to the novel, and, in succession, Sir Thomas, Henry, and Edmund all confer upon her a new status in the course of the action. Many readers have noted that Sir Thomas undergoes a change in Antigua and upon his return is unusually solicitous of Fanny's emotional, physical, and social circumstances. He receives her with "a kindness which astonished and penetrated her," and Fanny notes that "[h]e had never been so kind, so *very* kind to her in his life. 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" (p. 178).

The suggestion of a moral change in Sir Thomas is contrasted with his physical change, for "he was grown thinner and had the burnt, fagged, worn look of fatigue and a hot climate" (p. 178). He, like Tom Bertram and Marianne Dashwood in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, are "altered" by adversity.⁴⁰ Austen characters often must undergo a physical trial to be redeemed from personal faults, a process Halperin calls the "ordeal of learning."⁴¹ The poor economic conditions in Antigua and the suffering of the slaves were well-known facts to Austen since, as Brian Southam notes, her own father had been "appointed the principal trustee of a plantation in Antigua."⁴² Furthermore, her brother Francis reported on the "harshness and despotism" he observed while on duty in the West Indies.⁴³ These irrefutable biographical details revealing Austen's knowledge of the condition of slavery are what perplexed Edward W. Said, when he wrote: "There is a paradox here in reading Jane Austen which I have been impressed by but can in no way resolve. All the evidence says that even the most routine aspects of holding slaves on a West Indian sugar plantation were cruel stuff. And everything we know about Austen and her values is at odds with the cruelty of slavery."⁴⁴ Said, out of respect for Austen's character and greatness, interrogates this gap in our understanding of her with understated reservation, but any address of the issue of slavery in *Mansfield Park* must answer his implied criticism. If, as Marilyn Butler has observed, "[w]ith the possible exception of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park* is the most visibly ideological of Jane Austen's novels,"⁴⁵ what exactly is the ideological attitude that puzzles Said? Michael Steffes, though excellent in many particulars, wrongly concludes that "[s]lavery is a central issue in our estimate of Sir Thomas Bertram's moral character and, therefore, that of Fanny Price insofar as she has accepted his values."⁴⁶ By novel's end, the values of slavery are no longer Sir Thomas's and never were Fanny's. The answer to the question of Austen's position on slavery is so simple as to have been overlooked: Fanny is Mansfield Park's slave.

As Antigua is the archetype of a poorly managed estate, so too is Mrs. Norris's self-interested oversight of the materials and "slaves" (Fanny and the servants) of Mansfield Park an example of an unjust overseer. In what is surely an ironic moment, Austen describes this exercise of Mrs. Norris's prudence: "An enormous roll of green baize had arrived from Northampton, and been cut out by Mrs. Norris (with a saving, by her good management, of full three quarters of a yard)" (p. 131). Fifty-five pages later, Mrs.

Norris converts management into appropriation: "The curtain over which she had presided with such talent and such success, went off with her to her cottage, where she happened to be particularly in want of green baize" (p. 195). In the end, Sir Thomas realizes that Mrs. Norris's "good management" has always been a "grievous mismanagement" (p. 463). Intriguingly, Steffes suggests that Austen, who had read the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, named Mrs. Norris after his villain in *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*.⁴⁷ Steffes also points out that the novel itself might be named after the Earl of Mansfield whose judgments as Lord Chief Justice "were widely perceived as giving support to the anti-slavery cause."⁴⁸ In the absence of Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris's management of the staff of Mansfield Park, and specifically of Fanny's person and time, introduces rather than ignores the issue of slavery.

The mismanagement of the plantation in Antigua provides the perspective from which we must view the mismanagement of the estate at Mansfield Park. Sir Thomas returned physically altered but morally improved because he had witnessed the misery of the slaves on his Antiguan estate for which he was responsible. This reading goes strongly against the grain of some contemporary interpretations (e.g., Auerbach, Johnson) but is thoroughly consistent with the tone and action of the novel. In keeping with the metaphors of my argument, the change in him is one of physical alteration because of his moral improvement. Antigua in those days was the site of heavy missionary activity, and it was also a locus of the political and Evangelical debate on the horrible conditions of slavery. We know from George Holbert Tucker's list that Austen had read Clarkson's book against slavery (*An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African*). Furthermore, in the same year *Mansfield Park* was published, Austen responded to her niece Fanny's reservations about the conservative beliefs of her evangelical suitor: "I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals, & am at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason & Feeling must be happiest & safest."⁴⁹ The fervent evangelical climate in England at the time coincides with an improved moral change in Sir Thomas and would explain why, upon his return, he treats Fanny with unprecedented kindness. He sees that his previous demeanor toward her was tantamount to treating her as a slave—as one of the "lowest and last" in Mrs. Norris's formulation. Mrs. Norris—as a type of slave manager—

continually demeaned Fanny and guided Sir Thomas's judgment in all matters relating to Fanny. It was she who arranged for Fanny's acquisition, who had a "share" (p. 9) in her, managed the utilization of her labor, subordinated her to the "lowest" rung of the estate, overworked her "beyond her strength" (p. 36), and disregarded conditions affecting her health. Sir Thomas's awakened consciousness of Mrs. Norris's poor "conduct" corresponds to his improved moral consciousness (p. 203); to his subsequent social liberation of Fanny; and to his eventual estimation of Mrs. Norris as an "hourly evil" (p. 465). The analogy between slave and slave holder is strengthened by the fact that it was Mrs. Norris who raised the ugly specter of miscegenation, that one of Sir Thomas's sons might marry "her" (p. 6). That this possibility was constructed in such terms and that Fanny nonetheless married Edmund perhaps do more to address Said's concerns about race and slavery than any other actions in the novel. Even if the naming of Mrs. Norris and the novel are coincidences, such coincidences constitute a fascinating peek at the slave controversy. One can easily conclude that Austen's *Mansfield Park* is, in fact, an anti-slavery novel.

So it is not surprising that Trilling found Fanny's poor health to be an "alienating" factor, since it is characteristic of Fanny that she, as the novel's figurative slave, should suffer from fragile health.⁵⁰ Consequently, Sir Thomas institutes an improvement in his policy by reversing the past abuse of Mrs. Norris's superintendence, ordering a fire to be always present in Fanny's room. Furthermore, in the novel's most significant and symbolic act, he announces his desire for a ball over the objections of Mrs. Norris, a fatherly (and princely) action that ordines Fanny into the family, into the estate, and most importantly, into the status of equal personhood.

Henry's growing attentions to Fanny also situate her in a position of heightened social status. Although his desire for her raises Fanny in the esteem of every person at Mansfield Park, behind it lies a malign intent: "I cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart" (p. 229). To penetrate Fanny by making a hole in her heart is the type of social murder he later inflicts on Maria. It is through Henry's eyes that we get perhaps the fullest picture of Fanny's character when he realizes why he desires her for his wife: "of her having such a steadiness and regularity of conduct, such a high notion of honour, and such an observance of decorum as might warrant any man in the fullest dependence on her faith and in-

tegrity, he expressed what was inspired by the knowledge of her being well principled and religious" (p. 294). At one point, Fanny begins to think him "improved" (p. 232); unfortunately, the improvement is one of mode (manner) and not of substance, and he soon lapses back into his old ways.

Ironically, Fanny's being "well principled and religious" is precisely what qualifies her for ordination into a genteel and religious society and disqualifies Henry from being a fit mate for Fanny. Edmund's earlier condemnation of Mary as having faults of principle is echoed by Fanny's principled assessment of Henry: "How evidently was there a gross want of feeling and humanity where his own pleasure was concerned—And, alas! how always known no principle to supply as a duty what the heart was deficient in" (p. 329). Henry has been, according to his own admission, "a devourer" of his own happiness and is poised to devour the happiness of Fanny as well (p. 61). Austen's characterization of the Crawfords as social revolutionaries who reject the principles of gentility and spirituality embodied by Fanny and Edmund constitutes the invasion of Mansfield Park by French ideas. Accordingly, the re-ordination of the estate's disorder, and the elevation of Fanny and Edmund in the social and spiritual hierarchy, require the rejection of these two characters and represent the novel's defense against Jacobin politics and decadent Regency manners.

Finally, it is Edmund's gift of a chain for the cross that her brother William bought her that symbolically unites Fanny to Edmund and to Mansfield Park. Although Henry had also bought her one, it was too large, emblematic of Henry's great appetite for ostentation and his unfitness for Fanny. The chain and cross constitute a metaphor for the spirit of unity between gentility and religion that is missing in the other unions in *Mansfield Park*.

Mansfield Park as Austen describes its characters is a study in contrasts: of mode versus substance and of manners versus virtues. Restlessness in the Crawfords reflects the extreme of social innovation in which too much change is introduced, while the indolence of Lady Bertram reflects the extreme of social stagnation in which there is too little change. For Austen, neither extreme is beneficial to the estate or to the country. Consequently, the balancing mode of principled behavior in Fanny and Edmund reflects a positive if gradual movement in the moral and social sphere as a mean between extremes. The example of Mr. and Mrs. Bertram presents a level of inactivity that is amoral and threatens the institution with decay; the examples of Henry and

Mary Crawford present a level of activity that is immoral and threatens the estate with revolution. The Bertrams are incapable of correctly managing the estate; the Crawfords wish to overthrow it. In the Bertrams and the Crawfords, Austen figures the twin evils of the novel: self-centered solitude versus self-centered restlessness (p. 432). Both pairs live solely for their satisfaction. In the characters of Fanny and Edmund, Austen models a mode of management that is the mean between these extremes. Edmund provides a new paradigm of responsible civil management that the lords of misrule lack, while Fanny contributes a degree of faith-based morality that the upper-class women lack. This strongly resembles the Burkean prescription of progressive change reflected in the earlier quoted passage that “[a] state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation.” The slowly sinking Lady Bertram is clearly in such an entropic state.

Similar movement is seen in *Sense and Sensibility* where Elinor and Marianne have to modify their respective moral positions—one to become more “sensible,” the other less so. Likewise in *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy and Elizabeth have to overcome their flaws of pride and prejudgment and morally move to a balanced center where they may meet in harmony. This is the familiar mode of Austen in which she reconciles opposites of ideals, smoothes over extremes of conduct, and, like a reigning divinity, brings her characters’ social description level with the substance of their moral character according to their just deserts. Thus are the Wickhams, Willoughbys, and Crawfords served, and thus are Maria and Mrs. Norris banished from the estate where Fanny Price is admitted. Her only remarkable trait is her principled nature, but it happens to be the most important trait missing from the state/estate of Mansfield Park.

The absence of principle in the Crawfords also reflects Austen’s assessment of the representative types of the state/estate. Admiral Crawford models licentiousness on behalf of the military; Mr. Grant’s gluttony represents the dissipation of many in the clergy; while the lords of misrule outnumber all the other unworthy characters combined: the libertine Henry Crawford, the profligates Tom Bertram and Mr. Yates, and the blockhead Mr. Rushworth clearly demonstrate Austen’s contemptuous evaluation of the aristocracy as there is not a single positive example of the class in the entire book. She reserves her greatest censure for the Henry Crawfords of the time whose mania for altering the geographical and moral landscape of the state/estate disrupted both the social and civil order.

What is striking about these examples is that none of them represents radical institutions: the military, the church, and the aristocracy are all pillars of the establishment. While Austen's sympathies are clearly those of her gentry class, they are not reactionary. Her novels reflect a Burkean sensibility that is critical of the traditional institutions of her time and articulates a philosophy that is progressively conservative, recognizing that without Burke's two principles of conservation and correction, society either accelerates into disorder or decays into stagnation. Consequently, William Price replaces Admiral Crawford as the representative of the military, Edmund Bertram replaces Mr. Grant as the representative of the clergy, and a chastened Tom Bertram, who survives—like his father before him—a life-threatening “alteration,” will be the new, reformed face of the aristocracy.

Austen demonstrates, in this most visibly ideological of her novels, the decay of the country's three critical institutions. The ordination of Fanny and Edmund, and Sir Thomas's support of the worthy William, is Austen's solution for the controversies of her time. Austen reveals how, without alteration or innovation, improvement in the mode and substance of those institutions can occur when the spirit of a gentleman (Edmund) works with the spirit of religion (Fanny) to reform but not revolve the state/estate.

NOTES

¹ Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 29 January 1813, in *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3d edn. (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), p. 202.

² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, vol. 3 of *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 6 vols. (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), p. 200. Subsequent references to *Mansfield Park* will be to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.

³ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to That Event*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (London and New York: Penguin, 1986), p. 105.

⁴ Roger Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 87.

⁵ Alistair M. Duckworth, “*Mansfield Park* and Estate Improvements: Jane Austen's Grounds of Being,” *NCF* 26, 1 (June 1971): 25–48.

⁶ William Cowper, “The Task,” in vol. 2 of *The Poems of William Cowper*, ed. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 182, bk. 3, line 764.

⁷ Burke, qtd. in Duckworth, p. 33.

⁸ Duckworth, p. 33.

⁹ For instance, Compton, Sotherton, Mrs. Norris, Mary, and Tom are all "altered" for the worse.

¹⁰ Henry Brougham, qtd. in Joseph Lew, "'That Abominable Traffic': *Mansfield Park* and the Dynamics of Slavery," in *History, Gender, and Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens and London: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1994), pp. 271–300, 289.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Austen, *Sanditon* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), p. 67.

¹³ W. A. Speck, *Literature and Society in Eighteenth-Century England, 1680–1820* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), p. 159.

¹⁴ Lew, pp. 288–9.

¹⁵ Lew, p. 290.

¹⁶ Duckworth, p. 33.

¹⁷ Sales, p. 91. Sales is referring here to the argument made by Warren Roberts in *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (London and Basingstoke UK: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 97–100.

¹⁸ Elaine Jordan, "Pulpit, Stage, and Novel: *Mansfield Park* and Mrs. Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows*," *Novel* 20, 2 (Winter 1987): 138–48, 140.

¹⁹ Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 31–3.

²⁰ Avrom Fleishman, "*Mansfield Park* in Its Time," *NCF* 22, 1 (June 1967): 1–18, 9.

²¹ Burke, p. 237.

²² Sales, p. 101.

²³ OED, 2d edn., s.v. "ordination." The following are two additional examples under this first entry: "1658 SIR T. BROWNE *Gard. Cyrus* i. 36 Disposing his trees like his armies in regular ordination. *Ibid.* iii. 53 Quincuncial forms and Ordinations are also observable in animall figurations. 1703 T. N. *City & C. Purchaser* 85 He meaneth by Ordination, nothing but a well settling of the Model or Scheme of the whole Work."

²⁴ Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), p. 214.

²⁵ R. W. Chapman, *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p. 82.

²⁶ John Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984), p. 212.

²⁷ Nina Auerbach, "Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm: Feeling as One Ought about Fanny Price," in *Jane Austen: New Perspectives*, W&L, n.s., 3 (1983): 208–23, 219, 213, 218.

²⁸ Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 99, 116.

²⁹ Claudia Johnson, p. 114.

³⁰ Samuel Johnson, qtd. in John Wain, *Samuel Johnson* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 37.

³¹ Austen to Cassandra Austen, 22 May 1801, in *Letters*, p. 89.

³² Sales, p. 70.

³³ Burke, p. 173.

³⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1951), p. 45.

³⁵ Fleishman, p. 2.

³⁶ Fleishman, p. 1.

³⁷ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, vol. 1 of *The Novels of Jane Austen*, p. 331.

³⁸ Burke, p. 106; emphasis added.

³⁹ Trilling, p. 219.

⁴⁰ Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Ros Ballaster (New York and London: Penguin, 1995), p. 153.

⁴¹ Halperin, *Egoism and Self-Discovery in the Victorian Novel* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1974), p. 1.

⁴² Brian Southam, "The Silence of the Bertrams: Slavery and the Chronology of *Mansfield Park*," *TLS*, 17 February 1995, 13–4, 14.

⁴³ Francis Austen, qtd. in Southam, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 95–6.

⁴⁵ Butler, p. 219.

⁴⁶ Michael Steffes, "Slavery and *Mansfield Park*: The Historical and Biographical Context," *ELN* 34, 2 (December 1996): 23–41, 31.

⁴⁷ Steffes, p. 38n4.

⁴⁸ Steffes, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Austen to Fanny Knight, 18 November 1814, in *Letters*, p. 280.

⁵⁰ Trilling, p. 212.