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**THE CRUX OF COMMUNITY IN JANE AUSTEN'S**  
***MANSFIELD PARK*: SELF-ENCLOSED COMMUNITIES,**  
**MASQUERADES AND SPEECH ACTS**

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*We're not just individuals, we're part of a larger whole and we must constantly have regard for that larger whole, we're dependent on it.*

(Theodor Fontane, *Effi Briest*)

*But whenever men live together, something have been established that's just there, and it's a code we've become accustomed to judging everything by, ourselves as well as others. And going against it is unacceptable; society despises you for it,[...] let's call it that social something that tyrannizes us.*

(Theodor Fontane, *Effi Briest*)

*Un fantôme ne meurt jamais, il reste toujours à venir et à revenir.*

(Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*)

*But this had been a sin of passion, not of principle, nor even purpose.*

(Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*)

#### **SUMMARY**

The aim of this study is to examine one of Jane Austen's most complex novels, *Mansfield Park*, from a theoretical perspective sensitive to the interaction between the individual and community as theorized in continental, post-phenomenological philosophy (Derrida, Nancy, Blanchot, Sloterdijk, Agamben, Esposito, Badiou). Austen's novels make an appeal to tradition and maintain a connection with England's pre-Reformation past and the types of community it created. Thus, the community of Mansfield Park represents a self-enclosed community which has not a potential for alterity and the coexistence of difference. Indeed, it is presented as an organic community where nostalgic origins have been transfigured into a quasi-mystical body. Besides, this community is organized around the experience of *belonging* and consanguinity. The characters' limiting immanence prevents them from exposing to alterity, or, in Nancy's terms, from achieving *clinamen*. Fanny Price, in turn, functions as both destabilizer and restorer of this operative community since she is at the same time an alien entity who has a position of social subalternity, and a spiritual authority in Mansfield. In that capacity, Fanny is like the supplement or *pharmakon* theorized by Derrida: a kind of catalyist enabling process otherwise impractical. The theatricals, the most masterful part of *Mansfield Park*, constitute the characters' attempt to verbalize sexual attraction and to create "elective communities" (Blanchot). Finally, whereas some of the speech acts performed by the characters in everyday situations do not always accomplish the sincerity condition laid by Austin in *How to Do Things with Words*, this condition is fulfilled in the theatricals, which are seen by the characters as an excuse to liberate themselves from the constraints imposed by society. Here lays the irony of *Mansfield Park*.

## RESUMEN

El objetivo de este estudio es examinar una de las novelas más complejas de Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, desde una perspectiva teórica sensible a la interacción entre individuo y comunidad tal y como ha sido teorizada en la filosofía post-fenomenológica continental (Derrida, Nancy, Blanchot, Sloterdijk, Agamben, Esposito, Badiou). Las novelas de Austen apelan a la tradición y mantienen una conexión con la Inglaterra de la Pre-Reformación y los tipos de comunidad que ésta creó. Así, la comunidad de Mansfield Park representa una comunidad encerrada en sí misma que carece de potencial para la alteridad y la coexistencia de la diferencia. De hecho, se presenta como una comunidad orgánica donde los orígenes nostálgicos se transfiguran en una experiencia cuasi-mística. Además, esta comunidad se organiza alrededor de la experiencia de la *pertenencia* y la consanguinidad. La inmanencia restrictiva de los personajes les impide exponerse a la alteridad, o, en términos de Nancy, alcanzar el *clinamen*. Fanny Price, por su lado, es tanto un ente desestabilizador como una figura restauradora de esta comunidad operativa, pues funciona a la vez como un ente extraño con una posición de subalternidad social, y como una autoridad espiritual en Mansfield. En esa calidad, Fanny es como el complemento o *pharmakon* teorizado por Derrida: un tipo de proceso posibilitador y catalizador de otra manera impráctico. El teatro, la parte más consumada de *Mansfield Park*, constituye un intento por parte de los personajes de verbalizar su atracción sexual y de crear “comunidades electivas” (Blanchot). Finalmente, mientras que algunos de los actos de habla realizados por los personajes en situaciones cotidianas no siempre cumplen la condición de sinceridad establecida por Austin en *Cómo Hacer Cosas con Palabras*, esta condición se cumple en el teatro, el cual es visto por los personajes como una excusa para liberarse de las restricciones impuestas por la sociedad. Aquí yace la ironía de *Mansfield Park*.

**Keywords:** *Mansfield Park*, Community, Organic, Inoperative, Unavowable, Bataille, Nancy, Blanchot, Speech Act Theory, Austin.

### 1. Introduction

Many critics –Trilling (1963), Craik (1968), Butler (1976), Tanner (1986) –have emphasized the complexity and the self-reflexive nature of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), and many orthodox hermeneutic models (formalism, structuralism) and politically committed models (post-colonialism, feminism) have been applied to this novel. Therefore, what I propose in this study is to overcome the hermeneutic exhaustion of *Mansfield Park* and to read the novel within a wider context that includes not only Austen’s other novels but also the works of her precursors, such as Richardson and Scott. Additionally, my aim in this study is to read the novel from a new theoretical perspective, the communitarian model theorized by the French thinkers Jean-Luc Nancy (1983) and Maurice Blanchot (1983) with George Bataille as a third participant in absentia. The analytical potential of the notion of community is extremely significant not only because novels reproduce pre-existing models of community, but because they construct and maintain models of community which do not exist yet. Thus, novels can be seen as textual constructions of alternative communities. This innovative approach is mostly applied to modern literary works which have a palpably deconstructive force but it is seldom applied to canonical works that are hermeneutically so powerfully knitted; here lies one of the main challenges of my analysis.

The present study aims to analyze this bipolar perception of community in *Mansfield Park*. To this end, I will provide an introduction to the novel based on Taylor's (2006) distinction between "pre-modern social imaginaries" and "modern social imaginaries," both emblemized in the characters of Fanny and Mary Crawford, mainly. Within the organic communities in the novel, I will make a comparison between the urban organicism of London (represented by the Crawfords) and the rural organicism of Mansfield Park (represented by most of the Bertrams), using Tönnies' (1883) distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* and applying both Taylor's concept of the metatopicality of the public sphere as well as Benedict Anderson's (1983) theory of "imagined communities" shaped by the powerful influence of print and media. Additionally, I will study the institution of Mansfield Park as a self-enclosing embryo, a traditional community sustained by genealogy, matrimony and patrimony, paying special attention to Bachelard's (1958) notion of "original belonging."

This self-enclosing nature of Mansfield Park is connected to what Derrida (1994) calls "the schematic of filiation." Thus, the homophilial friendships that unfold in *Mansfield Park* guarantee the inbreeding of the traditional community. On the other hand, I will also explore Austen's ironic intimations of a dismantling of the operative community through Fanny, an outsider who threatens the parental logos and destabilizes the organic community of blood, birth and genealogy in Mansfield Park, and through the theatricals, which unveil the frustrated desires of the characters. I have also focused on the hints of otherness which are ignored by most of the characters and on the castrating silence that surrounds them, which betrays the characters' inability to approach alterity. Besides, I will also analyze whether the community of Mansfield Park represents a viable community that endorses and guarantees the felicity of speech acts, and how the speech acts in the theatricals do not break all the felicity conditions originally discussed by Austin in *How to Do Things With Words* (1962).

## **2. Community: Theoretical Premises**

The term "community" has generated a prolific debate. In *The Conflagration of Community: Fiction Before and After Auschwitz* (2011), J. Hillis Miller offers an elucidation of Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of *unworked community* and Maurice Blanchot's related concept of *unavowable community*, which, in his own words, constitute "An Alternative Model of Community" (2011:13). These alternative models of community "unwork" the commonsensical model of community, the one "most people have in mind, explicitly or implicitly, when they speak of community" (2011:13). This community that most of us take for granted is created by a group living and working together. They have made the community through time. Besides, this community is the result of their collective and cooperative work and the product of a social contract they have, explicitly or implicitly, signed. Sometimes, this community is constituted on the basis of an explicit "constitution," such as the departmental constitutions at universities, the United States Constitution or the Spanish Constitution. (2011:13).

The commonly accepted model of community, which Jiménez Heffernan calls “organic” or “operative” (Jiménez Heffernan, 2013 b.) presupposes pre-existing, self-enclosed subjectivities who have joined other subjectivities for the common good. In Hillis Miller’s words, these subjectivities

have made together a language, houses, roads, farms, industries, laws, institutions, religious beliefs, customs, mythical or religious stories about their origin and destiny that are told communally or written down in some sacred book to be recited to the group. (2011:15)

Therefore, these subjectivities create a social contract based on myths and determined and supervised by what Althusser calls “Ideological State Apparatuses,” that is, “a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (1971:143).

In his alternative model, Nancy sees persons not as subjectivities but as “singularities,” and each singularity possesses a secret otherness that cannot be communicated to any other singularity. In addition, each singularity is fundamentally characterized by its finitude or mortality. Community is then defined by the proximity of death: “Each singularity is exposed, at its limit, to a limitless or abyssal outside that it shares with the other singularities, from the beginning, by way of their common mortality” (2011:16). Thus, as we cannot experience death in our own deaths, since death cannot be “experienced,” we experience it in the death of another, the death of a relative, a friend or a neighbor (2011:16). This model unworks the previous, organic one; it is a negation in itself, “the community of those who have no community” (Blanchot, 1988:24) or, in Derrida’s words, “a community without community.” Hence, instead of individuals with self-enclosed subjectivities, Nancy puts singularities that are originally *partagés*, shared, open to an abyssal outside. However, he clarifies that, in order to overcome total immanence, the inoperative community needs a relation between its members beyond “individualism,” what Nancy calls *clinamen*, a concept that he takes from Lucretius and which means “an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other” (2008: 3-4). The aim of this community is not a spiritual fusion or a transcendental communion but rather “being-together,” “being-in-common.”

This community is also unavowable, in the sense that Blanchot means in *La communauté inavouable (The Unavowable Community)*. It is unavowable because it cannot be publicly affirmed: it remains secret. Besides, this community does not allow for any avowals or speech acts. This does not mean that speech acts do not occur in the inoperative community, or that they are not effective. What it does mean is that these speech acts are not permitted by institutions or public laws since they threaten the operative community (Hillis Miller, 2011:23). For instance, an adulterous couple cannot seal their love *legally* since their union is institutionally not sanctioned. Thus, they cannot make felicitous love vows since neither the speakers nor the context are the adequate ones to perform such a felicitous speech act. Jacques Derrida, in turn, dislikes the connotations of fusion and communion that the word “community” implies (Caputo,

1997:107): “Why call it a community?” asks Derrida in an interview. He proposes a (non)community of dissimilars, of non-*semblables*. This (non)community is characterized by their difference from one another:

Pure ethics, if there is any, begins with the respectable dignity of the other as the absolute *unlike*, recognized as nonrecognizable, indeed as unrecognizable beyond knowledge, all cognition and all recognition: far from being the beginning of pure ethics, the neighbor as like or as resembling, as looking like, spells the end or the ruin of such an ethics, if there is any. (qtd. Hillis Miller, 2011:26)

The present study aims to analyze this bipolar perception of community in *Mansfield Park*. Indeed, I will explore Austen’s ironic dismantling of the operative community by using Tanner’s grouping of the characters in the novel as the guardians, the inheritors and the interlopers (1986:151-154). Within the first group, we find Sir Thomas, the chief guardian, Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris. Tanner asserts that in Sir Thomas’ absence Mansfield falls into confusion and when he comes back, order is reestablished. Mrs. Norris proves to be a major failure of judgment; henceforth Sir Thomas’ relief when she finally leaves Mansfield. Mrs. Bertram’s “sofa-bound inertia” allows for the dominance of Mrs. Norris. The inheritors are Tom, Edmund, Maria and Julia Bertram and the interlopers are, according to Tanner, the most interesting characters in the novel. This group includes Henry and Mary Crawford. They are associated with movement, “the unhindered expenditure of energy” and their wealth and vitality allows them to disdain limits and limitations. Fanny stands apart from these groups, although at some point in the novel she oscillates between them. I will also examine the different communitarian spaces in the novel, starting from the most organic community, the institution of Mansfield Park to the least organic, London. Additionally, I will pay special attention to the most interesting episodes in the novel, the journey to Sotherton and the theatricals (by far the most fascinating episodes in the novel); to the sexual innuendoes that are developed within these episodes; and to the possible (failed?) communities of lovers that fluctuate in the novel.

According to Hillis Miller, literature is “the imitation, or reflection, or representation of community” (2011:14). In contrast, Nancy argues that literature becomes “the expression of the unworking of community” (2008:93). As a loyal supporter of mimesis, Miller shows dislike for what he calls “some clever postmodernist fictions,” which “spend so much time talking about or revealing their own artifice that the magic power to create, out of the words of the page, the illusion of real people is in them disabled” (2011:95). Although Jane Austen is a highly metafictional writer,<sup>1</sup> as the theatricals and her own authorial comments demonstrate, she escapes Miller’s criticism insofar as she adheres to a verisimilar (realistic) model of community. Apart from this, although Austen was obviously unaware of the modern theoretical implications stemming from the communal dimension of her novels, I want to argue that there are some flirtatious intimations that she tried to unwork the commonsense model of organic

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, no other work by Austen has the act of interpreting, so ostentatiously dramatized in the figure of the heroine, Fanny Price, who works as the reader’s delegate.



community. Taking into account Hillis Miller's assertion that Victorian multiplotted novels are "models of community" (2011:14) and that these organic communities guarantee the execution of speech acts, I will also examine whether the different communities in *Mansfield Park* ensure the execution of felicitous performatives.

### 3. Organic Communities

#### 3.1. Conservatism versus Improvement: Monumentalizing the Past

In order to fully understand *Mansfield Park*, we should go back to the historical context in which the novel takes place. When Jane Austen was writing *Mansfield Park*, war with France had threatened England for twenty years and George III's waning mental condition caused the promotion of the Prince of Wales to Regent in 1811. The Napoleonic Wars had caused poverty to the laboring classes, whereas the wealthiest classes of English society continued with their extravagant way of living. Social dissatisfaction was prevalent and the nation was divided between those who defended that improvement should be achieved by requesting change as revolutionary France did, or by preservation of the old order. The conservative Edmund Burke urged his countrymen to value their heritage as if it were a rich old mansion: "It has a pedigree and illustrating ancestors. It has its bearings and its ensigns armorial. It has its gallery of portraits; its monumental inscriptions; its records, evidences, and titles," and he warned them that "Rage and phrenzy will pull down more in half an hour, than prudence, deliberation, and foresight can build up in a hundred years" (qtd. Stabler, 2006:11). In *Mansfield Park*, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces are embodied in different characters and narrative modes.

Fanny then belongs to the stable and traditional world of the eighteenth-century England. In his groundbreaking, *The Way of the World* (1987), Franco Moretti states that the historical progression of the *Bildungsroman* originates with Goethe and Jane Austen. The European *Bildungsroman* is full of parvenus, that is, characters with no fixed place in society but who, however successfully or not, move in society. Some of the most famous upstarts are Rastignac in *Père Goriot*, Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*, or Pip in *Great Expectations*. Tony Tanner asserts that Fanny Price also belongs to this group of characters (1986:142); however, she also differs deeply from them. Rastignac and Becky Sharp are characters with self-determination; *machine désirantes* who pursue a certain social status: "She determined at any rate to get free from the prison in which she found herself, and now began to act for herself, and for the first time to make connected plans for the future," says the narrator of Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (19). However, Fanny Price is "a girl who triumphs by doing nothing" (Tanner, 1986:143). According to Tanner, Fanny's "extraordinary immobility," her adherence to fixed principles and the fact that she, unlike Lizzy Bennet or Emma, is never wrong are some of the main reasons why she is considered such an unsympathetic character (1986:143).

In his essay, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004), the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, distinguishes between "pre-modern social imaginaries" and "modern social imaginaries" (11-12). The pre-modern society was structured by various modes of

hierarchical organization. It was organic, intrinsic, hermeneutic and ontological whereas the modern society was functional, prescriptive and contingent. Its basic normative principle is that the members of society serve each other's needs, help each other, and behave like the rational and sociable creatures they are. Thus, they complement each other. But the particular functional differentiation they need to assume to do this effectively is endowed with no essential worth. There is not any more an ontic distinction but a functional one. Balzac brilliantly summarizes this distinction in *Père Goriot*: "A man who boasts that he never changes his opinions is a man committed always to follow a straight line, an idiot who believes in infallibility. *There are no such things as principles, only events; no laws, only circumstances*" (102, emphasis added). In the novel, this polarization is epitomized in the characters of Fanny and Mary Crawford, principally. Thus, Fanny belongs to the stable world of principles and laws whereas for Mary there are only mutable events and circumstances; for Mary, "[a]ll that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned" (Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, 87). This polarization is explicitly conveyed in the episode of the journey to Sotherton. Indeed, Sotherton bears numerous similarities with Burke's old mansion. Thus, like Burke's mansion, it contains portraits "illustrating ancestors" which monumentalize the past of the aristocratic family:

*Of pictures there were abundance, and some few good, but the larger part were family portraits, [...]. On the present occasion, she addressed herself chiefly to Miss Crawford and Fanny, but there was no comparison in the willingness of their attention, for Miss Crawford, who had seen scores of great houses, and cared for none of them, had only the appearance of civilly listening, while Fanny, to whom everything was almost as interesting as it was new, attended with unaffected earnestness to all that Mrs. Rushworth could relate of the family in former times, its rise and grandeur, regal visits and loyal efforts, delighted to connect any thing with history already known, or warm her imagination with scenes of the past. (67, emphasis added)*

Consequently, the subject of "improving" can be equated with the "rage" and "phrenzy" of the French Revolution. Indeed, it creates divisions between Fanny and Edmund and the Crawfords. Fanny wishes to see Sotherton "before it is cut down, *to see the place as it is now*, in its old state; but I should not suppose I shall" (45, emphasis added). On the other hand, Henry Crawford is described as an "improver" (48). When they travel to Sotherton, the narrator tells us that "Henry Crawford was full of ideas and projects, and, generally speaking, whatever he proposed was immediately approved, first by her, and then by Mr. Rushworth [...]" (77). Like Fanny, Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility* is also shocked when she hears John Dashwood's plan for improving Norland by cutting down its trees to create a flower garden and a greenhouse. In *Persuasion*, however, the narrator refuses to lament the alterations of the homes at Uppercross (37). When meditation on Donwell Abbey, Mr. Knightley's home, Emma reflects that "[i]t was just what it ought to be, and it looks what it was [...]" the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding" (*Emma*, 358). In a novel about deceiving appearances, Emma admires an ideal of honesty, related with personal

modesty and respect for those values which are least susceptible to fashion (Lamont, 2009:311).

In *The Politics of Jane Austen*, Edward Neill points out that Fanny has a kind of Sir Walter Scott-like attachment to a “feudal” past which honors rank and royalty and a specific cult of nature, Cowper and memory (2001:73). Neill asserts that Fanny’s reflections on the name Edmund echo the reflections of *Edmund* Burke, the chief sustainer of the *Ancien Régime* (2001:73): “It is a name of heroism and renown –of kings, princes and knights; and seems to breathe the spirit of chivalry and warm affections” (qtd. in Neill, 2001:73). This is, Neill argues, one of Austen’s numerous ironies. Claire Lamont notices that the phrase “middle England” appears several times in Austen’s novels. Although originally it was a geographical term, it has changed its connotations and it has come to be used socially, to suggest what the *OED* defines as “middle class people in England [...] regarded as representative of traditional social values, non-metropolitan mores, or conservative political views” (qtd. Lamont, 2009:310). According to Lamont, Austen’s characters are good examples of “middle England,” with the condition that many of them have an unsafe social position (2009:310). Their conservatism and their snobbism is patent in their behavior to those below them. Within their houses are unnamed servants who only speak when their duties absolutely require it (Lamont 2009:310). Therefore, in these saturated social organic communities, finitude and otherness are transfigured into an essentialist social – and patriotic– discourse which prevents the temporary existence of an inoperative community. Fanny Price, Elinor Dashwood, Emma and Anne Eliot are conservative characters who seek to preserve things as they are and emphasize stability and permanence, placing a barrier to social otherness. Austen’s novels record an interest in the appeal to tradition and in maintaining a connection with England’s pre-Reformation past and in the types of community it created (Moore, 2009:322).

### **3.2. Urban and Rural Organicism**

The opposition between country and city is never more prevalent than in Mary and Edmund’s conversation about Mary’s harp in which she complains that the farmers will not lend her a wagon to move her instrument: “I shall understand all your ways in time; but coming down with the true London maxim, that every thing is to be got with money, I was a little embarrassed at first by the sturdy independence of your country customs.” Thus, an opposition is established between her London idea that money buys everything and the rural knowledge that money depends on hard work on the land (Jones, 1997:47). This is stressed, Jones argues, by the fact that it is a *harp* that she wants to transport and which she sees as being more important than the grass that the farmers have to transport with their carts. If we extrapolate these ideas, we can oppose not only country to city, but work and leisure, and money to be *earned* and money to be *spent* (Jones, 1997:48).

In her book, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, Marilyn Butler points out that all late 18<sup>th</sup> century moralists preferred the country to the town and, as we could expect, Fanny does so as an archetypal conservative. Indeed, she associates it with a community in

which individuals have precise duties towards the rest of the community and, physically, it reminds her of the broader ordered universe to which this community belongs (1976:224). Mary Crawford, in turn, has acquired the selfish values of urban life and she unveils her egotism when she complains that the farmers will not lend her a wagon to move her harp and her materialism when she remarks that in London money buys anything (Butler, 1976:224).

These two models of community, the rural one and the urban one, correspond to what the philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies, in his book *Community and Civil Society*, calls, respectively *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Tönnies argues that human interaction is based on relationships of positive mutual affirmation, and this relationship “may be conceived either as having real organic life, and that is the essence of *Community* [*Gemeinschaft*], or else as a purely mechanical construction, existing in the mind, and that is what we think of as *Society* [*Gesellschaft*]” (2001:17). This contrast between the “real organic life” and the “mechanical construction,” which is rooted in German idealism (Schelling, Hegel), has been widely exploited by the English romantic poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and their likes, and has become an exacerbated romantic trope (Jiménez Heffernan, 2013b.:16). This contrast sets up Tönnies’ entire sociological axiology:

All kinds of social co-existence that are familiar, comfortable and exclusive are to be understood as belonging to *Gemeinschaft*. *Gesellschaft* means life in the public sphere, in the outside world. In *Gemeinschaft* we are united from the moment of our birth with our own folk better or worse. We go out into *Gesellschaft* as if into foreign land. (2001:18)

Therefore, according to Tönnies, community, like a family, is not an artificial device, but a natural or biological product, whereas society is based on convention rather than concord, on politics rather than custom, on public opinion rather than religion. Society derives from man’s calculative and rational will; it relies powerfully on commerce and positive law, and is spatially oriented towards metropolitan, national and international life (Jiménez Heffernan, 2013 b.:17).

The rural community of Mansfield Park constitutes then a utopian and mystified community, a cultural chimera that stems from the ideological dissemination of human society. Its discursive articulation lies in the output of various constitutive and ideological tropes. One of these tropes is the idea of the *collective* (the people, the *Volk*) for it is based on the failure to recognize partition and finitude, and on the transcendental transgression of limited singularities. In *Mansfield Park*, this idea of the *Volk* is related to religion and morality. All these tropes come to the fore in the sequence that provides an ideological key to the novel, the journey to Sotherton. According to Butler, Sotherton is “a Burkean symbol of human lives led among natural surroundings, man contiguous with nature and continuous with his own past” (1976:225).

The immanence of this rural community is clearly patent in the scene in the chapel, where Mary attacks the function of clergymen and discloses the gulf between the

Crawfords and religious orthodoxy (1976:225). In this interesting conversation, both Edmund, who intends to take orders, and Mary, discuss the influence and the guidance that a clergyman has in his parishioners. Edmund argues that a clergyman is the guardian of “religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence” (73). Thus, whereas Mary disputes the fact that clergymen do not have much influence and importance in urban society, Edmund believes that it is in rural areas where clergymen can better exercise their influence and where parishioners are capable of knowing their private character. I quote at length from Edmund’s argument:

[...] We do not look in great cities for our best morality. It is not there, that responsible people of any denomination can do most good; and it certainly is not there, that the influence of the clergy can be most felt. A fine preacher is followed and admired; but it is not in fine preaching only that a good clergyman will be useful in his parish and his neighbourhood, where the parish and neighbourhood are of a size capable of knowing his private character, and observing his general conduct, which in London can rarely be the case. The clergy are lost there in the crowds of their parishioners. They are known to the largest part only as preachers. 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; the effect, in short, of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend; and it will, I believe, be every where found, that as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation. (73-74)

Consequently, the community Edmund speaks of is an organic, saturated religious community. Likewise, in Disraeli’s novel, *Sybil* (1845), the protagonist laments the disappearance of the old rural and spiritual communities (*Gemeinschaft*) and their replacement by the political computation and the inhuman aggregation of the *Gesellschaft* at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Jiménez Heffernan, 2013 b. 11):

As for community [...] with the monasteries expired the only type we ever had in England of such an intercourse. *There is no community in England; there is only aggregation*, but aggregation under circumstance which make it rather a dissociating than a uniting principle [...] It is a community of purpose that constitutes society [...] without that men may be joined into contiguity, but they still continue virtually isolated [...] It is their condition everywhere; *but in cities that condition is aggravated*. (*Sybil*, 64-65, emphasis added)

What is remarkable about these passages is that the role of the clergyman is to impose models of behavior and conduct and to indoctrinate his parishioners. Like all organic communities, it is prescriptive, as it imposes rigid community models based on the tropes or religion and social status. It is a community of subjectivities, of intersubjective communication, of social bonds and of collective consciousness. This sectarian community which predicates “good principles” and the continuity of religious customs obliterates the people’s individuality and their predisposition to alterity. The clergymen’s role is then to colonize and homogenize the collective (un)consciousness of

the parishioners. Indeed, Edmund attributes Mary's lack of steady principles to her having been raised up in London and to the influence of his uncle and aunt: "Yes, that uncle and aunt! They have injured the finest mind!" (221).

Edmund and Fanny's concern is then the "well-being" of the individual, *sub specia aeternitatis*, and the social validity of traditional forms of worship (Butler, 1976:243):

It is a pity, cried Fanny, that the custom should have been discontinued. It was a valuable part of former times. There is something in a chapel and chaplain so much in character with a great house, with one's ideas of what such a household should be! A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer, is fine! (68)

This passage displays a deep resemblance between *Mansfield Park* and Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. In both novels, the possibility of an inoperative community is dialectically reduced by the kind of immanent communion which religion endorses. Thus, Fanny and Edmund's "retrospective consciousness of the lost community" (Nancy, 2008:10) and their nostalgic evocation of past Arcadian days is stained by aesthetic-religious connotations (Jiménez Heffernan, 2013 c.:90). Like Lady Marchmain and Cordelia in Waugh's novel, Edmund and Fanny lament the loss of a family tradition that links them to a magnificent spiritual past full of symbols of spiritual suffering: they make "an anguished paean for the metaphysical coincidence of native soil (chapel), blood (family) and mystical body (communion)" (ibid.:99). Therefore, this communion encourages an ecstatic immanence which leaves no room for transcendence and alterity (ibid.:99).

Mary Crawford's materialist attitude is the result of her living in the mechanical and aggregational world of the *Gesellschaft*. Although the *Gesellschaft* is more reconcilable with the inoperative community, the urban community of London does not constitute a real inoperative community. Therefore, we see in Mary's observations how the city, in this case London, also homogenizes people's consciousness: "I speak what appears to me the general opinion; and where an opinion is general, it is usually correct. Though *I* have not seen much of the domestic lives of clergymen, it is seen by too many to leave any deficiency of information" (88). This is the result of what Taylor calls the "metatopicality of the public sphere." Taylor defines the public sphere as "a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media, print, electronic, face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these" (2004:86). The people involved in the public sphere have never met but they are linked in a common space of discussion through coffee houses and saloons. The general opinion that resulted from these discussions was considered as the public opinion. This public sphere transcends topical spaces and joins together a plurality of such spaces into one larger space of nonassembly. Hence, its metatopicality (2004:86).

In his work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson famously describes a nation as an "imagined community." Thus, albeit nations are too big to know everybody who lives in them,

human beings develop a capacity to imagine our fellow inhabitants as people *like* ourselves. When saying this, Anderson grants exceptional significance to print, and especially to newspapers (Anderson, 2006: 33-6). In Austen's novels, newspapers have special prominence since they are usually the occupation of idle men (Lamont, 2009:306). According to Lamont, Austen is always interested in the influential roles that newspapers have in the shaping of minds by shared reading and this is indeed the major subject of one of her novels, *Northanger Abbey*, in which Catherine Morland, "in rather a solemn tone of voice," articulated these words: "I have heard that something very shocking indeed, will soon come out in London" (*Northanger Abbey*, 111-12). Reading in Austen certainly enhances several imagined communities and she frequently deals with the parallel attitudes which result from differences in reading. This is exactly what happens in Mary and Edmund's conversation about ordination. Mary's remarks are imbued by the general opinion that has stemmed from newspapers and coffee houses. Her voice has been absorbed by the power of *doxa*, ideology.

Mary Crawford is a character who belongs to the picaresque tradition of Cervantes, Smollet and Fielding. She is vain and superficial and she grows with the typical ambition of marrying for money (Butler, 1976:221). Like Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* or *Vautrin* in *Le Père Goriot*, she has no morality and money and success are her ruling motives: "So you no longer have any ethics. Today, with you, success is the ruling motive for all the action you take of whatever kind" says the priest in *Lost Illusions* (qtd. Moretti, 2000:129). Her principles are quite hedonistic and worldly as they include the belief that there are no values but material ones, and that the satisfaction of the self is the only possible goal (Butler, 1976:222): "Everybody should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage" (34). Thus, we can see the commodification of Mary's libidinal energies and her attachment to one of the most visible signs of patrimony, money: "The properties of money are my, the possessor's properties and essential powers... I am wicked, dishonest, unscrupulous individual, but money is respected, and so is its owner... Through money I can have anything the human heart desires" (Marx, 1975:377).

As opposed to Maria Bertram, who is hardly aware of the moral implications of what she does, Mary *is* consciously cynical (Butler, 1976:225). Thus, she ridicules Maria Bertram when she (Maria) has learned that Henry is in love with Fanny: "I hope she will recollect it, and be satisfied, as well she may, with moving the queen of a palace, though the king may appear best in the back ground [...]" (309). Although Mary is clearly indifferent to the social aspect of religion ("duty and morals") and to its spiritual pursuit of self-knowledge (Butler, 1976:226), Mary's feelings are contaminated by the constant *in-flowing* (Trilling) of the public sphere. Urban life in London has corrupted her (as well as Henry's) libidinal energies by a nascent capitalism. This commodification of her feelings and her reliance on public opinion prevents Mary from participating in otherness through exposure of inner selfhood to the outside. In turn, Fanny's instant hostility to the unprincipled and superficial Crawfords, her censure of Mary's disregard for old-established religious practices at Sotherton and her disapproval

of the theatricals stress her strong Evangelicalism. According to Butler, Fanny is “the steady critic of worldly vanities” who “is rightly to become a leader of the reformed community (1976:243).

### 3.3. Mansfield Park as a Self-Enclosing Embryo

The institution of Mansfield Park is also an organic, saturated community as it is based on what Derrida, in *The Politics of Friendship*, calls a “schematic of filiation,” which is grounded on “stock, genus or species, sex (*Geschlecht*), blood, birth, nature, nation” (2006:8). Genealogy and blood are indeed highly important in the community of Mansfield as they preserve and perpetuate what Blanchot calls the “traditional community,” that is, a *de facto* sociality, or, according to Blanchot, “the glorification of the earth, of blood or even of race” (1998:46). This traditional community is sustained by three important pillars: genealogy, matrimony, and patrimony.

In his essay on the novel, Trilling argues that Fanny “is overtly virtuous and consciously virtuous” and that the shade of Pamela “hovers over her career” (1963: 128). Indeed, like Pamela after the death of her Lady, Fanny has an unsafe political position when she arrives at Mansfield Park since she does not fit within the communities of the house: the society between parents and children, between brothers and sisters, and between masters and servants. In his essay, “Pamela’s Hands: Political Intangibility and the Production of Manners” (2013), Jiménez Heffernan analyzes the theme of *maintenance* in *Pamela* and makes a parallelism between the patriarchal political theory of Filmer and Hobbes and the domestic sphere. According to Jiménez Heffernan, the “new compulsiveness of [Pamela’s] letter-writing evinces a deep-seated yearning to reactivate the terms of an original community (parents-daughter) that still enjoins her with duties and obligations” (2013:29). Thus, like Pamela yearns to renew the familial ties which link her to her parents, Fanny also yields to letter-writing with her brother, William, and lately, when Sir Thomas encourages (or orders) her to visit her home in Portsmouth, she is delighted with the idea of being surrounded by her *equals*:

To be in the centre of such a circle, loved by so many, and more loved by all than she had ever been before, to feel affection without fear or restraint, *to feel herself the equal of those who surrounded her*, [...] –This was a prospect to be dwelt on with a fondness that could be but half acknowledged. (290, emphasis added)

Fanny is admitted in Mansfield Park because she is somehow part of the family: “Is not she a sister’s child?” (6) asks Mrs. Norris rhetorically to convince Sir Thomas of adopting Fanny Price. This appeal to consanguinity is annulled by Sir Thomas’ reassurance that “they cannot be equals. *Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different.* It is a point of great delicacy [...]” (9, emphasis added). Consequently, albeit they share the same blood, due to Fanny’s low social status, she is devalued by the family, especially by the Miss Bertrams and by Mrs. Norris, who thinks that “it is much more desirable” that there should be a difference between Fanny and her cousins (16).



As women could not inherit their fathers' patrimony in 19<sup>th</sup> century English society, their main concern was to marry a prosperous man, and this is the reason why Maria Bertram considers "her evident duty" to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could (31). Mary Crawford, on her part, had the presentiment that she "should" like the eldest son, Tom Bertram, best. Obviously, Tom Bertram, being Sir Thomas' eldest son, would be the heir of Mansfield Park and of all of Sir Thomas' property:

*Miss Crawford soon felt, that he and his situation might do.* She looked about her with due consideration, and *found almost every thing in his favour, a park, a real park five miles around, a spacious modern-built house,* so well placed and well screened as to deserve to be in any collection of engravings of gentlemen's seats in the kingdom, and wanting only to be completely new furnished –pleasant sisters, a quiet mother, and an agreeable man himself –with the advantage of being tied up from much gaming at present, by a promise to his father, and of being Sir Thomas hereafter. *It might do very well; she believed she should accept him;* and she began accordingly to interest herself a little about the horse which he had to run at the B—races. (38, emphasis added)

However, Mary's interests change and she sets her eyes on the second son, Edmund Bertram. Thus, when she learns that Edmund is going to take orders, Mary, quite astonished, claims that "there is generally an uncle or a grandfather to leave a fortune to the second son" (72) so it would be unnecessary for Edmund to have a profession. When Tom is about to die due to his debauched salutary habits, Mary exposes her "natural," "philanthropic," and "virtuous" wishes that Tom would die so that "Sir Edmund" would inherit all the Bertram property (341). At bottom, grounding Mary's selfish remarks is the dialectic between possession and dispossession, or what Sir Walter Scott called in *Waverley* "Patrimonial Injury" (*Waverley*, 124). Thus, Tom Bertram's death would ensure Edmund's subsequent inheritance of the whole of Sir Thomas' property.

We have seen how patrimony is crucial in this traditional, organic community.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, most of the characters in the novel have a link through spatial belonging to Mansfield Park. Gaston Bachelard speaks of a sense of "original belonging" or "protected intimacy" that "is physically inscribed in us, it is a group of organic habits" (1958:8, 14) that make us believe in a pre-established idea of home, which we can connect with organicist nationalist transfiguration. Thus, despite her initial enthusiasm about going to Portsmouth, Fanny ends up rejecting her original home and clinging to Mansfield as her genuine *home*:

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<sup>2</sup> Nation is also quite significant in *Mansfield Park*. Thus, Sir Thomas exerts the same patriarchal control in his Antigua plantations as he does in Mansfield Park. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said asserts that, more visibly than anywhere else in her fiction, "Austen here synchronizes domestic with international authority, making it plain that the values associated with such higher things as ordination, law, and propriety must be grounded firmly in actual rule over and possession of territory" (1994:104). This colonial authority enhances the national organicism of both England and the institution of Mansfield.

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 the home. Portsmouth was Portsmouth; Mansfield was home. (338)

Fanny's immanence-inclined individualism prevents her from entering Blanchot's negative community where such links are not so important. In addition, the ending of the novel in which Fanny and Edmund finally become the legal inheritors of Mansfield, suggests the community's constant renewal from generation to generation. This renewal gives it a kind of collective immortality since, as Hillis Miller argues, "the living together of individuals in a community tends to project a hypothetical sempiternal 'community consciousness' or 'collective consciousness'" (2011:14). In this "collective consciousness," death tends to be suppressed and almost forgotten.

Consequently, Mansfield Park is a self-enclosed and inbreeding community which has not a potential for otherness and the coexistence of difference. Indeed, it is presented as an organic community where nostalgic origins have been transfigured into a quasi-mystical body. This enclosed community follows the pattern discussed by Tönnies (2001:27), where a community of blood develops into a community of place and this, in turn, into a quasi-spiritual community, in this case the idealization of Mansfield as a self-enclosing embryo. This attachment to the land, and hence to property, is seen as a hindrance in the construction of new relationships based on friendship and hospitality.

### 3.4. "Is not she a sister's child?": Homophilial Friendship

This self-enclosure and inbreeding is never more emblemized than in the community that Fanny, her brother William and Edmund form. In *The Politics of Friendship*, Derrida makes a parallelism between friendship and politics, specifically republican democracy and asserts that "the figure of the friend" regularly comes "back on stage with the features of the *brother*" and that it "seems spontaneously to belong to a *familial, fraternalist* and thus *androcentric* configuration of politics" (2006:8). Derrida proposes, instead, "a friendship which goes beyond this proximity of the congeneric double, beyond parenthood, the most as well as the least natural of parenthood" (2006:8).

This "schematic of filiation" Derrida refers to is at the center of Fanny's relationship with both her brother and Edmund. Like the institution of Mansfield, this community is grounded on "stock, genus or species, sex (*Geschlecht*), blood, birth, nature, nation" (2006:8). Thus, when describing the close relationship between William and Fanny, Austen makes a strong eulogy of fraternization and states that "[c]hildren of the same family, the same blood, with the same first associations and habits, have some means of enjoyment in their power, which no subsequent connections can supply" (183). Similarly, Fanny and Edmund's relationship is also depicted in fraternal terms: "[...] and whether it might not be a possible, an hopeful undertaking to persuade her *that her*

*warm and sisterly regard for him would be foundation enough for wedded love*" (369, emphasis added).

Following Derrida, we can argue that this kinship (*suggéneia*) between William and Fanny, produces a constant, homophilial friendship because it is based on *homogeneity*, on *hemophilia*, on a solid and fixed affinity (*bébaion*) which stems from birth, that is, from native community. As this kinship is real (and not just spoken), this syngenealogy assures the strength of their social bond in life (2006:929) but it prevents them from experiencing "laceration" (Bataille), that is, from exposing themselves to the other that makes them singularities. Jane Austen outlines here an ideology of organicism and homogeneity since she perpetuates the genealogical schema which is grounded on "the approbation given to filiation, at birth and at the origin, to generation, to the familiarity of the family, to the proximity of the neighbor –to what axioms too quickly inscribe under these words" (2006:105).

In 1790, Edmund Burke argued that the political wisdom of England can be found in the policy "the image of a relation in blood" (Burke 1790:120). According to Coleman, in a revolutionary era, the metaphor of kinship is a deeply political act (2009:302). Hence, we can see in this period a really democratic appeal to a shared human nature, the progressive growth of the rights of women and the rights of slaves. This development co-occurs with a movement inwards, a restraining of the wider possibilities of kinship (Coleman, 2009:302). The Crawfords, with their corrupted urban morality, are expelled from Mansfield, and Fanny's sister, Susan, is called to replace her place, becoming, then, a "stationary niece" (371). The family circle is drawn firmly inwards (Coleman, 2009:302). Thus, Edmund's fraternal embrace at the end of the novel: "My Fanny –my only sister– my only comfort now" (349) is quickly shadowed by the conjugal embrace, as the narrator abruptly concludes: "I only entreat everybody to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and *became as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire*" (369, emphasis added).

Accordingly, everything remains *within* the family at Mansfield Park since the marriage between Edmund and Fanny has achieved the restoration of the institution of Mansfield. Fanny, then, has won the rights to become a member of the family now that Sir Thomas thinks of her as "the daughter that he wanted" (371). Once the shadow of Mary Crawford has vanished, a potential threat to this syngenealogy –though not to rank and social status– this native community can be perpetuated. For Derrida, kinship cherishes a constant and homophilial friendship which assures constancy beyond discourses. Provided that this kinship is real, this syngenealogy guarantees the strength of the social bond in life (2006:92). Mansfield Park is then configured on the experience of *belonging* and sharing of blood, family, religion, ethnicity, homeland, nation, country, state, love, friendship and even humanity (Derrida, 2006:80).

## 4. Inoperative Communities

### 4.1. Failed Attempts to Approach The Other

Although we have seen the institution of Mansfield Park as a deeply organic community, it contains several hints of otherness which are ignored by most of the characters but which have called the attention of many critics: the fact that Mansfield Park is sustained by Sir Thomas' Antigua plantations which are maintained by slave labor; Maria's rejection of the inhabitants of the cottages at Sotherton as "a disgrace;" and Maria and Henry's elopement. The critic John Wiltshire has criticized the way in which postcolonial critics have "colonized" *Mansfield Park* and have equated Fanny with a slave and Mansfield Park with Antigua (Wiltshire 2006:69-86). However, the colonial issue is very prominent in *Mansfield Park*.<sup>3</sup> In the so-much discussed and controversial passage in which Fanny reminds her cousin that, after asking Sir Thomas about the slave trade, "there was such a dead silence" (155), we find the major approach to racial otherness:

*And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject, I did not like –I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel. (155, emphasis added)*

According to Said, this silence seems to suggest that there is no language for this matter (Said, 1994: 105). Here we find the seed of an inoperative community, in Fanny's failed attempt to approach the Other, to resurrect subjugated knowledges and "to revive hidden or forgotten bodies of experiences and memories" (Medina, 2011:11). Thus, she has played with the idea of the Other, but she never actually undertakes the trip.

A second intimation of otherness in the novel takes place when Maria Bertram is boasting to Mary Crawford about Sotherton, which will become her future property: "Now we shall have no more rough road, Miss Crawford; our difficulties are over. The rest of the way is such as it ought to be. Mr. Rushworth has made it since he succeeded to the estate. Here begins the village. *Those cottages are really a disgrace*" (65, emphasis added). Maria's lack of concern for the inhabitants of the cottages at Sotherton outlines the community of Mansfield's rejection of the social other, whose place in society they –the inhabitants of Mansfield– do not want to recognize (Lamont, 2009:310). An equally noteworthy rejection of otherness takes place in *Emma* when a party of gypsies interposes in a public road and the characters' instinctive response is to flee (*Emma*, 333).

The third and last intimation of otherness in the novel is expressed in Maria and Henry's elopement. Ruth Bernard Yeazell notes that Fanny experiences a "shuddering of horror" (346) when she learns about Henry and Maria's elopement. She argues Fanny

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, in her adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (1999), Patricia Rozema exploits the issues of slavery and plantations. Indeed, slavery becomes central in the plot line and the film displays very explicitly the treatment of slaves in Antigua.

is alarmed because of “people dangerously out of place, of accustomed categories blurred and confounded” (qtd. Coleman, 1984:135). For Coleman, Fanny is so traumatized that she cannot even mention Maria and Henry by their names and she simply refers to them as a “woman” and a “man:”

A woman married only six months ago, a man professing himself devoted, even *engaged*, to another –that other her near relation– the whole family, both families connected as they were by tie upon tie, all friends, all intimate together! –it was too horrible a confusion of guilt, too gross a complication of evil, for human nature, not in a state of utter barbarism, to be capable of! (346)

This taxonomical indeterminacy scares Fanny. In fact, this is not the only instance in which Maria loses her name and, consequently, her identity. Thus, when Edmund relates Mary’s shocking opinions to Fanny, he declares: “She reprobated her brother’s folly in being drawn by *a woman* whom he had never cared for” (357, emphasis added). Henry and Maria have stepped aside from what is socially permitted and what is institutionally sanctioned, so there are available names neither for them nor for their anomic society. This elopement emblemizes then the dialectical tension between subjective unrest (the individual) and the objective order (the *nomos*) that is frequently dramatized in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century England.

Mary Crawford is the only character who does not act as a severe judge when talking about Maria and Henry’s elopement. Thus, she dares to mention Maria’s name in front of Edmund: “[...] poor Maria, in sacrificing such a situation, plunging into such difficulties, under the idea of being really loved by a man who had long ago made his indifference clear” (357). Besides, Mary considers the elopement as a mere folly and, as opposed to Edmund and Fanny, she does not see any evil resulting from Henry and Maria’s elopement. Thus, she insists that, with the passage of time, Maria will eventually be re-accepted in society, or at least in certain societies: “In some circles, we know, she would never be admitted, but with good dinners, and large parties, there will always be those who will be glad of her acquaintance; and there is, undoubtedly, more liberality and candour on those points than formerly” (359).

We have seen how otherness is displayed in the novel and, yet, characters are incapable of exploring and assimilating it. In the first case, we see Sir Thomas and the Bertram girls’ inability to answer Fanny’s enquiry about slave trade in Antigua and Fanny’s subsequent lack of courage to enquire further whereas in the second case everybody fails to notice –or they simply do not care about it– Maria’s selfish and snobbish remark about the cottages at Sotherton. Finally, in the third manifestation of otherness, Henry and Maria’s elopement is condemned by all the characters except Mary Crawford. Not only does Maria lose social status and communal respect, she loses her name, which is an indicator not only of social identity but also of personal identity. Additionally, characters such as Fanny do not know how to confront such an affront to the traditional community in particular and to the *Gemeinschaft* in general. The inability to utter this approach to alterity is the secret around which Blanchot’s unavowable community is established since secrecy is the basis of the unavowable community. We

are in fact confronted with a castrating silence that betrays the characters' impossibility of understanding otherness (Rodríguez Salas, 2013:69). This view stresses the limiting immanence that most of Austen's characters, seemingly satisfied within their ego-limits and unable to open up to the desired alterity of the inoperative community.

#### **4.2. Fanny Price: An Outsider who Threatens the Parental Logos**

It is clear that Fanny Price does not have a predisposition towards alterity, however, she *does* constitute an alterity figure. In fact, Fanny somehow threatens and destabilizes the organic community of blood, birth, social status and genealogy of Mansfield Park. Fanny is the encroaching satellite of a family system, the domestic intruder who "shakes up the threatening dogmatism of the paternal logos: the being that is, and the non-being that is not" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000:5). Fanny Price, one of the weakest and most helpless of Jane Austen's heroines, is the only character in the novel who shows enough independence of mind and who dares to contest the authority of the master of the house. Thus, Fanny is responsible for the three greatest speech acts of refusal in the novel: she absolutely refuses to take part in *Lovers' Vows*; she resolutely says "No" to Henry's marriage proposals, and she repeats her negation in front of the "chief guardian" (Tanner, 1983:151), Sir Thomas. In this sense, Fanny can be equated to one of Austen's most self-determining heroines, Lizzy Bennet. Tanner points out that Fanny is "a true speaker" since she does not hesitate to refuse a false discourse and a false economics of affection where marriage was subjected to the dominant ethos of market values (1986:6).

In Tanner's illuminating division of the characters into guardians (Sir Thomas), inheritors (Tom, Edmund, Maria and Julia) and interlopers (Henry and Mary Crawford), there is no room for Fanny. However, Fanny, I claim, is the main interloper in the novel. Although she is the Bertrams' cousin, she does not have the same line of descent. Besides, Fanny has status inconsistency since she is charitably admitted at the house as a kind of handy servant who is always ready to help –we cannot forget that both Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Bertram "found her very handy and quick in carrying messages, and fetching what she wanted" (20) –but, like Pamela, she ends up as a legitimate wife. Derrida argues that it is the master of the house, the chief guardian, the one who lays down the laws of hospitality (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000:149). Absolute hospitality requires then that the father opens up his home and gives place to the outsider, to the foreigner or to the absolute other without asking anything from them (ibid.:25). This hospitality requires a clear demarcation of thresholds between the familial and the non-familial; between what is mine and what is yours; between the private and the public, etc. (ibid.:49). Nevertheless, wherever a home is threatened, Dufourmantelle argues, there is a privatizing and even familialist response by widening, in this case, the homofamilial and communal circle (ibid.:53). Thus, Mrs. Norris defends that there should be a difference between Fanny and her cousins so she is provided with the smallest and less comfortable room in the house. Not even the most basic rights, such as the right to light a fire in her room, are granted to Fanny.

Although she is an alien entity with a position of social subalternity in Mansfield, Fanny Price, like Pamela, is a sort of subaltern who has a station of spiritual authority (Jiménez Heffernan, 2013 d.:35). According to what Lawrence Sterne has called “the companionate marriage,” the woman gives up political control to the male in order to obtain exclusive authority over domestic life, morality, emotions, and taste (qtd. Armstrong, 1987:41). Only this spiritual authority has the power of really reforming the conduct (Jiménez Heffernan, 2013 d.:35). Therefore, Sir Thomas, at the end of the novel, reflects that Fanny “was indeed the daughter that he wanted” (371) since she had steady principles and a sober temper. Indeed, Fanny Price becomes “the spiritual mistress of Mansfield Park” (Said, 1993:101), the best judge of parental mismanagement and the most judicious critic of the social theatricals that develop around her.

According to Jiménez Heffernan, in patriarchalist political theory, the higher authoritative hand in a state is that of the monarch, who needed always to be obeyed because, Filmer argues, “a thing may be commanded contrary to law, and yet obedience to such a command is necessary” (qtd. Jiménez Heffernan, 2013 b.:43). Yet, Fanny, like Pamela, shares the Lockean political idea of civil disobedience in cases of abuse of power, that is, when the monarch surpasses the subject’s liberties and properties (ibid.:37). Thus, Fanny’s spiritual authority and her political immunity give her the right and the strength to contest her cousins’ fervent pleas to make her say a few lines in the play; to reject Henry’s marriage proposals and to resist Sir Thomas’ arguments in favor of marrying Henry.

Like Richardson’s heroine, Fanny seems to typify the principle of self-determination that reached Hegel from Kant through Schiller and Goethe (Jiménez Heffernan, 2013 b.:45). Fanny acquires then a Christological status since she has to defy everyone’s authority in order to be loyal to her principles. In that capacity, Fanny functions as Edmund’s spiritual healer when he is dejected after realizing about Mary’s “perversion of mind” and “fault of principles” (358). Thus, we are told that “Fanny’s friendship was all that he had to cling to” (361). Fanny is turned then from an object that both Mrs. Bertram and Mrs. Norris can employ, into a self-possessed subject (Armstrong, 2005:6). Said’s contention is that Fanny does in a domestic or small-scale what Sir Thomas, her mentor, does in Antigua. For him, the two movements depend on each other (1993:104). Therefore, Fanny, a foreign entity, has entered into the core of an operative community and has destabilized it. However, she has become the key element that will restore it. Like Pamela again, Fanny has moved from being no more than a *servant* to be welcomed back as a legitimate *wife* and, like her, she ends up becoming the mistress of a great country house, Mansfield Park. Thus, patrimony can now be transmitted from generation to generation.

### **4.3. Exposure or The Community of Lovers**

Many critics have identified the theatricals as the most accomplished part of *Mansfield Park*. Thus, Butler asserts that “the play-sequence remains the most masterly part of

*Mansfield Park*” (1976:229), whereas Tanner claims that “[t]he theatricals provide the core of the book; and indeed, they are the occasion of one of the most subtle and searching pieces in English fiction” (1986:162). O’Quinn, on his part, points out that “the *Lovers’ Vows* section of the novel becomes not only a site for meditations on memory, but also the proleptic trigger which structures the future of many of the novel’s characters” (2009:380). The whole passage is full of innuendoes, sexual tension and a risky game of roles. All this takes form in the rehearsals of the play, since the play itself is never performed.

*Lovers’ Vows*, the play which the characters choose to perform, has various evocative parallels between the characters in the novel and the roles they take. Thus, Tom is the play’s producer whereas Mrs. Norris supervises the physical damage caused on Sir Thomas’ property. Mr. Rushworth plays the role of Count Cassel, a silly and rejected suitor. Mr. Yates plays Baron Wildenhaim, a man whose past triggers the action of the play. Mary Crawford plays the liberal Amelia. Edmund plays a clergyman highly unsuccessful in love whereas Maria plays Agatha, a fallen woman. Fanny, on her part, becomes a kind of surrogate conscience about what is right and what inappropriate (Said, 1994:104); and the figure of order par excellence and the supporter of family and rank, Sir Thomas, represents a grotesque reversal of himself. Thus, when Sir Thomas comes back from Antigua, he meets Mr. Yates ludicrously playing the role of Baron Wildenhaim: “the dignified baronet meets the ‘Baron’ whose play-function is to abandon his dignity and to legitimize his mistress” (Butler, 1976:235). According to Stabler, Sir Thomas treats *Lovers’ Vows* like a proscribed text since he burned “all that met his eye” (149) and that was related to the play. Sir Thomas does not object to the play itself, but to what it unveils about the frustrated desires of the actors (Stabler, 2008:22).

To my mind, the rehearsals of *Lovers’ Vows* become the second intimation of an unworked community in the novel (Fanny’s question about the slave trade being the first one). In fact, never are the characters presented more objectively than in their acts of interpretation and we readers must interpret the dangerous taking of roles in the play. Our position as readers or audience can be equated to Fanny’s passive position, who is undoubtedly the best “reader” of the many implications that are involved in the play. Indeed, Fanny’s function is that of the reader’s delegate. Like Fanny Assingham in *The Golden Bowl*, Fanny Price epitomizes in a hyperbolic way the subtle hermeneutic acts of working out, on the grounds of the evidence presented, what Austen hopes her readers will figure out (Hillis Miller, 2005:255). Particularly, the scenes between Henry and Maria are the ones which contain the seed for inoperativeness. Indeed, Craik has perceived Maria as “the stronger and more interesting character, because the most important” (1968:104). Austen would approve Hillis Miller assertion that marriage is one of the basic institutions upon which an organic community depends, while adultery is presented as “disable[ing] more or less any community” (2005:127).

Certainly, their scenes full of sexual innuendoes and corporeal interaction constitute a threat to social conventions and also anticipate their final elopement:



*Frederick was listening with looks of devotion to Agatha's narrative, and pressing her hand to his heart, and as soon as she could notice this, and see that, in spite of the shock of her words, he still kept his station and retained her sister's hand, her wounded heart swelled again with injury, and looking as red as she had been white before, she turned out of the room, saying "I need not be afraid of appearing before him." (137, emphasis added)*

Indisputably, this scene suggests Maria's tragic end and it confirms Nancy's idea that mere corporeity replaces language in the lovers' contact. Thus, Maria and Henry's relationship constitute what Blanchot has called "an elective community," that is, a community that results from an election that unites its members and without which it would not take place (1988:46). Maine, in his book, *Ancient Law: In Connection with the Early History of Society, and its Relation to Modern Ideas* (1861), holds that "the individual is steadily substituted for the Family, as the unit of which civil laws take account" (1999:163). This statement suggests that our individuality is determined by *where we are* in the family. Maria, then, although she is strongly attached to her position in society, makes an act of transgression which threatens the stability of the family on which society depends. She transgresses the marriage contract and the family system in search of, who knows, maybe genuine love, sexual satisfaction or freedom.

Due to Sir Thomas's proscription of the play and to the threat that it posed to conventional morality and social constraints, this elective community has to remain secret, unable to be publicly avowed. Besides, society does not allow the members of this community to carry out any performative speech act, such as the matrimonial vow (Hillis Miller, 2011:140). It is then an antisocial community or, in Bataille's words, "the community of those who do not have a community" (qtd. Blanchot, 1988:1). Secrecy, indeed, is one of the main traits of the unavowable community and everything that is connected to the theatricals is surrounded by secrecy. Although there is no evidence of genuine love between Henry and Maria (Henry's interest in Maria is merely his capricious desire to obtain what is prohibited, whereas Maria is a victim of romantic dreams who wants to escape from the restraint that his father imposes at Mansfield), they form what Blanchot calls a "community of lovers," a community that defies the organic community:

There where an episodic community takes shape between two beings who are made or who are not made for each other, a war machine is set up or, to say it more clearly, the possibility of a disaster carrying within itself, be it in infinitesimal doses, the menace of universal annihilation. (1988:48)

Indeed, at the end of the novel, when Henry and Maria's elopement comes to light, both of them, but especially Maria, are expelled from society. Thus, Sir Thomas sends both Maria and Mrs. Norris to a private establishment that he buys for them in an unnamed and remote country where they have little company (365). For a novelist who is so accurate in her reference to English counties, Maria Rushworth's expulsion to somewhere unnamed reflects the dimension of her trespassing: she cannot even be exiled to a concrete and physical place. And yet, despite Maria's banishment, the ghost

of adultery will return, since a ghost never dies, as my epigraph from Derrida suggests, it remains in what Blanchot calls *l'espace littéraire*, a silent space that cannot be accessible by hermeneutics.

According to Blanchot, the two beings in a community of lovers represent, without joy and without happiness, the hope of singularity which they can share with no one else because they are enclosed in their common indifference and in the death which one reveals to the other. Their union takes place precisely by not taking place and it is *because* of that that they form a community. These beings' individualities are not lost in the comedy of a "fusional or communal" understanding. The sovereignty of death characterizes this community, a death of which one does not die, a death without power effect, or achievement (Blanchot, 1988:49). The elective community that the adulterous relationship between Henry and Maria constitutes is the major threat that throws into disarray all the complex web of organic communities in Mansfield Park. Thus, Maria's marriage with Mr. Rushworth is obviously invalidated and it ends in a divorce. Henry's slowly but steady approach to Fanny and their potential union which would provide a secure future to Fanny is thrown away: "Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward –and a reward very voluntarily bestowed– within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Fanny" (367). Finally, Maria's elopement scares Julia and she eventually elopes with Mr. Yates: "She had not eloped with any worse feelings than those of selfish alarm. It had appeared to her the only thing to be done. Maria's guilt had induced Julia's folly" (366). This second elopement –as opposed to Maria and Henry's elopement and similar to Lydia Bennet and Wickham's elopement– does not constitute such a challenge to the normative community since neither Julia nor Lydia are married women so their elopements can be redirected to marriage and, consequently, can be properly institutionalized by the operative community.

The sovereignty of death also surrounds Maria and Henry's community. But it is not a physical death. It is a *social* one. They constitute "that antisocial society or association, always ready to dissolve itself, formed by *friends* or *couples*" (1988:46). Therefore, whereas Maria and Henry's relationship is non-institutional and requires no linguistic devices, Maria and Mr. Rushworth's relationship is institutional and language dependent. In other words, and using Searle's terminology, Maria and Henry's relationship unfolds within the realm of brute facts, whereas Maria and Mr. Rushworth's relationship remains within the realm of institutional facts (1996:34). Hence, although Maria's love is based on a romanticized and Arcadian vision of love similar to that of Marianne Dashwood and Willoughby, she is ready to embark upon an alternative community. Thus, although Austen's characters typically do not manage to escape from their own immanence and they fail to open up to a desired alterity, we find here the intimation of an alternative community that destabilizes the more organic, saturated community. Maria's rebelliousness and her insubordination to social institutions make her a proto-anarchist and an anomic character, that is, a character who threatens the established social order. Certainly, critics such as Craik have noticed that

the main subject of the novel is “the breakdown and the subsequent reform of a whole highly organized society –the society formed by those who live at Mansfield Park” (1968:92).

#### 4.4. “No, Indeed I Cannot Act:” The Theatricals as a Way of Liberation

In *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James*, Hillis Miller claims that Victorian novels are “models of community.” He argues that the existence of such communities both in reality and in fiction guarantee the execution of felicitous performatives. In Victorian novels, the most crucial speech acts or writing acts are the marriages of young women and the transmission from generation to generation by gifts, wills, and marriage settlements of money, property, and rank (2005:145). Thus, the heroine’s marriage reallocates property, money, rank and transmits it to the next generation (ibid.:145) and this is precisely what the alternative community between Henry and Maria cannot do. An operative community depends then on preserving unbroken institutions such as marriage: “Community depends on the possibility of making marriage promises and in keeping those promises, on pain of severe sanctions” (ibid.:127). Thus, my question is: does *Mansfield Park* represent a viable community that endorses and guarantees the felicity of speech acts?

Each character attempts to conceal his or her true intentions behind a veil of apparent sincerity and each uses language, not primarily as a means of intercommunication, but as a way of forcing the other through language to act in the way he or she desires. They use language performatively, as a way of doing something with words (ibid.:114). It is true that the theatricals unleash the sexual tension that fluctuates between the characters but, cunningly, Austen does not provide any direct report of the dialogues between the characters when acting. Yet, there are many other passages in the novel where Austen allows her characters to disclose their inner intentions and temptations. The journey to Sotherton is one of them.

When they are seeing the chapel at Sotherton, Henry Crawford makes a clever assertion: “I do not like to see Miss Bertram so near the altar” (70). Obviously, there is a hidden meaning behind this apparently innocent declaration: he does not want Maria to marry Mr. Rushworth. In Searle’s view, one performs a speech act when others become aware of one’s intention of performing such an act. Auspiciously, Henry’s speech act has the desired effect, or, more technically, the desired perlocutionary force, and Maria retreats from the altar: “Starting, the lady instinctively moved a step or two, but recovering herself in a moment, affected to laugh [...]” (70). Additionally, Henry flouts one of Grice’s cooperative maxims, the maxim of manner, since his contribution is ambiguous and the interpretation may vary. This consideration suggests that this speech act is a conversational implicature, that is, a process by which the speaker means more than he says. Conversational implicatures depend on communicative intentions and the availability of inference to the best explanation (Grice, 1989:37). Behind Henry’s assertion there is then a reflexive communicative intention. Grice argues that for speaker meaning to take place, the speaker must (a) intend to produce an effect on the

addressee, and (b) intend that this intention be recognized by that addressee, but also (c) the speaker must intend this effect on the addressees to be produced by their recognition of the speaker's intention. This very intention to produce a belief on the addressee by means of the recognition of this intention is what has been called a reflexive communicative intention. Unquestionably, Maria recognizes Henry's intention instantly, hence her impulsive reaction of retreating from the altar.

A similar speech act takes place when Henry, again very eloquently, tries to persuade Maria of passing round the edge of the gate in order to see the park of Sotherton while Mr. Rushworth has gone to fetch the key of the gate: "[...] I think you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance; I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited" (79). This is an indirect speech act since there is no relation between the illocutionary force (proposal) and the linguistic form (assertion). Like the previous one, it is a reflexive communicative intention since Maria accepts Henry's challenge without hesitating it: "Prohibited! nonsense! I certainly can get out that way, and I will" (79). Obviously, this passage anticipates Maria's adultery with Henry.

Out of jealousy of her sister Maria and Henry's understanding, Julia expresses her regret that her brother Edmund, who intends to take orders, does not have the license to perform Maria and Mr. Rushworth's wedding at that very moment: "My dear Edmund, if you were but in orders now, you might perform the ceremony directly. How unlucky that you are not ordained, Mr. Rushworth and Maria are quite ready" (70). This is another indirect speech act as there is no direct relation between the linguistic form (expressive) and the illocutionary force (reminder or warning). On the other hand, it is clear that when we say something we perform a speech act, but that does not mean that any saying by any speaker constitutes the performance of a speech act. Only an adequate authority, speaking at the correct place and time, can carry out a declarative speech act such as pronouncing a couple married. Edmund, then, cannot be such authority since he is not legally invested to marry Maria and Mr. Rushworth... yet. Therefore, Edmund does not fulfill one of the seven features that Searle and Vanderveken (1985) establish to define illocutionary force, the preparatory condition, which claims that the interlocutor must have the appropriate social status for a speech act not to misfire. Another speech act takes place when Mary Crawford, very dexterously, feigns to offer Fanny one of her necklaces when in fact she is functioning as an intermediary of Henry, who is the one behind the necklace (202). Although she places several necklaces before Fanny, Mary's intention –and Henry's– is to give Fanny *one* particular necklace. Thus, Fanny notices that one of the necklaces is "more frequently placed before her eyes than the rest" (202). Mary performs then a directive speech act (order), without uttering a word: her gesture of showing one particular necklace more frequently to Fanny will cause the desired effect.

Many of the speech acts in the novel are not misfired but they are still less than felicitous. Thus, when Sir Thomas gives Maria the opportunity to break her engagement with Mr. Rushworth, Maria assures him that "[s]he had the highest esteem for Mr.

Rushworth's character and disposition, and could not have a doubt of her happiness with him" (157). This act is not felicitous because it does not fulfill the sincerity condition, that is, the speaker is not in the psychological state that her speech act expresses. This act is, more precisely, an abuse, because the speaker, in this case Maria, breaks the sincerity condition consciously since she knows deep inside that she is in love with Henry Crawford. Sincerity is then a major condition for a speech act to be felicitous. Not happy with lying to her father, Maria carries to an extreme her "conscious perjury" (Hillis Miller, 2005:229), and ends up marrying Mr. Rushworth. According to Hillis Miller, neither a lie nor a perjury is a performative utterance since the speaker believes them to be false. A performative utterance is, however, neither true nor false. Austin recognizes in *How to Do Things with Words* that a lie or a perjury can have a performative function if they are believed by those who hear it. This lie or perjury is then a way to do things with words (2005:229). Thus, Maria's speech act has made his father believe the lie. It has created an illusory world.

Not only can speakers perform a speech act by saying that they are doing so, they can also, under the appropriate conditions, *rescind* that very speech act. This is precisely what Edmund does when he finally decides to take a part in *Lovers' Vows*. Thus, at the beginning, he is strongly assertive: "No, as to acting myself [...], *that* I absolutely protest against" (101). However, when he learns that they want to look for a boy outside the family to play the role of Anhalt, who will share an excessive intimacy with Mary Crawford, he decides to take the role himself: "There is but *one* thing to be done, Fanny. I must take Anhalt myself. I am well aware that nothing else will quiet Tom" (121). Thus, Edmund retracts his assertion. Fanny is equally assertive in her rejection of acting: "Me! [...] Indeed you must excuse me. I could not act any thing if you were to give me the world. No, indeed, I cannot act" (115). Although the imminent and unexpected arrival of Sir Thomas from Antigua prevents it, the narrator suggests that, were the theatricals not interrupted, she might have yielded to everybody's wishes:

Fanny could not say she did *not* –and as they all persevered– as Edmund repeated his wish, and with a look of even fond dependence on her good nature, she must yield. She would do her best. Every body was satisfied and she was left to the tremors of a most palpitating heart, while the others prepared to begin. (135)

Like Edmund had previously done, Fanny, retracts from her previous promise that she would never act. Thus, both Edmund's and Fanny's assertions have no illocutionary point since the characteristic point of a promise is to commit oneself to a future course of action, and both of them yield to others' pressures and, in the case of Edmund, ends up taking part in the theatricals.

Henry Crawford makes another important pledge in the novel: he promises to make Fanny Prince in love with him (179). Not only does Henry make the appropriate speech act in front of her sister, Mary, he also has the adequate intentional undertaking of his commitment, that is, he has a "strong illocutionary commitment" (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985). According to Searle and Vanderveken, an illocutionary act commits a speaker to another illocutionary act if it is not possible to perform one

without performing the other. Therefore, Henry's pledge inevitably commits him to another illocutionary act, that is, the resulting declaration of love and the marriage proposal to Fanny. Indeed, one of the most important speech acts in the novel is Henry's proposal of matrimony to Fanny. This speech act is a "misfire," as Austin calls them, because the addressee, in this case Fanny, fails to respond with an appropriate *uptake*:

"No, no, no," she cried, hiding her face. "This is all nonsense. Do not distress me. I can hear no more of this. Your kindness to William makes me more obliged to you than words can express; but I do not want, I cannot bear, I must not listen to such –No, no, don't think of me. But you are *not* thinking of me. I know it is all nothing. (236)

Social convention allowed young women to say "No" to a marriage proposal. According to Hillis Miller, novels played a central ideological role by reassuring their readers that a happy resolution was conceivable and even likely. Thus, the happy marriage at the end reallocates property and rank, as well as guarantees the continuation of the community in the new generations that follow (2005:145). Despite Fanny's bold rejection of Henry's marriage proposal, the community is renewed through her marriage with Edmund. Fanny and Edmund eventually become the owners of Mansfield Park and property and rank remain safe within genealogy. However, this renewal and continuation of the community is blocked in the case of Henry and Maria Rushworth. Maria becomes a *die*-vorded woman (notice the pun here), and the community is not renewed through marriage and motherhood. The community is "unworked" rather than workable (Hillis Miller, 2005:145). Consequently, a rather covered intimation of an unworked community is enacted in *Mansfield Park* since Maria's ending contests the restoration of order that most Victorian novels will subsequently enact.

But what about the speech acts that take place in the theatricals? Hillis Miller asserts that none of the conditions for felicitous speech acts established by J.L. Austin in *How to Do Things with words* (1962) is met within an inoperative community since the members are not enclosed selves capable of taking responsibility for what they say. Additionally, no social contract or constitution makes possible the establishment of effective laws or institutions. There is not clear "intersubjective" communication and no social bond can confirm the sincerity of speech acts uttered by another person in an unworked community (Hillis Miller, 2005:145). First of all, the title of the play that the characters choose to perform, *Lovers' Vows*, contains itself a performative speech act, a vow. But do these vows contain some perlocutionary force? Austin states that when we emit a performative speech act we are doing actions and that these actions can be emitted by design, by accident or by any error. In this case, they are described as non-intentional. Austin distinguishes between serious uses, produced in ordinary circumstances of quotidian life, from non-serious uses, which take place in literary language so that the conditions of habitual speech acts cannot be applied to them. Thus, a performative speech act in a poem or the speech act formulated by an actor is a "parasitic" or "not full normal" use of language (Austin, 1975:104). The normal conditions of reference are then suspended and there is no attempt made at a normal

perlocutionary act (Austin, 1975:104). These types of speech acts do not meet any of the basic conditions that Austin proposes for a speech act to be happy. Thus, the context or the circumstances are not the adequate ones; the people that take part in the speech act are not the appropriate ones. They break the sincerity condition as they probably do not have the thoughts or the feelings that they say they have, and, last but not least, they do not take responsibility for what they do with words.

Actors then do not use language seriously but in a figurative way and their utterances do not refer to a previous state of affairs and, consequently, they can be neither true nor false. Their utterances create themselves the situations to which they refer. Richard Ohmann has called these speech acts “quasi-speech acts” because they seem to have the characteristics of habitual speech acts but in none of them do the required conditions meet. These quasi-speech acts are liberating, since they liberate us from taking the responsibility that speech acts have in our quotidian life. Thus, actors and audience –and writers and readers– resemble impostors; they feel free to speak, to invent, and to tell whatever they want because they are not tied to the exigencies of serious speech acts. This is exactly what happens in the theatricals. Although none of the speech acts in the theatricals would meet all of Austin’s criteria for a happy speech act, all of these performative utterances are felicitous since they make something happen. For instance, they make Maria believe that Henry is in love with her and vice versa. Maria’s consequent adultery is just the effect of these speech acts. And yet, when rehearsing *Lovers’ Vows*, the characters in *Mansfield Park* do not break all the rules of felicitous performatives. Indeed, the danger that the figures of order, Sir Thomas, Edmund and Fanny, foresee in the theatricals is that some of the participants would see the rehearsals as an opportunity to liberate themselves from social constraints and from the rigid impositions that serious speech acts incorporate. Indeed, Mary and Edmund and Henry and Maria *do* speak *sincerely* since they are in the psychological state that their speech acts express. Fortunately, and this is where the main danger resides, they do not have to take responsibility for their lovers’ vows. Each speech act is, therefore, anomalous, illicit, atypical.

These notions refute Trilling’s assertion that Jane Austen, as well as Fanny Price, objects to the performance of the play due to the insincerity involved in acting a role (1963:133), and verifies Marilyn Butler’s assertion that the opposite is the truth: *Lovers’ Vows* allows them to express and to do what otherwise would normally be entirely improper (1976:232). The different scenes together permit physical contact between Maria and Henry and between Edmund and Mary. Besides, the dialogues are full of innuendoes which allow them to liberate themselves outside the constraint imposed by social norms. Butler claims that in touching one another and in making love to one another on the stage these four characters are not feigning but they are rather expressing their real feelings: “The impropriety lies in the fact that they are *not* acting, but are finding an indirect means to gratify desires which are illicit, and should have been contained” (1976:232). The liberating power of literature, and in this case of theatre, releases them from moral restraint. The vows that the characters make in the theatricals

function as felicitous speech acts. They are utterances that make something happen, since other people are brought to act as if they believe them, as is the case of Maria, Edmund, and Mary Crawford. They then establish a fictitious social game that has real consequences (Hillis Miller, 2005:281). *Mansfield Park* illustrates, then, how the speech acts made in a play can be performatively felicitous if others believe them or act as if they believe them. In a way, the theatricals provide a reflection on the performative rhetoric of literature. *Lovers' Vows* has raised ghosts through the power of language and has made the characters believe in love vows that have no reality outside that conferred on them by the characters when they are rehearsing.

The felicitous performatives of the theatricals are of an anomalous kind since they are not based on a feasible community with effective institutions, laws, and customs, or guaranteed in their efficacy by such a community (Hillis Miller, 2005:147). Agatha and Frederick's fictional community or Maria and Henry's real community, as well as Mary and Edmund's community, are what Blanchot calls a *communauté inavouable*, i.e. an "unavowable community." Society does not allow this community to utter publicly, in an institutionally sanctioned way, the *vows* that would seal their loves. They are even forbidden to avow in public the liaisons that could be the foundation, for them, of genuine promissory speech acts, of sincere lovers' vows (Hillis Miller, 2005:141). Therefore, the communities which take place in the theatricals are unavowable in the double sense that Blanchot elucidates. First, the unworked communities that take place in the theatricals remain secret, unable to be publicly avowed. Secrecy and silence, then, surround everything which is connected with the theatricals:

Mr. Yates had staid to see the destruction of every theatrical preparation at Mansfield, the removal of every thing appertaining to the play; he left the house in all the soberness of its general character; and Sir Thomas hoped, in seeing him out of it, to be rid of the worst object connected with the scheme, *and the last that must be inevitably reminding him of its existence.* (153, emphasis added)

Unquestionably, Sir Thomas believes that by destroying the play and every remnant of it in the house, he can also destroy what the play has unleashed. Additionally, this secrecy has also to do with the destructive exposure of young unmarried women, like Maria or Mary, to premature sexual knowledge that may prevent conventional men from proposing marriage to them, and this is patent in Edmund's and Fanny's protests at the play actually chosen:

Agatha and Amelia appeared to her in their different ways so totally improper for home representation –*the situation of one, and the language of the other, so unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty*, that she could hardly suppose her cousins could be aware of what they were engaging in. (137, emphasis added)

This something "so unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty" refers to the experience of something uncanny but nevertheless familiar, something, using Freud's terms, *unheimlich* (Hillis Miller, 2005:11). The mystery lies in the impossibility of reporting these very dialogues. The narrator seldom gives an instance of what the



dialogues in *Lovers' Vows* say; they are uncanny, then, because they never appear in themselves, they are almost never transcribed. As Foucault observes, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the discovery of the fact of desire hidden within the individual provoked a wide process of verbalization that efficiently displaced an eroticism that had been located on the surface of the body. The discourse of sexuality replaced this primary and natural desire (qtd. Armstrong, 1987:12). Possibly, this verbalization of eroticism in Kotzebue's play is what alarms Edmund and Fanny and what prevents Austen from transcribing it. Second, these unavowable communities are not institutionally protected by any public laws or institutions. Derrida posits a certain unsaid at the heart of every community: "The unavowable in community is also a sovereignty that cannot but posit itself and impose itself in silence, in the unsaid" (qtd. Hillis Miller, 2005:84).

The irony of *Mansfield Park* lays then in the fact that only when they are acting—that is, taking another persona—the characters are more sincere, whereas when they are being themselves—interacting in society—they are wearing a mask, symbolized by the theatre itself, and this is probably the key to their failure. Indeed, as Camille Paglia holds in her outstanding work, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*, no matter the culture, sex has always been surrounded with taboo since it is the point of interaction between man and nature, where morality falls to primitive impulses (1990:3). Thus, the sexual taboo that the figures of order have detected in *Lovers' Vows* is so unbearable that every revelation of it leads to repression. This fact makes me agree with Paglia's statement that "[i]n Western culture, there can never be a purely physical or anxiety-free sexual encounter. Every attraction, every pattern of touch, every orgasm is shaped by psychic shadows" (1990:4). In her book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler theorizes this concept of performativity. According to Butler, there is not a coherent and stable gender identity. On the contrary, gender is "a stylized repetition of acts [...] which are internally discontinuous" so that "the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (2008:179). Hence, to say that gender is performative is to argue that gender is "real only to the extent that it is performed." Thus, Butler plays with the ambiguity of the concept of "performative," implying that performative utterances do not passively describe a reality but rather change it. Butler then sees gender as a play that has to be rehearsed, and the actors make the play a reality through repetition. This is precisely what happens in *Mansfield Park*. The theatricals illustrate Butler's notion of identity as essentially imitative, learning to perform a role, to parody, and to adopt a mask.

The actors have performed their correspondent roles in *Lovers' Vows* so many times that they have made it a reality and they cannot distinguish between reality and performance. I think that we can apply to the society of *Mansfield Park* what Morris says about the writings of Sexton and Plath, that they seem to operate "across the boundary site where a self constructs self as a voice or performance" and yet it retains a

“comic cynicism” towards that construction of identity (1996:154). Therefore, in *Mansfield Park*, identity is foregrounded as a carnival process of masking and acting. The restricting societal conventions of late 18<sup>th</sup> century England make the characters artificial and prevent them from truly opening up to each other since their identity is an artificial construction which cannot find a natural essence, and when they dare to trespass the limits, they are sternly chastised. The play functions then, in spite of Sir Thomas’ exorcism, as ineffaceable testimony to the characters’ hidden passions. Like the golden bowl in Henry James’ homonymous novel, it has its own silent performative efficacy, whatever opposing words are said about it.

## 5. Conclusion

Organic, operative communities are pervasive in *Mansfield Park*. The community of Mansfield Park is based on blood, genus, birth and nation. It is a utopian and mystified community, a cultural chimera that stems from the ideological dissemination of human society and whose discursive articulation is grounded on the idea of the *collective* and the failure to recognize partition and finitude. Like all organic communities, it is prescriptive, as it imposes firm communitarian models based on various ideological tropes. One of these tropes is the idea of filiation since stock, sex, genealogy and blood help to preserve and to perpetuate the traditional community of Mansfield. This fraternalist kinship and homogeneity is extrapolated to the relationship that Fanny has with both her siblings, William and Susan, and with Edmund, and it serves for the self-enclosure of the community, which is sustained by three important pillars: genealogy, matrimony and patrimony. The community of London, on the other hand, is closer to Tönnies’ concept of *Gesellschaft*. This type of community is more reconcilable with Nancy’s inoperative community but it is still contaminated by the constant *in-flowing* (Trilling) of the public sphere and it uncovers the commodification of human beings and the corruption of the characters’ libidinal energies by an emerging capitalism.

And yet, despite the self-enclosure of the traditional community of Mansfield, there are some passages in the novel that contain a palpably deconstructive drive and which are not explored and assimilated by most of the characters. The first prefiguration of otherness takes place when Fanny asks Sir Thomas about slave trade in Antigua; the second one occurs when Maria disregards the inhabitants of the cottages at Sotherton; and the most important one takes place when Maria and Henry elope. A castrating silence fluctuates around these intimations of alterity. This secrecy, which is the basis of Blanchot’s unavowable community, highlights the autarchy of absolute immanence and the characters’ inability to expose their inner selfhood to the outside. Fanny Price plays a double role in the novel. Indeed, she oscillates between the operative and the inoperative community since she is at the same time an interloper and a restorer of the organic community of blood, birth and genealogy of Mansfield Park. She has a position of social subalternity and spiritual authority and it is precisely this position what allows her to perform the major speech acts of refusal in the novel. One of the most emphatic speech acts of refusal is her rejection to take part in the rehearsals of *Lovers’ Vows*. The reason of her rejection is that the play is full of sexual innuendoes and corporeal

interaction which threaten the stability of the organic community and which result in Henry and Maria's elopement. This elopement transgresses the marriage contract, one of the main pillars of the organic community of Mansfield, and constitutes what Blanchot calls "an elective community" since it is not based on contracts or sanctioned by institutions and, moreover, it throws into disarray all the complex webs of organic communities in the novel. This elective community remains secret, unable to be publicly avowed and it turns Maria into an anomic character who dares to threaten the established social order. Many of the speech acts of the organic community are not misfired but they are still not felicitous since the characters do not respect the sincerity condition. The speech acts performed in the theatricals, in turn, establish a fictitious social game with real consequences. Although they do not meet all of Austin's criteria for a happy speech act, they are felicitous, since they make something happen. Indeed, most of the characters are victims of society's restraining norms which prevent them from being truly natural and spontaneous so they see the theatricals as the best opportunity to release themselves from societal restrictive rules. The ironic turn of *Mansfield Park* lies in the fact that it is precisely when they are taking another persona that the characters are more sincere, whereas when they are interacting in society they wear a mask. The play's purpose is then to give voice to the characters' true selves and their hidden passions.

Thus, although Austen was obviously unaware of this bipolar conception of community –this mere statement is an anachronism– her portrayal of communitarian models is not completely pessimistic. She suggests a potential, temporary relational bond in unprejudiced corporeity by means of the theatricals as well as a way of unveiling the characters' genuine passions and feelings. The unworked community of lovers that Henry and Maria form, manages to unravel the intricate web of operative communities in the novel and, therefore, to break with the general organic community system. Indeed, the theatricals and Maria's act of transgression contravene Moretti's unfair assertion that, whereas the continental narrative tradition is characterized by a dialectic tension between subjective unrest (the individual) and the social order (*nomos*), the English tradition is subjugated by social and political stability, institutions, ideological conformity and pliable, common, ordinary and unsubstantial characters who easily succumb before social pressures. For this reason, Moretti claims, the adultery novel is inconceivable in the Anglo-German literary tradition (2000:8). I cannot assert that *Mansfield Park* is an adultery novel in the strictest sense of the word; however, I hope to suggest that there is a latent eroticism manifested in the interaction between the characters when they act, an eroticism that threatens the stability of the family on which the organic society so strongly depends. Maria's dangerous trespassing of thresholds allows us to group her with the most emblematic adulterous heroines in the continental narrative tradition, Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina, La Regenta and Effi Briest. Additionally, despite Austen's final restoration of the operative community, the narrator's ironic authorial comments at the end of the novel serve to subvert what they seem to celebrate. Thus, although she always expiates her daring incursion into anomie

with the subsequent restoration of the operative community, Austen becomes iconic in the attempt to unwork conventional communities.

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