

Diplomski rad

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BAD PARENTING IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND
MANSFIELD PARK

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Contents

1. Abstract	1
2. Key Words.....	2
3. Introduction	2
4. The Family Unit and Domestic Fiction in Jane Austen's England.....	4
5. Parents and Children in <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	9
5.1. Mrs. Bennet's Least Favourite Daughter	9
5.2. Mr. Bennet: Like Father, Like Daughter?	15
6. Parents and children in <i>Mansfield Park</i>	20
6.1. Mrs. Bertram and Mrs. Price: Non-existent Mothers.....	20
6.2. Sir Thomas Bertram: Authority over Affection	27
7. Conclusion.....	37
8. Works Cited.....	41

Abstract

Family relationship and the topic of parenting in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* are discussed. The position of the parents and the upbringing or lack of it in the two novels is put into social context of Austen's time, in which the individual is still subjected to social norms and accepted behaviour patterns, but which also reflects the new ideas of a more balanced distribution of power and autonomy within the family unit. The focus is on two heroines Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price and the emergence of a new domestic female that dictates the path of courtship and marriage. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the domestic reform comes in the form of assertive and outspoken Elizabeth Bennet. In *Mansfield Park*, it comes through the recognition and incorporation of the poor cousin into the family. Elizabeth's father Mr. Bennet neglects his parental role, and Mrs. Bennet's main preoccupation is to see her daughters married. Fanny's substitute father Sir Thomas is an oppressive parent who alienates his children, and his wife Mrs. Bertram is a non-existent mother. Fanny's birth parents are equally inadequate. However, all parents make themselves inadvertently of use to the heroines. Mrs. Bennet's habitual impropriety and her father's neglect challenge Elizabeth's passivity and provoke her into action. By distancing herself from her parents and learning from their mistakes, Elizabeth is able to grow and eventually achieve happiness through marriage. The negligence from her substitute and birth parents causes Fanny to further develop her sense of propriety and ultimately make her the moral compass of the story. In the end, the heroines achieve a balanced union between their private lives and the requirements of their society. Through the marriages shown in the novels, the idea is asserted that marriages based on love and esteem are more likely to endure the test of time than those contracted for material gain.

Key Words: Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, family, domestic woman, domestic fiction, reform, parenting, parents, class, gender, upbringing, social reform, marriage, education, individuality, female sexuality.

3. Introduction

Upon reading and comparing Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* with *Mansfield Park*, one of the first noticeable themes are family relationships and the topic of parenting. One of the ways to elaborate on the topic of assimilation and position the characters occupy or are supposed to occupy in the society is to question the aspects and the aim of the upbringing that the families deny or provide the characters with. In Jane Austen's novels, the impact of the family is felt in the social area, where it affects the questions of occupation, marriage, position, and relationships with others. Thus, by analysing the position and importance of the parents and the upbringing or lack of it in these two novels, the author makes it possible for the reader to get familiar with the social, cultural, historical, and economic situation in the novels and in the periods of the author's life. A major concern in both novels is the way the structure of the family affects the ability of the heroine to enter society, develop her own adult judgment and marry successfully, especially when defects in her family distort this process. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* begin with scenes describing the personalities and circumstances of the adults, presenting the state of affairs in the Bennet and Bertram families. It is interesting to note that at the beginning of both novels Austen's heroines find themselves in unbalanced family situations, but ultimately end up on the verge of creating balanced families. The lack of competent parental guidance is a major source of hardship for the author's protagonists, who are the victims of a faulty upbringing because their parents or surrogate parents have failed to provide competent adult guidance. However, this situation

also enables the heroines to separate themselves from their parents and gain their own identities. The main focus of this paper is Elizabeth Bennet, Fanny Price, and their parents. In this sense, looking at the aspects of Fanny and Elizabeth's upbringing, it should be possible to answer the questions encompassing the nature and purpose of the parenting shown in the novels, but also the reason for its absence in certain cases. More specifically, the paper will try to elaborate on the importance of gender, class, economic, and political aspects in connection with the topics of parenting and upbringing in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*. To be able to answer the question why Jane Austen focuses mostly on what she believes to be flawed parent-child relationships, the analysis made from the family situations in both novels will be placed in the social context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Jane Austen's fictional parents have proved to be a useful tool for social criticism. She uses the literary form of her day as a platform to address such issues. Her fictional families' dynamics are crucial both to her plots and to her explorations of ethical complexities. In fact, the whole plots of the two novels can be seen as dependent on the dysfunctionality of the Bennet and Bertram families.

The paper is divided into three parts, with the first part of the paper considering the topic of parenting in terms of *Pride and Prejudice*, i.e. educational practices of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet that influence the life of the novel's heroine Elizabeth Bennet. The second part of the paper analyses Mr. and Mrs. Bertram's parenting in *Mansfield Park* and their influence on their substitute daughter Fanny Price, as well as the role of Fanny's birth parents. After analysing the topic of parenting in two novels separately, the final part of the paper presents intersections between these two novels in parenting terms, but also some of the different manners in which the topic is regarded by the author.

4. The family Unit and Domestic Fiction in Jane Austen's England

Jane Austen's books were published at a time when England was shifting its economic focus from an agrarian and landed society to a more industrial economy. *Pride and Prejudice* was first published in 1813, and *Mansfield Park* in 1814. In general, Austen occupies a curious position in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For the purpose of this paper, the eighteenth and nineteenth-century structure of the family unit, female and male social roles, as well as the representation of these factors in domestic fiction need to be explained in order to help understand Austen's approach to parent-child relationships in both novels. Jane Austen's concept of the family unit reflects the process of social reform that took place during her time. In his book *Jane Austen*, Tony Tanner writes that the community she depicted in her novels "was in some way parabolic of what was happening to society at large" (12). It is important to note that the society Austen was writing about was essentially based on the notion of property. This emphasis on the importance of property was essential for maintaining social peace and order in the late eighteenth-century England, and social control in the eighteenth century appeared as a spontaneous and generally accepted regulation of conduct. To this extent, Jane Austen's work corresponds to the dominant ideology, since her novels are embedded within a set of domestic concerns over property, money and status that highlight the changing social landscape of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England. The reader knows that all of her heroines are in search for a propertied man. In the earlier eighteenth century, the ruling class had been associated with libertinism and loose morals, but later on, the protection of their position and property was possible only through reforming their principles and conduct. According to Tanner, Jane Austen's concern with good manners in her novels was thus a form of politics, "an involvement with a widespread attempt to save the nation by correcting, monitoring and elevating its morals" (27). In her novels, an individual must conform to the accepted behaviour patterns and norms of society in order to

maintain his or her proper place within the group. A person who disregards the rules and conventions of society may lose the acceptance and protection offered by the social unit as seen in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*. At the same time, both novels examine the values and assumptions of society in terms of their impact on the quality of individual lives, specifically in the domestic sphere.

In the literature of 18th century, the wave of change was led by writers who believed that the quality of family life was crucial to the happiness of the individual, well-being and proper raising of children, and to the successful functioning of society as a whole. This shift in the power structure of the family affected both parent-child and husband-wife relationships, resulting in a more balanced and equitable distribution of power and autonomy within the family unit. In his book *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, Lawrence Stone dissects the early modern English society and its effects on the rules regulating marriage. For the purpose of this paper, it is important to inspect more closely the institution of marriage because it played a crucial role in family strategy, upbringing, and in wife-husband and children-parents relationships in the late 18th and early 19th-century. In Jane Austen's novels, the most far-reaching and harmful consequence of an unsuitable marriage is the failure of husband and wife to perform their functions as father and mother adequately. During the 18th and 19th century, as the relationship between parents and children became more affectionate, young people were given more freedom in the choice of their future partner. The closer parent-child bonding within the nuclear family brought the criterion of marital happiness to the fore. Stone uses the term "affective individualism" (149), defined by the trend towards greater freedom for children and an equal partnership between spouses. Stone notes that marriage ceased to be an artificial constraint and became instead "a prime source of personal pleasure, both emotional and sexual" (165). The rise of individualism and affective bonds enabled the preference of individual happiness within a marriage built on

mutual sympathy, put before the financial and social interests and responsibilities towards the family. Furthermore, the status of the eldest male as the patriarch of the family was questioned because the society considered fatherly influence over children to be of a temporary nature which lost its importance when the children grew up. Moreover, new property laws made sure that the rights of each member of the family were clearly defined and carefully preserved. Just as the structure of the family changed, views on raising children changed as well. Slowly, “Parents were beginning to recognize that each child, even if it lived for only a few hours or days, had its own unique individuality” (Stone 257) and society became more and more child-minded. The domestic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reflects the aforementioned shift from marriage as an aristocratic institution regulated by family interest to an institution largely shaped by middle-class values, which recognizes the value of the individual woman, though still confining her to a realm of domesticity. In his book *Sex, Politics, and Society, The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, Jeffrey Weeks writes about the construction of family ideologies and the shaping of sex and gender divisions during the time. Weeks notes that the ideological separation of women into a private domestic sphere had a clear moral and economic purpose. By limiting a woman to the domestic world, female sexuality, for the respectable woman, was confined to marriage in order to assure the legitimacy of the offspring. Because this new definition of marriage assumed that the female would be content to limit herself to the private domain and subordinate herself to her husband, the assertion of individual rather than family rights in the choice of a mate became the source of many romantic dramas (Weeks 29). The very movement toward individuality that empowered the middle-class woman with a sense of desirability eventually led to the growth of intellectual curiosity in the female who had been forced to sacrifice her personal desires to fulfil her role as wife and mother. Weeks claims that the debate over the proper path of securing marriages began to emerge in literature as early as

the mid-eighteenth century (29). While the advancement for young men lay in the military, church, or law, the chief method of self-improvement for women was the acquisition of wealth. Women could only accomplish this goal through successful marriage, which explains the omnipresence of matrimony as a goal and topic of conversation in Austen's writing. For example, the importance of marriage is unambiguously stressed in the very first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (Austen 1). Despite the shift in the power structure of the family and marriage, a man was still the head of the family. There are several instances of this kind of power imbalance between a husband and wife in both novels. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennet is shown giving Mr. Bennet details about what took place at the ball, "Mr. Bennet protested against any description of finery. She was therefore obliged to seek another branch of the subject" (Austen 13). As soon as Mr. Bennet told Mrs. Bennet that he no longer wished to hear about Mr. Bingley's interactions with Jane at the ball, Mrs. Bennet changed the subject rather quickly to Mr. Darcy, as if she already knew what to do. Nancy Armstrong in her book *Desire and Domestic Fiction, A Political History of the Novel* argues that the rise of a new kind of domestic fiction coincided with the rise of a new kind of woman. Within the structure of the novel, the new domestic female could achieve a sense of power within the text by dictating the path of courtship and marriage. "Literature devoted to producing the domestic woman thus appeared to ignore the political world run by men. Of the female alone did it presume to say that neither birth nor the accoutrements of title and status accurately represented the individual. Only the more subtle nuances of behaviour indicated what one was really worth" (Armstrong 4). As the object of desire, the female achieves a sense of power over the male, but this power will eventually be relinquished to him in matrimony in exchange for control over domestic tasks. No matter how strong and independent the heroines, early domestic fiction ends with marital unions that

reinforce the traditional power of the husband over the wife. In later domestic fiction, as the indoctrination of the new female ideal has been established and the characters are confident in their own intrinsic desirability, the heroines begin to make controversial decisions that have narrative consequences.

This development shows that the domestic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth century did not simply serve as a tool to convey a new code of behaviour concerning the rules of marriage, but also established a clear correlation between desirability and autonomy. Although Austen's fiction appears to be content to deal with courtship and marriage, both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* work effectively to exemplify the way to go about achieving personal happiness. Despite having as ineffective parents as one can have, both of Austen's heroines, Elizabeth and Fanny, clearly assert their individual desires concerning marriage over the desires of their parents. By the conclusions, unlike their parents, Elizabeth and Fanny end up in successful marriages with the men they love. Both heroines strive toward the creation of a more nearly ideal family unit through their marriage. Therefore, it is important for Elizabeth and Fanny to be in successful marriages in order to develop to their fullest potential and in order to have functional families. Each of the men has been clearly chosen by the heroines, however, the completion of a traditional marriage reinforces the power of men while confining women to the domestic realm. One can conclude that the message of the novels, then, is that a proper marriage is a prerequisite for feminine happiness. Several value judgments are made about a proper marriage through different types of marriages shown in both novels, but the final assessment is that marriage itself is valuable. Through the marriages shown in the novels, the idea is asserted that marriages based on love and esteem are more likely to endure the test of time than those contracted for material gain. The traditional criteria for selecting a marriage partner – money, social connections, and physical attraction – are shown to be inadequate because they do not ensure an acceptable

quality of domestic life. Marital decisions based solely on these considerations are harmful to the individual, to the marriage relationship, and to the children in the family. Thus, the problem becomes self-perpetuating: in both novels the reader sees how a bad marriage relationship causes a distortion of the family unit and this inadequate home environment impairs the functioning of the family members in society, which in turns lessens the opportunity for the children to make good marriages.

5. Parents and Children in *Pride and Prejudice*

5.1. Mrs. Bennet's Least Favourite Daughter

In “Mothers, Substitute Mothers, and Daughters in the Novels of Jane Austen”, Mary Margaret Benson notes that, “Even a cursory examination of the novels of Jane Austen reveals an abundance of absent or otherwise ineffectual mothers” (117) and that those mothers “are unable to provide any sort of role model, or guidance, or education” (117). The Bennets have five unmarried daughters and Mrs. Bennet is desperate to see them all married. The very first sentence in the novel, “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife,” (Austen 1) is the manifestation of the preoccupation with socially advantageous marriage in the nineteenth-century English society. Even as it abruptly introduces the arrival of Mr. Bingley at Netherfield, the event that sets the novel in motion, this sentence also offers a miniature sketch of the entire plot, which concerns itself with the pursuit of “single men in possession of a good fortune” by female characters. The arrival of Mr. Collins brings the issue of the entail to the forefront and helps readers to understand Mrs. Bennet’s obsession with getting her daughters married. She is concerned with security rather than happiness, as demonstrated by her own marriage to a man she cannot understand and who treats her with no respect. Contrastingly, Mrs. Bennet is

indifferent to her daughters' education. In the novel, Lady Catherine pronounces, "No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! I have never heard of such a thing ... Without a governess you must have been neglected" (Austen, 120). Mrs. Bennet is equally indifferent to her daughters' moral education and, in fact, is incapable of providing them with any moral example. Tony Tanner makes a clear division between the characters of *Pride and Prejudice* and arranges them into two categories: those who are not capable of change and unable to think outside their particular situations and those who are able to see outside their roles and develop (126). Elizabeth Bennet's mother is the perfect example of the former. Tanner describes Mrs. Bennet as being "incapable of reflection" (124) and "lacking any introspective tendencies" (124). Take, for example, Mrs. Bennet's conversations. They seem to be somewhat limited, repetitive and predictable. Other characters, by contrast, speak in a reflective manner, they manoeuvre the language more freely. The narrator describes Mrs. Bennet as "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper" (Austen 2). In "Mrs. Bennet's Least Favorite Daughter", John Wiltshire also writes about Mrs. Bennet in terms of being a caricature, rather than a character, "A caricature, roughly speaking, is a figure which does not interact with others and thus does not develop, does not deepen in interest to the reader, but merely goes on displaying the same traits in different circumstances - the amusement to be gained from such figures being in the nature of the running joke" (180). Mrs. Bennet's references to her nerves, for instance, would certainly put her in this category. She uses her illness symptoms in comically ineffective attempts to get her own way, claiming: "People who suffer as I do from nervous complaints can have no great inclination for talking. Nobody can tell what I suffer! But it is always so. Those who do not complain are never pitied" (Austen 83).

However, it is not possible to merely dismiss Mrs. Bennet as a fool. The reader's attention is drawn to the fact that she is a disruptive influence on her daughters, thus, her

character is of far more importance in the novel. Wiltshire notes that, “What distinguishes an effusion like this from the comic display of the theatre is the presence of Mrs. Bennet’s daughters and the demands, partly stated, partly implied, such behaviour makes on them” (181). Mrs. Bennet has an intrusive presence in the first chapters of *Pride and Prejudice*, and this effect is accomplished without any description of her person but through the dialogues. As in this instance, the reader experiences her repeatedly as overriding or taking possession of her daughters’ lives. One is prompted to search for the reason behind Mrs. Bennet’s behaviour and can discern that there is more to her than being a caricature. Out of her five daughters, Lydia and Kitty are the ones acting silly and annoying. The other three are more level-headed and conscious of the social norms. To further understand the function of Mrs. Bennet’s character in the novel, it seems interesting to question whether or not it is a coincidence that Mrs. Bennet’s favourite daughter is the one who behaves in the most unscrupulous manner. Wiltshire notes that, “we glimpse, in the violence of her emotions, in the volubility of her discourse, in the unnuanced, coarse vibrations of her presence, a great deal of energy. And it is - we might concede - a sexual energy, too” (184). Early on in the novel, Mrs. Bennet’s confession indicates that she is still fascinated with excitements from her youth, which is to play its role in fostering her youngest daughter’s erotic escapade. She recalls, “I remember the time when I liked a red coat very well - and indeed so I do still at my heart” (Austen 21). In another demonstration of her failure to keep her own life and emotions separate from her daughters, Mrs. Bennet later promotes Lydia’s desire to go to Brighton in terms of her own wishes. In many ways, Mrs. Bennet is still a child of uncertain temper, self-absorbed. The problem is that “The sexuality of a mother is not a pretty spectacle to her daughters” (Wiltshire 184), which is one of the reasons Elizabeth feels a strong need to distance herself from her mother. In “Mothers and Daughters”, Marianne Hirsch writes that, “The mother remains an important inner object throughout adult life” (206) and that, “mothers identify

more strongly with female infants, seeing them more as extensions of themselves” (206). The question then arises as to why is the protagonist of the novel indeed her mother’s least favourite daughter and how that relationship affects the heroine’s development and the position she occupies in the society. As noted earlier, one can say that Elizabeth is all her mother is not, bright, lively, intelligent, and socially competent. Whereas Mrs. Bennet strictly follows her gender role, her daughter is an example of independence and is capable of “role distance” (Tanner 124). Elizabeth is set apart as the novel’s true heroine in the first chapter when her father comments that, “Lizzy has something more of a quickness than her sisters” (Austen 2). This establishment of Elizabeth as the heroine early on clues the reader into the didactic function of the novel. It will be Lizzy’s romance and eventual marriage that is presented as ideal. She must not only cope with a hopeless mother, a distant father, two badly behaved younger siblings, and several snobbish, antagonizing females, she must also overcome her own mistaken impressions of Darcy, which initially lead her to reject his proposals of marriage. As she gradually comes to recognize the nobility of Darcy’s character, she realizes the error of her initial prejudice against him. Unlike her mother, Elizabeth’s character grows, which is confirmed further on in the novel when she states, “Till this moment I never knew myself” (Austen 152). Elizabeth will not bow to the need for economic survival and turns down Mr. Collins’s and initially Mr. Darcy’s proposals because she believes in marrying for love and genuine affection. Throughout the novel, she searches for a relationship opposite to that of her parents. In this regard, she can be considered a complex character, having “a mental range and depth which almost make her an isolated figure trapped in a constricting web of a small number of simple people” (Tanner 126). Such character seeks refuge from spaces she shares with linguistically more incompetent characters. The clash of characters that occurs between Elizabeth and her mother in their conversations makes Elizabeth seek solace in her room, and ultimately find permanent escape through marriage

with Darcy. Wiltshire observes that, “It is Elizabeth’s triumph that in loving and marrying Darcy, she succeeds in escaping from, and in putting so much distance between herself and Mrs. Bennet” (186). On the other hand, when analysing the function of these characters in the novel, it is also necessary to look at the matter at hand from another perspective. One can also find similarities between the heroine and her mother. In the novel, Elizabeth's provocative social manner does remain within the line of appropriate conduct, but it reproduces, in moderated form, her mother’s forwardness. It is possible to think of Mrs. Bennet in terms of being an embodiment of “a more or less pathological variation of her daughter’s vitality” (Wiltshire 185). There are moments when an indirect connection with Elizabeth is indicated, who, the reader remembers, was thought to look “almost wild” (Austen 8) after her walk to Netherfield in the mud. Obviously, Mrs. Bennet’s habitual impropriety is an impediment to her daughter’s chances of making a prosperous marriage. But the novel portrays something more intimate in the relation of the mother and daughter. It is possible that Elizabeth shares similarities with her mother, and when the mother is felt to be uncomfortably close to the self, the self is urged to escape from her, which is another reason for Elizabeth's alienation from Mrs. Bennet.

There is another purpose Mrs. Bennet’s silly character serves in the novel. Elizabeth certainly blushes many times with shame at her mother’s domination of the conversations she is a part of and she states, “ ‘Indeed, Mamma, you are mistaken,’ said Elizabeth, blushing for her mother” (Austen 31). On Elizabeth’s first appearance in the novel, for example, her speech is usurped by her mother. Observing his second daughter employed in trimming a hat, Mr. Bennet suddenly says to her, “ ‘I hope Mr. Bingley will like it Lizzy.’ ‘We are not in a way to know what Mr. Bingley likes,’ said her mother resentfully, ‘since we are not to visit’ ” (Austen 3). Taking over Elizabeth’s right of reply, she simultaneously displays herself as rude and resentful. Moreover, in this small scene Mrs. Bennet is the victim of one of her husband’s

habitual conversational traps. In addressing his daughter in preference to his wife, Mr. Bennet is by implication displacing his wife, and giving Elizabeth the attention and information he knows she craves. Even though Elizabeth has been mortified and embarrassed on such occasions, her responses to her mother never take the articulate shape that she allows herself in criticism of her father. She manages to maintain filial duty and reserve, except for one interesting occasion, when, at an apparently idle moment while Mrs. Bennet is lamenting the departure of Lydia and her husband, Elizabeth slips into her father's ironic mode of conduct, saying, “ ‘This is the consequence you see, Madam, of marrying a daughter,’ she tells her. ‘It must make you better satisfied that your other four are single’ ” (Austen 239). It is possible, then, to consider Mrs. Bennet's function in the novel as being the mother who, though accidentally, triggers her daughter's reactions and actions, which sometimes works in her favour. In “Murderous Mothers: The Problem of Parenting in the Victorian Novel”, author Joan Manheimer also takes a slightly different approach to Mrs. Bennet's character in terms of her function in the novel, which is in agreement with the above-mentioned statement. She suggests that, “The nineteenth-century novel, which relies as a staple on the story of the maturing and marriage of the young girl, provides us with a range of Terrible Mothers for scrutiny” (530). The author's claim that this bad mother can often be inadvertently helpful to her daughter and facilitate “the unions she is feared to endanger” (534). This statement can be confirmed by the fact that despite Mrs. Bennet's almost non-existent parental guidance, Elizabeth establishes her own identity and ends up in a successful marriage. Though usually unaware of what she is doing, Mrs. Bennet consistently promotes connections threatened by her daughter's modesty or pride. Early on in the novel, she forces Elizabeth to defend Darcy by responding to an imagined insult that Elizabeth feels compelled to intervene, “You quite mistook Mr. Darcy. He only meant that there was not such a variety of people to be met with in the country as in town, which you must acknowledge to be true” (Austen 31). Manheimer

claims that, "This defense anticipates the broader support of Darcy which Elizabeth undertakes toward the end of the novel and it presents Mrs. Bennet as a useful, though inadvertent, instructor" (535). This analysis of Mrs. Bennet's character in the novel suggests that whatever is lost to her daughters by Mrs. Bennet's silliness, is gained back by them from the purpose she serves in the novel.

5.2. Mr. Bennet: Like Father, Like Daughter?

One can say that Mr. Bennet character's function in the novel is to criticize the role of fatherhood set up by his society. Mr. Bennet is the victim of two circumstances that have come to dominate his life. The first circumstance is the law of strict settlement that was devised to keep estates intact, which means he cannot provide his daughters with dowries. Mr. Bennet's second mistake is his disastrous marriage. He married Mrs. Bennet for her youth and beauty and it is obvious to the reader that theirs is a marriage with no mutual respect, in which he merely tolerates the presence of his wife. They are an ill-matched pair, busy feeling sorry for themselves, while their children suffer. Trapped in such marriage, he takes refuge in his library. In "Mr. Bennet and the Failures of Fatherhood in Jane Austen's Novels", Mary A. Burgan notes:

Surrounded by the trivial conventions which ruled family life in the early nineteenth century and all but overwhelmed by their demands on his time and energies, Mr. Bennet is reduced to two kinds of retaliation which modern readers may find familiar and attractive: he seeks either to sabotage the social process through subtle practical jokes and verbal sallies or to retreat completely to the sanctuary of his library. Thus, Mr. Bennet can be seen as the only consistent and unyielding critic of society in the novel. (Burgan 538)

The narrator describes Mr. Bennet as an "odd mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character" (Austen 2). One of the better examples of Mr. and

Mrs. Bennet's usual verbal exchange and his sarcasm is displayed at the beginning of the novel when Mrs. Bennet is protesting to Mr. Bennet's use of words for their daughters, "You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves" (Austen 2). Mr. Bennet quickly replies, "I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these last twenty years at least" (Austen 2). The relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Bennett can advance no further than the limitations of Mrs. Bennet herself. The lack of any real communication in their marriage is perpetuated by her personality and her husband's response to it. This marriage is presented to the reader as a dangerous reality resulting from a choice of desire but maintained by the rigid social standards of marital necessity. Mr. Bennet has given up both his authority and his responsibility as head of his family and taken the role of sarcastic observer. It becomes clear throughout the novel that the price of his detachment is considerable since at critical moments he fails his family. Burgan concludes that, "His minor satirical victories are to be savored, but his preoccupation with them at the expense of his real obligations as a father causes him to forfeit the moral justification for irony as the novel progresses" (539). In particular, his foolish indulgence of his daughter Lydia's immature behaviour nearly leads to general disgrace when she elopes with Wickham. The narrator mentions that Mr. Bennet had "talents, which, rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters" (Austen 173). At a time when family manners are becoming more informal, he is always Mr. Bennet to his wife, and sir to his children, with only Elizabeth addressing him as papa. However, this type of communication does not mean that Mr. Bennet is a parental tyrant, rather a non-existent parent. The girls' laissez-faire education happens to suit Elizabeth and Jane, who are able to motivate themselves to develop, but it is disastrous for their three younger sisters. Their father sees this with his usual clarity but does nothing about it. It is almost as if he has written off his three youngest daughters, describing them as the silliest girls in England. He

states that, “they have none of them much to recommend them,” (Austen 2) and that, “they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters” (Austen 2). Burgan suggests that, “it is easier for him and less self-accusing to tell himself that their characters are unalterable” (540).

Mr. Bennet clearly has a favourite child and that is Elizabeth. There are two specific examples of his concern for Elizabeth’s welfare. The first is following Mr. Collins’ proposal. Mrs. Bennet insists on Elizabeth’s marrying the man and tries to get her husband to talk some sense into her. Mr. Bennet, when presented with the dilemma, calmly says, “An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must become a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do” (Austen 82). Mr. Bennet has long realized that his cousin is a fool and that Elizabeth would never be happy with him, so he will not comply with his wife’s wishes despite the financial security such an arrangement would bring to his daughter and the rest of his family. The other example is following Mr. Darcy’s last proposal. Mr. Bennet believes that Elizabeth has hated Darcy from their first meeting, but Mr. Bennet has been unaware of her change of heart. When Darcy asks for permission to marry Elizabeth, her father fears that she is making a mistake and marrying for something less than love. In urging her to be sure of her choice, he reveals a side of himself that he has shown only through contempt, his deep dissatisfaction with the woman he married. He tells his favourite daughter, “Let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life” (Austen 275). Mr. Bennet’s facade of indifference and ironic detachment is a defence against his frustration and grief, and his only protection against being hurt by being constantly reminded of his own error in choosing a marriage partner. Once Elizabeth has convinced him that she loves Darcy, Mr. Bennet accepts it, saying, “I could not have parted with you, my Lizzy, to someone less worthy” (Austen 275). Throughout the novel, the reader knows that Mr. Bennet is capable of

clearly seeing various situations, but here one sees that there is a warm, loving side to him which he does reveal to at least one member of his family. However, it is questionable whether or not he really becomes a better father to his children. Towards the end of the novel, he makes allusions to his parental rights and it may seem that he learned from his mistakes. He proclaims, "I have at last learnt to be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it. No officer is ever to enter my house again, nor even to pass through the village" (Austen 216). However, if examined more carefully, one can say that he is simply not capable of finding a sensible way of being a father to his children. He is either a distant father, almost non-existent, or wishes to be a traditional authority in the end. He is simply uncomfortable in the father's role. Nevertheless, his character in the novel serves to criticize the traditionally prescribed gender roles. Despite his failed fatherhood, which he is aware of, in urging Elizabeth to marry out of love and respect for someone, he can be viewed as one of the more progressive elements of the novel.

Elizabeth's self-assurance comes from a keen critical mind and is expressed through her quick-witted dialogues, which is reminiscent of her father. It is no wonder then, that the daughter who is most similar in intellect to her father ends up being the father's favourite. Just like Mr. Bennet, she in some ways feels she is superior to the rest of her family. They are both victims of transient moods of self-accusation. Mr. Bennet is transfixed by guilt upon Lydia's infamous elopement. The reader witnesses Elizabeth's self-reproach when she becomes aware of how "blind, partial, prejudiced" (Austen 152) she has been in her assessment of Darcy and Wickham. It is obvious that Elizabeth has a more loving relationship with her father than her mother, but she is in no way unaware of his faults. The narrator confirms that, "Elizabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what she could not overlook" (Austen 173).

What distinguishes the relationship between Mr. Bennet and his daughter is the clear-sightedness. Their relationship is founded upon full knowledge and respect for each other. However, Elizabeth differs greatly from her father in one important aspect. While her character is very much capable of change, her father is one of the least mobile characters in the book. In a novel in which people are active visiting neighbours or going on trips, Mr. Bennet is rarely seen outside of his library. His physical retreat from the world signifies his emotional retreat from his family and unwillingness to change and develop. Unlike her father, Elizabeth is not apathetic and addresses problems. Mr. Bennet's character does not grow, he recognizes facts and problems but chooses to do nothing about them. Elizabeth has to learn “how to control the tendency to irony which she has inherited from her father so that it will keep her from wounding those who do not deserve pain” (Burgan 541).

In “Father Figures in the Novels of Jane Austen”, Adli Odeh notes that Mr. Bennet does not contribute towards the development of the plot and that, “he is given to comment as an outsider” (38). However, on the practical level of plot, the entire Bennet family failings delay the marriage of Elizabeth long enough to provide the novel with the necessary narrative force. In fact, the whole plot of *Pride and Prejudice* can be seen as dependent on the dysfunctionality of the Bennet family. In changing the family dynamics, the adaptations change both the plot and characters. Also, Mr. Bennet's character functions as the critique of the traditionally prescribed gender roles. *Pride and Prejudice* is concerned both with the nature of marriage and the obligations of parents, for in choosing a partner, one chooses one's children's parent. The unsuitable marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and the uneasy interactions of the Bennet family as a whole are central to both these concerns and especially to the discussion of marriage that permeates the novel. If at the end of *Pride and Prejudice* the narrator justifies Elizabeth's expectation of marital happiness, in the body of the novel it is

certainly demonstrated that such a state is not easily achieved. In “Pride and Prejudice: Thought, Character, Argument, and Plot”, McKeon notes:

From this family framework, devoid of conjugal felicity and domestic comfort, the action of the plot runs through a sequence of discoveries and reversals determined, like the framework in which they arise, by the feelings and decisions of pairs of characters, Lydia and Wickham, Jane and Bingley, and Elizabeth and Darcy, to a resolution in which the impediments resulting from the marriage of the younger sister cease to block the marriages of the older sisters. (McKeon 524)

The parents that these young women have play a major role in the choices that they make when they marry. In Elizabeth’s case, she uses her parents’ marriage as an example of the marital union she does not wish for herself, which drives her further away from her parents in terms of developing her own opinions and expectations. The narrator informs us at a certain point that “she had never felt so strongly as now the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents” (Austen 173). Elizabeth recognizes that a marriage for the sole purpose of financial security, particularly when faced with such incompatibility, would be ridiculous. Her rejection of Mr. Collins shows her reasoning power in choosing a husband and her moral standing in refusing to accept what she knows to be a poor choice.

6. Parents and Children in *Mansfield Park*

6.1. Mrs. Bertram and Mrs. Price: Non-existent Mothers

Tony Tanner describes Thomas Bertram’s wife Maria Bertram as a “travesty” (152) of the values her husband stands for. Whereas Sir Thomas has been a repressive father to his children, Mrs. Bertram has been a non-existent mother. The narrator tells us that she, “spoke one word where he spoke ten” (Austen 9). At first, one may get the idea that Lady Bertram is

incapable of independent judgment, which makes her caricature-like. Certainly the character of Mrs. Bennet comes to mind when one mentions a caricature, but what differs Mrs. Bertram from Elizabeth's mother significantly is the fact that her actions are almost non-existent, unlike Mrs. Bennet who has an intrusive presence from the beginning of the novel. Mrs. Bertram does not interact much with her children. However, both parenting styles have the same consequence: they are damaging to the children. Lady Bertram is too devitalized to have any sort of moral existence at all, and as a guardian, she is useless:

To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not the time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long pieces of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than of her children . . . guided in everything important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister. (Austen 16)

Tanner observes that, "Under such guardians it is hardly surprising that the legitimate inheritors go wrong since they have not been brought up to respect and maintain their heritage" (153). Lady Bertram can usually be seen sitting on her sofa being catered to, and her lack of physical activity corresponds to her role of a beautiful wife (seemingly the reason Sir Thomas married her) and literalizes her psychological inertia as a parent and a wife. Her own family is aware of this and tends to either ignore her, make fun of her, or have conversations right in front of her without caring about her overhearing anything. However, if one carefully observes Lady Bertram's statements in *Mansfield Park*, one finds them to be significantly less silly than those of Mrs. Bennet. She may be lazy and indifferent to what is happening around her as long as it does not threaten her, but she is not unobservant nor does she fail to notice what is in her interest, nor what the motives of others are. For example, in the Shakespeare reading scene, she shows her capability of smart judgments when she declares, "You have a great turn for acting, I am sure, Mr. Crawford" (Austen 193). Knowing that Henry Crawford is, in fact, acting a role throughout the novel, the reader can read a lot into this line, which is

even more significant coming from a character who is not vigilant enough in observing those around her. What Lady Bertram does not want to do is “put herself to any inconvenience” (Austen 16). In contrast, Mrs. Bennet’s remarks are often lengthy and blind to what is happening around her. On the practical level of the plot, Lady Bertram’s lack of vigilance is crucial in the outcome of the plot for some of the characters in the novel. For example, she furthers the plans of Henry Crawford as he sets out to make Fanny Price fall in love with him. A quiet mother, considered only half awake is perfect for his strategies to be alone with Fanny. When the news of Henry’s proposal reaches Lady Bertram, she does not see the danger behind it, only the advantage. Her advice to Fanny, the only advice she offers anyone in the novel, about accepting a marriage proposal from Henry Crawford, is that “It is every young woman’s duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this” (Austen 266). When Fanny resists, suggesting that Lady Bertram would miss her, Lady Bertram dismisses the objection, “No, my dear, I should not think of missing you, when such an offer as this comes in your way. I could do very well without you, if you were married to a man of such good estate as Mr. Crawford” (Austen 266). There is no sentimentality or acknowledgment of their relationship in this response, only convenience. Later in the novel, when Mrs. Bertram hastens to greet Fanny on her return to Mansfield, she exhibits her characteristic selfishness, happy because Fanny brings her comfort. The narrator describes, “Lady Bertram came into the drawing room to meet her; came with no indolent step; and, falling on her neck, said, ‘Dear Fanny! Now I shall be comfortable’ ” (Austen 447). The reader can also interpret these lines in a different manner and conclude that Lady Bertram’s relationship with Fanny has progressed during Fanny’s absence. After all, they have bonded during Fanny’s stay in Portsmouth and written each other loving letters. But one cannot forget that the time Mrs. Bertram starts thinking more highly of Fanny is the time when Fanny receives the marriage proposal from Mr. Crawford. To Mrs. Bertram, it is the confirmation of her beauty and wealth

by which she determines Fanny's worth. The narrator tells us that, "beauty and wealth were all that excited her respect" (Austen 266). Furthermore, "To know Fanny to be sought in marriage by a man of fortune, raised her, therefore, very much in her [Mrs. Bertram's] opinion" (Austen 266). Conversely, her husband values Fanny for her firm moral principles. So, it remains open to interpretation whether or not Mrs. Bertram and Fanny's relationship has progressed to that of a loving mother-daughter relationship. But the fact is that the woman's devitalized state has made her totally irresponsible in the guidance of Fanny and other children. It has also allowed her sister Mrs. Norris to take control of parenting, which ended up being destructive for the children.

It is possible to notice similarities between Lady Bertram and her surrogate daughter Fanny in their calm demeanour, their domesticity and lack of stamina. However, Lady Bertram's quietness is a different kind of quietness than that of Fanny Price. Mrs. Bertram is simply indifferent. In this regard, Fanny, just like Elizabeth Bennet is capable of seeing outside her roles and of change. Tanner writes that Fanny "does not fully participate in the world, but as a result, she sees things more clearly and accurately than those who do" (157). Fanny is the only one who has been consistent in her right judgements. In her immobility, she is not paralysed. Fanny's quietness speaks volumes, and one can say that her quiet mind is actually the loudest one in the novel. Through her character, the narrator suggests that this is the right kind of silence, one that is capable of clear evaluation of how things stand in a world full of shifting standards. What distinguishes Mrs. Bertram in the novel is her subtle role in directing the movement of the plot. One can infer that without her withdrawal from the role of a dutiful mother, the play that the children put up during Sir Thomas's absence would never have been considered, and without her sleeping at convenient moments, the plot would not have been pushed forward.

Another mother almost completely absent from the heroine's upbringing is her birth mother Frances Price. Fanny's mother has fallen down the social ladder through her own marriage to a sailor who turns out to be a drunk. Her aunt Lady Bertram, on the other hand, does fairly well by marrying. Similarities can be drawn between Lady Bertram and Mrs. Price in their habits and attitudes. Both are lethargic and somewhat indifferent, and both are insensitive to their own children. To the capacity of Frances Price, "a situation of similar affluence and do-nothing-ness would have been much more suited" (Austen 313). Some may think that Fanny Price's mother meant to do her a great favour by sending her to live in a more comfortable environment. The narrator dispels that possibility when Mrs. Bertram explains that the mother actually wanted to send her son William, his mother's favourite, and that "her daughters never had been much to her" (Austen 313). One should take into consideration Fanny's mother's unfortunate life circumstances, i.e. living on a low income with a husband who drinks, but that should not be a justification for her behaviour towards her daughters. Fanny is a small child when she comes to Mansfield. Her initial moves along the social ladder will involve not marriage, but the adoption of surrogate parents. By virtue of her outsider status, she immediately establishes a place in the Bertram family system. She soon becomes a means by which other characters are defined in the novel. In "Stabilizing the Family System at Mansfield Park", Paula Marantz Cohen writes that Fanny's character also defines family as a family, stating, "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" (678). At the beginning, Fanny's separation from her birth home is physical and later, as an adult and during the visit to her parents' home, Fanny learns that the alienation runs deep within her and is permanent. During her visit to Portsmouth, she anticipates a joyous reunion with her family, but her parents, particularly her mother, fail to meet her expectations. The narrator informs us that, "Her disappointment in her mother was

greater; there she had hoped much, and found almost nothing” (Austen 313). While Fanny recognizes the material distinctions between Portsmouth and Mansfield Park, she refuses to acknowledge that socio-economic circumstances might affect her mother’s behaviour. Her assessment of the mother is almost merciless:

She must and did feel that her mother was a partial, ill-judging parent, a dawdle, a slattern, who neither taught nor restrained her children, whose house was the scene of mismanagement and discomfort from beginning to end, and who had no talent, no conversation, no affection towards herself; no curiosity to know her better, no desire of her friendship, and no inclination for her company that could lessen her sense of such feelings. (Austen 313)

Mrs. Price’s letter to Fanny expresses “so natural and motherly a joy in the prospect of seeing her child again” (Austen 296) and raises Fanny’s expectations, for she wants her mother to cherish her. The reader remembers that at the beginning of the novel Fanny was “as unhappy as possible” (Austen 10) and “afraid of everybody, ashamed of herself, and longing for the home she had left, she knew not how to look up, and could scarcely speak to be heard, or without crying” (Austen 10). In “Jane Austen’s Subdued Heroines”, Valerie Shaw notes that, “A Portsmouth Fanny meets her biggest challenge in having to face her own unimportance without being able to explain it in terms of inherited social position” (295). The narrator tells us, “She was at home. But alas! It was not such a home, she had not such a welcome, as - she checked herself; she was unreasonable. What right had she to be of importance to her family?” (Austen 306). The development of Fanny’s character can be interpreted as the consequence of her dislocation as a child at the beginning of the novel. Fanny’s adjustment to the new environment seems plausible. Early on, she acquired a code of behaviour and decorum, and she would develop a strong notion of justice and virtue and cling to it. Fanny insists on honesty and correctness from herself and judges others on the same scale. Her position of an outsider sharpens her sense of propriety and decorum. Since she has been marginalized at Mansfield for years, she wants to be central and significant. She refuses to

understand her mother's perspective because that could validate her mother's lack of interest in her, so she protects her own identity by rejecting her birth mother. It is better to characterize her mother as incompetent, and better to be a minor character at Mansfield than to feel like a nobody. The longer Fanny remains in Portsmouth, the more she identifies as a resident of Mansfield Park, which she now calls home. In describing Fanny's birthplace through her eyes, the narrator reveals that, "It was the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety," (Austen 312) that "Nobody was in their right place, nothing was done as it ought to be," (312) and that Fanny "could not respect her parents, as she had hoped" (312). The children are brought up wrongly in as much as they are brought up at all. There is no real affection or harmony, the household is chaotic and noisy. Tanner considers words used to describe the Portsmouth household, such as *rush*, *push*, *squabble* and *kick*, "the most violent Jane Austen ever used" (146). Amidst this chaos, Fanny is quiet and still. She represents the proper values necessary for the preservation of society.

In a broader sense, Fanny's passage from her mother's house to her aunt's house can be seen as historically significant in that it expresses that shift in the nature of family life actually occurring at the time Jane Austen wrote. Cohen describes Fanny's move from Portsmouth household to Mansfield household as a transaction between the families and notes that the Bertrams are "the kind of insular and inbred nuclear family fated to replace outer-directed families like the Prices" (673-74). The Portsmouth poverty highlights both the difference and similarity between the two mothers, each destructive in her own way, each neglecting the vital central role of the caring, nurturing mother. When Fanny returns to Mansfield Park, she fulfills her fantasy as the valued child, as she becomes the daughter Sir Thomas always wanted. The narrator reveals that "Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted" (Austen 379) and that "Now, on really knowing each other, their mutual attachment became very strong" (Austen 379-80). Mansfield is a place where she feels like her best self. "When she had been coming

to Portsmouth, she had loved to call it her home, had been fond of saying that she was going home; the word had been very dear to her; and so it still was, but it must be applied to Mansfield. That was now her home. Portsmouth was Portsmouth; Mansfield was home” (Austen 345). Fanny thinks of Mansfield as a place where “all proceeded in a regular course of cheerful orderliness; everybody had their due importance; everybody’s feelings were consulted” (Austen 315). Taking into consideration her initial position in Mansfield, one cannot fail to see the irony of her inclusion of herself in the everybody whose “feelings were consulted,” but her distortion of the reality is crucial to her growth. Shaw notes that, “Through the extreme contrast between Mansfield and Portsmouth she learns to weigh relative values, and what she rightly longs for is Mansfield as it should be - a combination of stable framework and contingent dailiness” (295). Mansfield ends up being a place where children grow up to be refined people, like Fanny and her sister Susan. Interestingly enough, this upbringing is not done by parental figures, but by themselves.

6.2. Sir Thomas Bertram: Authority over Affection

Sir Thomas Bertram is the chief guardian of Mansfield Park and plays an important role in the development of the story as the heroine of the novel happens to be his protégé. The dynamic between him and Fanny is the core family dynamic in the novel. At the beginning of the novel, he is presented as a character who values “domestic tranquillity” and “a home which shuts out noisy pleasures” (Austen 147). However, he is also a pragmatist who wishes to increase his wealth and refine his social connections. By showing that he possesses multiple sets of values, the narrator gives the reader a basis to interpret his reactions to situations later in the novel. To the reader, it may seem that he receives greater attention from the author and is drawn with more vitality than Mr. Bennet’s character. Sir Thomas is more involved with the upbringing of his children than Mr. Bennet, and he represents the patriarchal authority in the family, unlike Mr. Bennet who is dominated by women through

the entire novel. Through his parenting style, Mr. Bertram's expresses the belief that the character must be built "upon a careful, consistent, and firm parental nurturing of children" (Burgan 546). However, no matter how different the parenting styles of Mr. Bertram and Mr. Bennet, the effects on their children are unfortunately the same. Like Mr. Bennet, Sir Thomas married a woman with little wit, who infatuated him with her beauty. On one occasion, when trying to persuade Fanny to marry Mr. Crawford, the reader learns about Sir Thomas offering Fanny advice that clues them into the nature of his relationship with his wife, "You cannot be struck as I am with all that is wonderful" (Austen 264). The reason for his sternness when it comes to dealing with his children comes from the fact that he allowed himself to be infatuated once, so he does not want to be carried away again. His reserve is also an attempt to counteract the easy indulgence of his wife. However, the reader also learns that despite her neuroses and illnesses, Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas actually have a fairly loving relationship, unlike Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. The reader witnesses Lady Bertram's genuine happiness upon Sir Thomas's return from Antigua and is informed that she "was really extremely happy to see him, and [her] feelings were so warmed by his sudden arrival" (Austen 141). Nevertheless, his reserve, combined with Lady Bertram's indifference handicaps his children's moral and social education. Their education is entrusted to Mrs. Norris, Lady Bertram's older sister, who mistreats Fanny and spoils Sir Thomas's daughters, thus being equally detrimental to the children's upbringing. The reader later learns that Sir Thomas, just like Mr. Bennet is capable of being a thoughtful and sensitive man, but he lacks human sympathy that is apparent to the world outside. He is basically a just man, but he allows injustice to exist in his home by not paying enough attention. The narrator informs the reader that he is a man who "did not know what was wanting, because, though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him" (Austen 16). Shaw describes him as "not tyrannical in the literal

sense of the word but tyrannical in the sense that his good intentions have brought about bad results” (40). Most of all, Sir Thomas’s judgment is distorted by his excessive class consciousness and pride and the reader learns that most of his children do not respect him. “Their father was no object of love to them, he had never seemed the friend of their pleasures, and his absence was unhappily most welcome” (Austen 26).

Sir Thomas's house and his family look nice on the outside but have definite problems on the inside. His departure for Antigua gives further evidence of the destruction of family feeling by a rigorous and unresponsive fatherhood. Immediately after he has gone, the children put up a play *Lovers' Vows* which exposes the true intentions of the participants. They adapt the dramatic and erotic energies of the play to their own purposes. For example, Henry Crawford as Frederick manoeuvres to ensure that Maria, the object of his seduction, will play his mother. In their acting, paternal or filial love serves to mask erotic desire. Such an adaptation suggests that the struggles at Mansfield are those between generations, i.e. children and parents. Fanny is coerced into taking part in the play and what offends her about it is “thoughtless eroticism” (Tanner 165). The theatricals are stopped by Sir Thomas’s sudden return, who brings the traditional family structure back to Mansfield. The staging of the play as well as the rearrangement of furniture in his room is the direct violation of his rules and represent an attempt to bypass the permissible limits of expression. The narrator explains that, “it needed all the felicity of being again at home, and all the forbearance it could supply, to save Sir Thomas from anger on finding himself thus bewildered in his own house, making part of a ridiculous exhibition in the midst of theatrical nonsense” (Austen 145). The Bertram children know their father would disapprove and are therefore disobeying him in his absence, as well as choosing a play that, as Fanny realizes, is unsuitable for performance in a domestic circle. The sexual tensions created during the play between Maria and Henry Crawford, and Edmund and Mary Crawford, as they rehearse their parts too enthusiastically,

make the production of *Lovers' Vows* the turning point for the eventual collapse of the Bertram family group. Mr. Bertram's solution for chaos is to deny its existence by refusing to talk about it and by closing the family off:

Sir Thomas saw all the impropriety of such a scheme among such a party, and at such a time, as strongly as his son had ever supposed he must; he felt it too much, indeed, for many words; and having shaken hands with Edmund, meant to try to lose the disagreeable impression, and forget how much he had been forgotten himself as soon as he could, after the house had been . . . restored to its proper state. (Austen 148)

Sir Thomas's actions here give good insight into his character. He seems content with outward appearances and hopes that removing all traces of the theatre will make everyone forget about it. "Sir Thomas was in hopes that another day or two would suffice to wipe away every outward memento of what had been, even to the destruction of every unbound copy of *Lovers' Vows* in the house, for he was burning all that met his eye" (Austen 150). Paradoxically, Fanny, who is not even his real daughter, is the one who guards the symbolic value of the household in his absence. Edmund informs Sir Thomas that, "She never ceased to think of what was due to you [Sir Thomas]" (Austen 148). Fanny acts this way despite the fact that Sir Thomas was the one who set the conditions by which the restraints were placed upon her when she first came to Mansfield Park. The reader remembers his contemplation about "how to preserve in the minds of . . . [his] 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 remember that she is not a Miss Bertram" (Austen 8). In Mr. Bertram's opinion, his daughters and Fanny cannot be equal, but little does he know that he is yet to learn the guilt of his two daughters and that his own values will be carried into the next generation by the adopted daughter from whom he did not expect much. Upon Fanny's first arrival to Mansfield Park, when she was a little child, Mr. Bertram expected to see "gross ignorance" and "very distressing vulgarity of manner," (Austen 8) but instead, he saw the

opposite. The only character who recognizes Fanny's potential in learning from the beginning of the novel is her cousin and future husband Edmund who "knew her to be clever, to have a quick apprehension as well as good sense, and a fondness for reading" (Austen 20-1). Despite Mr. Bertram's pride, he is a generous man and would have helped Fanny's birth parents "from principle as well as from pride, from a general wish of doing right, and a desire of seeing all that were connected with him in situations of respectability" (Austen 3).

Throughout the entire novel, Fanny maintains her integrity, even though under great pressure to act differently. The narrator names her heroism the "heroism of principle" (Austen 213). Fanny, with her keen perceptions and her faith in her ability to reason out how she should behave, is an ideal and almost odd heroine. According to Shaw, "The other characters try to escape from duty into feeling, Fanny tries to escape from feeling into duty" (293). By a seemingly simple act of ordering for the fire to be put into her cold room, Sir Thomas begins to demonstrate his personal fondness of Fanny and it becomes clear to the reader that his wish is to be just in treating the adopted daughter, who is to become the father's favourite. His relationship with Fanny continues to progress following his return from Antigua, where he is presumably involved in slave business. Although the references to Antigua in *Mansfield Park* are a few, it seems that one would have no difficulty grasping the fact that a property in England such as Mansfield Park was maintained by the labour of the natives of a plantation in the colony of Antigua. To discuss the analogy between Fanny's position in the family and Mr. Bertram's alleged slave business in Antigua, it is worth mentioning Edward W. Said's reading of *Mansfield Park* in *Culture and Imperialism*. He writes that, "Almost all colonial schemes begin with an assumption of native backwardness and general inadequacy to be independent, equal and fit" (80). The reader remembers that upon her arrival to Mansfield, in Mr. Bertram's opinion Fanny was anything but equal to her cousins. It follows that it is possible to compare her position to that of a slave, and to draw an analogy between Mr. Bertram's role as the

patriarch of Mansfield and his ownership of a colonial slave plantation. Said writes that, “To earn the right to Mansfield Park you must first leave home as a kind of indentured servant . . . or as a kind of transported commodity . . . but then you have the promise of future wealth” (88-89). Said argues that Fanny's move from Portsmouth to Mansfield and her recognition and incorporation into the Bertram family is a “domestic . . . movement in space that corresponds to the larger, more openly colonial movements of Sir Thomas, her mentor, the man whose estate she inherits” (89). Furthermore, “blood relationships are not enough to assure continuity, hierarchy, authority” (Said 85). Fanny Price, the orphaned niece, ultimately acquires status superior to most of her more fortunate relatives. On Fanny and Sir Thomas's first meeting upon his return from Antigua, “He 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 has grown” (Austen 140). This greeting scene establishes a reversal that signals the new pattern of interaction towards which the family will move for the rest of the novel. Cohen calls it a “mutual recognition scene” (682) in which “the conventional nature of the roles is undermined . . . by physical appearance” (682). The reader is told that Fanny looks healthy and pretty, while Sir Thomas looks thin and worn. Cohen claims that weakness must accompany power and vice versa for the family system to exist in equilibrium (682). In other words, Sir Thomas has not suddenly gone all soft and still uses an authoritarian approach when trying to persuade Fanny to marry Henry Crawford. Tanner notes that his “domestic instincts are corrupted by mercenary considerations” (151). It is almost as if he wishes to be paid by Fanny for what he has done for her. When he realizes Fanny is resolute in her decision, he asks Edmund to exercise his influence on her. Odeh writes that, “When Edmund even fails, he uses what he conceives as, a medicinal project by sending her to Portsmouth” (40). Sir Thomas is under an illusion that whatever he thinks is correct, is consequently useful, but he becomes aware of what his repression towards his

daughters has caused them when his daughter Julia elopes with Mr. Yates little later on. Sir Thomas's concern about his other daughter Maria's marriage reflects a new attitude toward relationships between men and women. As mentioned in the first section of the paper, the early nineteenth-century society saw a new interest in marriages as companionate relationships: the man and the woman should not be only financially but also spiritually helpful to each other. One can assume that the trip Sir Thomas had to make in the name of business probably taught him something about the importance of family and relationships, and he does not want to see his daughter make a mistake in her decision of a life companion. Gradually, he and his substitute daughter also become much closer. The narrator explains, "It had been an error of judgment only which had given him the appearance of harshness, and deprived him of her early love; and now, on really knowing each other, their mutual attachment became very strong" (Austen 379). Like the relationship of Mr. Bennet and Elizabeth, Fanny and Sir Thomas's also progresses to mutual understanding and full knowledge of each other. The traits that at first made Fanny an outsider now appear to make her the character most like the father, and the one nearest to the centre of the family.

One can consider Fanny's growing affection for her substitute father to be the consequence of her birth family circumstances. She is quiet and delicate and was brought up in a chaotic household with no order. This very quietness and repose that Sir Thomas possesses are what she seeks, and Mansfield Park enables her tranquillity that she welcomes. During the course of the novel, Sir Thomas, just like Mr. Bennet, comes to a realization that he failed at educating his own children. The act of Mrs. Norris's departure is a relief for him, for he realizes that she was fatally flawed when it came to judgment, and he regrets entrusting his children's upbringing to her. Tanner notes that Sir Thomas "has cared about their elegance and accomplishments, but has been negligent of any moral effect on the mind" (151). In the final chapter, Sir Thomas is thinking about the mistakes he had made in the upbringing of his

children, regretting that he had not been more accessible to them. The narrator informs the reader of his enlightenment:

He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments - the authorized object of their youth - could have no useful influence that way, no moral effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition. (Austen 372)

It is Sir Thomas himself who finally acknowledges what has been wrong with his daughters and with his own direction of Mansfield Park. At this point, his sense of duty and parental regard resurface and he feels the consequences of his behaviour. His negligence as a parent leads to the disgrace of Maria at the hands of Henry Crawford. As Tanner states, "With his repressive, indelicate inflexibility, Sir Thomas nearly brings about the ruin of Mansfield Park, and it is only at the end that he finds himself truly sick of ambitious and mercenary connections and more and more appreciative of the sterling good of principle and temper" (152). In many ways, Sir Thomas functions as an antagonistic figure in the novel. After all, his niece's fear of him causes her great distress, and his daughters' dislike of him drives them away from home in a fit of rebellious behaviour that ends up in questionable marriage decisions. His strong moral principles, sometimes admired, other times are undermined and rendered useless by his lack of perceptiveness and by his unhealthy pride. But Sir Thomas is also a sympathetic figure. By the end of the novel, he is acutely aware of his failure. Odeh suggests:

His banishment of Maria for eloping with Henry Crawford even though she was married and Mrs. Norris because he sees how destructive she has been to his family, coupled with his embracing of Fanny as a daughter even before she marries Edmund, shows that he is changed. He has become a moral person, even if he will probably always remain an authoritarian parent. (Odeh 41)

Furthermore, in the resolution of *Mansfield Park*, which is a novel largely about the established order and its rootedness in the tradition, we witness the effective dethronement of the eldest child as the inheritor. Sir Thomas, the patriarchal figure, finally has to place his faith in a young woman of no fortune. The true inheritors of Mansfield Park are his second son and his wife of low birth. Benson writes that, “Even in this most hierarchical of novels, primacy is meted out to proved virtue rather than to ascribed worth” (549). In analysing this ending of the novel, Cohen notes that it 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” (676). Family relationships in *Mansfield Park* are focused on the quality of the interactive bond rather than the quality of the bloodline. Therefore the marriage of Edmund and Fanny does not mark the heroine's promotion to rank and influence, but incorporation within the Bertram family of the principles that she represents.

In a novel full of incompetent parents, there is another father in Fanny's life, one may say even more ineffective than Sir Thomas. Upon visiting her birth home, after spending years at Mansfield, Fanny's birth father Mr. Price is the ultimate reminder of a chaos that Fanny does not want to be a part of. She has grown so distant from the place where she was born, and her birth father, who is supposed to represent the head of the family and the household, is actually the very epitome of the values Fanny stands against in the novel. Whereas Sir Thomas indulges his wife's every whim, Mr. Price is a wastrel, disabled for active service from the navy, but always out of the house, who has over the years developed into a vulgar, prone-to-violence drunkard. “He swore and he drank, he was dirty and gross” (Austen 312). Mr. Price does not seem to even notice Fanny upon her arrival to her birth home, as if he does not wish to acknowledge her return, reducing her to “the object of a coarse joke” (Austen 313). The narrator informs us that Mr. Price was now “more negligent of

his family, his habits were worse, and his manners coarser, than she [Fanny] had been prepared for” (Austen 312). The reader is told that Fanny “had never been able to recall anything approaching to tenderness in his former treatment of herself” (Austen 312). However, Fanny did not expect much from her father to begin with, so upon her return, he is no greater disappointment than he had already been, merely a reminder of the world she does not belong to. Her mother, however, is a different story.

7. Conclusion

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* reflect both the social reform philosophy of the eighteenth century and the rise of industrialism which began during the second half of the eighteenth century and became increasingly important during the nineteenth. The view of the family unit expressed in both novels corresponds with the eighteenth-century ideal of the companionate marriage and proper parent-child relationships. This paper explores the family dynamics shown in the two novels since it is within the context of family interactions that both heroines acquire their value. Families represented in the two novels are inadequate because the parents have failed to achieve a healthy union and harmony in their marriages and have neglected their necessary parental roles. The errors in perception or judgment which the heroines must outgrow and the faults which make negative characters morally deficient are usually the results of inadequate or improper parental leadership. Nevertheless, the author expects the heroines to be more than just the products of external circumstances and events. In the course of the novels, Elizabeth and Fanny are shown to be influenced by the pattern of relationships in their families and the position they hold within the family structure. Throughout the plot, they become aware of the negative effects of their upbringing on their perceptions and rise above those limitations.

Fanny Price is the closest to an orphan since both her birth and substitute parents do not fulfil their parental roles. She is timid, silent, unassertive, vulnerable, passive, all traits we do not usually associate with heroines. She may be a morally impressive heroine, but is also remote from the wit and irony of Elizabeth Bennet. Tanner notes that some critics describe Fanny as "a monster of complacency and pride" (143). The narrator often uses the word *lively* in a positive way to describe the character of Elizabeth Bennet. Contrastingly, *lively* is used with negative connotations in *Mansfield Park*, in which the author draws attention to the conflict between liveliness and moral propriety. To have lively manners in *Mansfield Park* is

not a recommendation. However, Tanner carefully observes that Fanny Price is never wrong and that despite the immobility and passiveness of the heroine, *Mansfield Park* turns out to be “one of the most profound novels of the nineteenth century” (143). Both heroines possess an awareness of their actions. “I was quiet but I was not blind,” Fanny states (Austen 290). Even though they are different, both heroines are agents of reform. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the domestic reform comes in the form of assertive, active and outspoken Elizabeth Bennet. In *Mansfield Park*, it comes through the recognition of the marginal, the incorporation of the poor cousin into the family, and the validation of the domestic ideals of love, thoughtfulness, generosity, and constancy against the self-interest and vanity. Both Elizabeth and Fanny defy powers that try to coerce them to marry the men they do not want.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, we have Mr. Bennet and in *Mansfield Park* Mrs. Bertram as the perfect examples of overly permissive parents who fail to protect their children from their lack of maturity and judgment, and fail to instil self-control and strong principles in their children. In both novels, central interactions are between father and daughter. With his sternness, Sir Thomas Bertram is the opposite of Mr. Bennet and his leniency, and is an oppressive parent who alienates his children, often provoking them to rebel or escape. However, he has been unaware of emotional distance between him and his children, whereas Mr. Bennet has consciously withdrawn from participation in the concerns of his wife and younger daughters. Sir Thomas is angry when he learns that Fanny refuses to marry Henry Crawford and cannot comprehend how any young woman in her position would not like to marry a rich young man. It is in this attitude that he is most dissimilar to Mr. Bennet, whom we see initially objecting to Elizabeth’s marriage because he believes it would not be to her satisfaction. Even though being almost non-existent mothers and lacking proper moral guidance, both Lady Bertram and Mrs. Bennet have a very important role in the novels. In “Jane Austen and the Tradition of the Absent Mother” Susan Peck MacDonald explains:

The absence of mothers seems to derive not from the impotence or unimportance of mothers, but from the almost excessive power of motherhood; the good supportive mother is potentially so powerful a figure as to prevent her daughter's trials from occurring, to shield her from the process of maturation, and thus to disrupt the focus and equilibrium of the novel. (MacDonald 58)

This claim is supported by the fact that both Fanny Price and Elizabeth Bennet are not taught by their parents, but learn through experience and hardship. Through the characters of parents and children, the narrator suggests that neither extreme is effective when it comes to raising offspring. In both novels, the reader can see the child-parent relationship reversed so that Elizabeth and Fanny take on parental roles in the family. Elizabeth's strongest criticism of her father is that when he realized he could not improve his wife's character, he gave up trying to educate his daughters as well. She tries to persuade her father to forbid her sister Lydia from following the officers to Brighton, pointing out the harmful consequences of his permissiveness. Fanny takes on Sir Thomas's role in his absence and advises her siblings against staging the controversial play in their home, in which she refuses to participate.

In both novels, Sir Thomas and Mr. Bennet's characters seem to be criticised for failing to instil the moral principles of the rigid social order. On the other hand, both heroines challenge that order when refusing a marriage subjected to market values. It follows that the preservation of moral values and the family structure that instils those values are defended in the novel, but at the same time, the narrator warns against "false economics of affection" (Tanner 6) and moral collapse that comes from inadequate marriages. Benson writes that the disability of both fathers comes from "the pressures of social responsibility or the obstructive effects of privilege" (551). She states that, "The new husband generally provides the possibility for the creation of a new order, and there is a promise that the new order will be guarded from conventional rigidity and social malice by the freedom of the betrothed to be critical as well as loving" (Benson 551). Whereas their parents married mostly for the

traditional reasons fostered by the patriarchal system or out of physical attraction, Elizabeth and Fanny marry out of a deeper and well-tryed mutual attachment. Fanny's birth parents did not marry each other for money, but their marriage is equally unsuccessful because her mother and father do not share similar attitudes and their characters are incompatible. Burgan explains that, "the ways in which fathers are finally relegated to obscurity in all of her [Austen's] mature novels provide a gauge of the possibilities for individual rebellions within the family structure and thus soon within the society itself" (551). Mentioned earlier in this paper is the idea that absent mothers provide their daughters with the opportunity to mature and acquire their own identity through experience. Similarly, incompetent fathers force the daughters into an increasing reliance upon themselves. They must disengage themselves from the family hierarchy in order to survive. While the heroines overcome parental objections, they do not disregard the dictates of their society. The most important task of the heroine is to achieve a balanced union between her private emotional self and the requirements of her society. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* express the conviction that the needs and best interests of the individual can only be met within the context and boundaries of the society, but that the goals of society can best be met when personal and emotional needs of the individual are also satisfied. Through the course of the novels, Elizabeth and Fanny, as well as their future husbands, must learn to evaluate the commonly held beliefs and widespread practices of their society, recognize the limitations of the prevailing attitudes of those around them, particularly their own parents, and strive for a higher level of self-knowledge and moral awareness.

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