

CHAPTER 30

Jane Austen and the Bible

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When thinking about Austen and the Bible, it is useful to recall how common it was for our forebears to relate chapter and verse of scripture to their personal and communal lives, and to national and international events. We do not know whether Austen did the same, but she could have, as a clergy daughter with a strong personal faith and an astute awareness of the world within and beyond her domestic frame. As alien as it may seem to us, her family would have said morning and/or evening prayer daily. If they used the prayer book lectionary, which was highly likely, Austen would have read or heard most of the Psalms once a month, most of the Jewish Scriptures once a year, and most of the Christian Scriptures twice a year. She cherished her copy of *A Companion to the Altar*, a primer of meditations for those preparing to receive Holy Communion. She wrote eloquent intercessory prayers.

Understanding Austen's period is challenging, as it has become foreign to us in many ways. At least since Alistair Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate* (1971) and Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975), most critics support the view that her novels are commentaries that participate in the intellectual ferment of her period and situate themselves in relation to genres and sub-genres of contemporary heroine-centered novels. She belongs to what is increasingly referred to as a long eighteenth century between the Restoration in 1660 and the end of the Georgian period in 1830. During this period the state and church were united in a way that will not be as apparent to us as it was to her contemporaries. She accepted that unity, which is why it is difficult to separate her literary vision into distinct secular and religious spheres.

Austen's novels are simultaneously biblical and contemporary. On a biblical level they present the story of the fall and the drama of salvation in contemporary terms. On a contemporary level they interrogate neoclassicism and romanticism in biblical terms. In each novel, these presentations and interrogations are firmly focused on marriage and family, where the condition of the domestic economy mirrors the national economy, both of which are measured against what theologians call the divine economy. Husbands and wives exercise joint headship, effectively or ineffectively. Marriage and parenthood determine whether the domestic economy is ordered or disordered.

Austen intends to establish her heroines and heroes in effective marriages, as a means of promoting domestic economy. This is not an easy process as all the heroines

and heroes, with the possible exception of Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* (1818), have been raised in families that are disordered in some way; consequently they lack necessary qualities in an effective partner. None of these marriages is easily achieved and neither are they established by fate or accident or providence. They are the hard won product of conflict and misunderstanding and growth. They are forged in difficult social and economic and moral circumstances. They occur at the end of a journey into maturity that, in most cases, is analogous with those undertaken by many characters in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, including Abraham, Moses, the followers of Jesus, and Jesus himself.

Everything depends on the heroine and hero maturing. Jesus' maturity comes after the journey of his earthly ministry in Galilee and its gradual progress toward and beyond Jerusalem. The heroine and hero undertake a similar journey. Their maturity depends on how they exercise their free will, and learn from their circumstances and the consequences of their choices. Expressed in theological terms, a fallen and continually falling humanity is called to follow the human example of the earthly Jesus, in order to participate in the divine example of the risen Christ, and thereby share the physical preservation (*soteria*) and metaphysical salvation (*soteria*) the following and participation confer. Notice how these two terms, preservation and salvation, are the same in biblical Greek.

The need for preservation and salvation was wide ranging in the Georgian period. Social life was still determined by property and patronage. Economic life was still dominated by a market economy subject to cycles of surplus and shortage, boom and bust, and extended periods of high inflation. Public health was still poor, filled with inequalities, and even the wealthy suffered from what we now regard as unacceptable levels of preventable sickness and premature death. There were high degrees of social mobility, upward and downward. Every class was restless and insecure and under threat. In this period of individual and communal vulnerability, the Austen heroine and hero need to discover answers to the questions: How have I fallen? How can I be preserved and saved? This is a difficult physical and metaphysical discovery among the extremes of a Georgian reality very different from, and much less secure than, our reality, where marriage was much more crucial to survival than it is now.

Let us see how Austen's narrative scheme appears in three of her novels.

Sense and Sensibility

Both biblical and contemporary themes are woven together in the first chapter of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811). Mrs Henry Dashwood and her daughters are in precarious circumstances, caused by her late husband's inability to secure their future and the greed of his son and daughter-in-law. With each sentence Austen heightens an awareness of how the commandment to honor thy father and mother, and the injunction to care for the widowed and orphaned, have been violated. Once that violation is described, and its consequences are revealed, Austen presents the different temperaments of two sisters, Elinor's reason (sense) and Marianne's feeling (sensibility), which determine their neoclassical and romantic responses to their circumstances.

Mr John Dashwood, already wealthy through maternal inheritance and advantageous marriage, inherits his father's estate. At the deathbed he promises to do everything in his power to care for his stepmother and stepsisters but once the paternal inheritance is conveyed his wife persuades him to change his mind and not provide for them at all. As a result, they are ejected from their home and descend to a lower class. This violation was common and contemporary readers would recognize it as something that could happen to them.

The plight of Mrs Henry Dashwood and her daughters is mitigated when Sir John Middleton, her cousin, offers her a small cottage on easy terms on his estate. Their removal to Barton Cottage solves the immediate problem of how they can live within their means. It also allows the central action of the novel to unfold: the drama of two young women whose preservation and salvation depend on negotiating an effective marriage. Central to this drama is the way Elinor's neoclassical sense is portrayed as appropriate, because it protects her and allows her to survive, and Marianne's romantic sensibility is portrayed as inappropriate, because it makes her vulnerable and self-destructive.

This does not mean Elinor is without feeling and Marianne cannot reason. Austen maintains an exquisite symmetrical sense of the balance each sister needs to achieve depending on whether she is destined for Church or Estate. After her trials, Elinor is rewarded with an effective marriage to a priest, Edward Ferrars, in which feeling provides a corrective balance to reason. After her trials, Marianne is rewarded with an effective marriage to a squire, Colonel Brandon, in which reason provides a corrective balance to feeling.

Early in the novel, before her removal from Norland Park, Elinor's reason tells her Edward Ferrars, a candidate for ordination, is interested in and temperamentally suited to her. Her great drama is maintaining her faith in reason, even when it seems to have failed her, and the outcome of that faith is a hard won vindication of her rationality. Soon after her arrival in Barton Cottage, Marianne's feeling tells her John Willoughby, a flawed Byronic character, is interested in and temperamentally suited to her. Her great drama is suffering the consequences of her misguided faith in feeling as it betrays her and leads her close to self-destruction. Both sisters suffer greatly, Elinor privately and Marianne publicly, as Austen leads them to and through their respective passions before rewarding them as Mrs Ferrars and Mrs Brandon.

Reason is what will make Elinor an ideal priest's wife, in Austen's narrative scheme. Her discretion and caution, proportion and propriety, refusal to prejudge or misjudge, and repression of will and desire are important because her preservation and salvation depend on them. That does not mean she is passionless. Elinor has deep feelings, even of anger, but she regulates her behavior in a way Marianne refuses to. When Edward does not behave as she wishes, or senses he wishes, she reasons that his life, like hers, might be full of difficult circumstances she may not be aware of. More importantly, she accepts that his happiness may not involve her and must take precedence over hers.

Elinor's reason turns out to be right. Edward is wrestling with his conscience. He is faced with the prospect of following a difficult vocation, as a poor man, disinherited by his wealthy and manipulative mother and burdened with an unsuitable wife. Yet

Edward refuses to cultivate his inheritance and, youthful and misguided though it was, he knows he freely entered into an engagement with Lucy Steele. He is morally obliged to marry her regardless of consequences. In choosing to be true to his principles over his earthly happiness, Edward is at odds with the values of the world. His actions reflect the cost of discipleship described in the three Synoptic Gospels: denying one's self and taking up one's cross and following Jesus, for whoever would save his life will lose it and whoever would lose his life for Jesus' sake will find it (Matthew 16:24–5; Mark 8:34–5; Luke 9:23–4). Since Edward is prepared to lose his life for Jesus' sake, Austen finally rewards him with both Elinor and Jesus.

Elinor's selfless behavior requires great emotional forbearance and sacrifice. She places Marianne's needs above her own, which brings her reader sympathy because Marianne is a sympathetic heroine in spite of her behavior. Placing the needs of Edward's fiancé above her own brings Elinor less reader sympathy because Lucy is not a sympathetic character. In spite of this, Elinor is obliged to uphold the law of perfect love described in Matthew: we must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, for God makes his sun rise on the evil and the good and sends his rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:43–5). Everywhere in Austen's novels evil coexists with good, as it does in the parable of the wheat and the tares, where Jesus reminds us to leave ultimate moral judgments for God to make on the last day (Matthew 13:24–30). According to human justice, Elinor should take a stronger moral position against Willoughby; according to divine justice, she forgives him in spite of his treatment of Marianne, marriage of convenience to Miss Grey, and ruin of Eliza Brandon's character. If the reader wants to see Willoughby held to account for his actions, and is in sympathy with Colonel Brandon's failed attempt to duel with him, ultimately the coals of forgiveness Elinor heaps upon him are more effective.

Feeling is what will make Marianne an ideal squire's wife in Austen's narrative scheme. Her abilities are in many respects equal to Elinor's and she embodies several necessary qualities in a young woman destined to preside over the Estate rather than the Church. There are dangers, however, which Austen highlights by making her a damsel in romantic distress. Before Marianne can be elevated to her pedestal she needs to mature within Austen's critique of romanticism.

In the Platonic model of mind still dominant in Austen's period, Elinor is guided by reason (head) and Marianne is guided by feeling (heart) but, according to this model, feeling is more easily corrupted by base appetite (lower abdomen) than reason is. Feeling is a dangerous guardian of conscience and Marianne is a romantic accident waiting to happen. When she meets the handsome Willoughby, through a fall, he literally sweeps her off her feet, but she is unaware he is a rake who has recently seduced and impregnated and abandoned a young woman much like herself in temperament. She is overcome by her desire for Willoughby, and her feeling is soon overtaken by base appetite and degenerates into an unhealthy passion. At no stage is Marianne a victim. Her passion is fed by her will, and she can be understood as an early example of a prototype that develops throughout the nineteenth-century novel, culminating in characters such as Rosamond Vincy and Mr Kurtz. Once her friendship with Willoughby is established, Marianne's personality alters. She becomes selfish and arrogant and her thinking becomes disordered, especially about Colonel Brandon.

The chivalrous colonel, a knight in a flannel waistcoat, wants to protect Marianne from as much harm as he can, while remaining in the background, vigilant while nursing his unrequited love for his beautiful lady. He is the only character who knows what kind of suffering and self-destruction Marianne's romantic sensibilities are capable of, because he shares those sensibilities and in his youth he saw their capabilities unleashed in and against a similar young woman.

Once her feeling is corrupted by base appetite, Marianne starts to believe that social propriety, ethical value, and moral behavior can all be judged through a pleasure principle. This is hedonism, which Austen associates with romanticism and uses to strengthen Marianne's delusion so the moral weight of her disillusionment, and the physical and mental breakdown it causes, will be more keenly felt. The outcome of Marianne's disillusionment is her recognition of her errors of judgment and the promise that her painful memories of Willoughby will be regulated "by religion, by reason, and by constant employment." This is Marianne's admission that for much of the novel she abandoned these three things, which upheld Elinor in her darkest hour: religion, reason, and constant employment.

Marianne's greatest mortifications, and greatest lessons, are realizing how much emotional suffering she brought to those who love her, including her failure to see Elinor was suffering as intensely over Edward as she was over Willoughby, and her inability to see Colonel Brandon as temperamentally suited to her. Much more than Willoughby, the Colonel is in every sense an ideal husband for Marianne: socially, economically, morally, romantically, and even sexually.

At the end of the novel, the Reverend and Mrs Ferrars and the Colonel and Mrs Brandon begin their interdependent lives at Delaford, peacefully and happily. The fall-enness that began the novel, and the disorder that characterized most of its story, are resolved. The heroines, who represent neoclassical reason and romantic feeling, have been balanced and achieve preservation and salvation. Delaford is now an idealized model in which the effective marriages of male and female, and of Church and Estate, perform complementary roles in a domestic economy that mirrors the national economy, both of which are measured against the divine economy.

Pride and Prejudice

When read through the prism of hermeneutics, or theory of interpretation, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) becomes less a love story of a middle-class heroine and an upper-class hero and more a moral story about how Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy learn to interpret "correctly," in biblical and contemporary terms, by overcoming their first impressions, recognizing their sins of pride and prejudice, and learning to give and receive human love as a proxy for divine love. The novel is about how they mature, and after they mature Austen places them as equals at the pinnacle of her symbolic order, which is hierarchical but also a meritocracy, where their shared headship is of both public and private importance.

According to the logic the novel proposes, their marriage overcomes the bad economy of Longbourn in Hertfordshire, where their horizons clash, improves the good economy

of Rosings and Hunsford in Kent, where their horizons dialogue, and perfects the ideal economy of Pemberley in Derbyshire, where their horizons fuse. Elizabeth's pilgrimage into preservation and salvation is a gradual discovery of self, which moves from south to north, beginning in an earthly purgatory and ending in an earthly paradise. However, Austen interrupts that ascent on two occasions, after Elizabeth's first trip to Kent, and again after her first trip to Derbyshire, and returns her to purgatory to reflect. During that slow and painful ascent, and its necessary interruptions, Elizabeth's attitude to Darcy gradually changes from contempt, to ambivalence, and finally to gratitude, John Gregory's contentious precondition for love and successful marriage, described in his popular female conduct book *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774).

Having established Longbourn (long + borne) as an earthly purgatory in volume I, Austen uses Elizabeth's confident assertion to her sister Jane, "one knows exactly what to think," to measure the pride and prejudice of both heroine and hero. Before the gulf between them can be bridged, they must change how they interpret. Austen uses the language of danger, fear, and mortification to describe that change because, as Paul tells the Philippians, we must work out our preservation and salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

Elizabeth's pride and prejudice cannot be defended but can be understood. She is contemptuous because Darcy believes her connections are inferior but everything her family does proves him right. Beneath her defences, she is aware of belonging to a dysfunctional family. Mr and Mrs Bennet are ineffective managers, primogeniture has operated against their daughters, and what remains of Mr Bennet's estate is entailed in favor of his cousin Mr Collins. The future depends on the Bennet sisters finding good husbands, but they are leaving too much to chance, are temperamentally unsuited to the task, and their parents are not providing them with guidance or the right example.

The contrast between Elizabeth and Charlotte Lucas is instructive. Charlotte is plain, her parents cannot provide for her future, even though they are more secure than the Bennets, and she does not intend to leave finding a husband to chance because chance is a poor finder of husbands. While Austen does not believe Charlotte's engagement to Mr Collins is ideal, and intends something better for Elizabeth, it is wrong to assume Elizabeth's view of the Collins marriage is Austen's view.

Darcy's pride and prejudice cannot be defended but can be understood. If he is highly aware of class, his own and everyone else's, so are most other characters that have ulterior motives for cultivating his acquaintance. In fact, Darcy is less of a snob than those vying for his attention. He can accept social change but needs to learn he cannot dictate the terms of change or remain invulnerable in the face of change. Also, the qualities that attract him to Elizabeth are, ironically, the qualities that will make her refuse him when he proposes to her in Kent. He is willing to overlook her inferior connections, because of his feelings for her, but she cannot be grateful to a man who has tried to ruin her sister's chances of happiness, or who is insensitive enough to offer her a marriage that will apparently exclude her family. In spite of her inferior connections, Elizabeth must remain loyal to her family. Disloyalty would disqualify her from becoming the kind of Mrs Darcy Austen wants her to become in Derbyshire.

Unlike that of volume I, the leitmotiv of volume II is one does not know what to think. At the center of the volume, also the center of the novel, the great confrontation

between Elizabeth and Darcy challenges the way they interpret. Following this confrontation, Elizabeth begins a process of seeking understanding, and she uses John Locke's formula of reason, revelation, and reflection on experience to do so.

Austen accomplishes many things during Elizabeth's visit to Kent. She is seen as equal to the society of Rosings and her manners are better than Lady Catherine's. She learns the truth about George Wickham, a flawed Byronic character similar to John Willoughby. She observes the unity of the relationship between Estate and Church. Rosings and Hunsford represent good economy, certainly much better than Longbourn, but it is less than ideal. In spite of her caricatures of Lady Catherine and Mr Collins, Austen portrays life in Kent as a model of decency and good order compared with life in Hertfordshire, although a better model awaits the heroine in Derbyshire.

Elizabeth notices Mr Collins's manners have not changed with marriage but apart from that she is unable to fault him. He is hospitable and kind, is pleased to be married, loves his home and garden, and is assiduous in performing his clerical duties. He is proud of his connection with Lady Catherine and although he may hope for advancement in the Church he is neither ruthless nor political. Elizabeth would find marriage to Mr Collins oppressive but the pragmatic Charlotte appears quite happy because her expectations are lower than Elizabeth's and may be more realistic.

Elizabeth is returned to the purgatory of Longbourn to reflect on what she has learned at Rosings and Hunsford. She now knows that if her younger sister Lydia follows Wickham's regiment to Brighton there will be dire consequences for her family, but she is unable to convince her father of the moral danger. Mr Bennet allows Lydia to become a camp follower, even though she is a minor, because he has never been able to effectively manage her or any other member of his family.

Elizabeth cannot influence what is happening at Longbourn and must allow events to take their course. All she can do is maintain her dignity, behave with humility, and seek as much understanding as she can through Locke's formula. She realizes she has made many errors of judgment, some of which have contributed to the precariousness of her situation. Her future depends on interpreting correctly, acting wisely, and not expecting good fortune. Suddenly life has become a serious business for a young woman, not yet twenty-one, so certain of herself in the first half of the novel.

Volume III demonstrates Darcy's capacity for change and Elizabeth's gradual recognition of that change. The key word here is gradual, for the novel would lose much of its Lockean significance, and become less relevant as a moral story about the consequences of free will, if the hermeneutical dilemmas Elizabeth encounters on her journey into maturity were easily solved. Austen does not allow Elizabeth facile recognitions based on her feelings because, like Marianne's in *Sense and Sensibility*, her feelings are unreliable and she must learn to give primacy to reason. If her feelings now tell her she wants Darcy to love her, she needs to keep them in check.

Austen confounds Gregory's thesis that love and successful marriage depend on the female being grateful to the male. Darcy does not expect Elizabeth's gratitude for saving Lydia, or for reuniting Bingley with Jane, but what Elizabeth doesn't realize during most of volume III is how Darcy is trying to be everything she accused him of not being during their confrontation at the center of the novel. He is doing everything he can to become acceptable to her, but she is now reacting with an inappropriate passiveness,

giving him signals more like those Jane gave Bingley in volume I. Complicating this, Darcy and Elizabeth are never allowed a moment alone. Their every attempt to connect is interrupted.

Ultimately it is Lady Catherine's visit to Longbourn that gives Darcy hope. The visit is intended to intimidate Elizabeth but she refuses to be intimidated. This demonstrates her suitability to be first lady of the Estate, and shows the forces of change outstriking the forces of reaction. Their confrontation must have a high level of probability about it or Austen would have been criticized for Elizabeth's lack of deference to her superiors. Elizabeth's refusal to invest Lady Catherine with an authority she does not merit is the source of her moral authority.

The preservation and salvation bestowed on Elizabeth and Darcy at Pemberley is not shared with everyone, and it is not shared indiscriminately. In the final chapter we see who is allowed to visit Pemberley, as an earthly paradise, and who will benefit from its now perfected economy. Pemberley mediates different degrees of preservation and salvation to many frail and fallen characters, some of whom have merited it more than others, some of whom have not merited it at all. That makes Pemberley a potent symbol of biblical soteriology: for example, in Jesus' description of heaven as a house with many rooms (John 14:1–4). Not every character is given a room at Pemberley. But because Austen is both biblical and contemporary in equal measure she fills those rooms with several characters that represent a society in transition: a society continually falling and continually being preserved and saved.

Mansfield Park

The seriousness of *Mansfield Park* (1814) as a social and religious commentary sets it apart from the rest of Austen's novels. The first chapter establishes a series of ineffective marriages within an extended family in Mansfield and Portsmouth, which cause disorder in Estate and Church. Three men, Sir Thomas Bertram, Reverend Norris, and Lieutenant Price, marry three sisters. The second sister, who should not marry first, captivates Sir Thomas and becomes Lady Bertram. Six years later, the first sister, unless she wishes to remain a spinster, is obliged to marry the Reverend Norris, a clergyman with education but no fortune. Finally, the third sister, to disoblige her family, marries a lieutenant of marines with neither education nor fortune. Sir Thomas, paterfamilias of the extended family, gives Mr Norris a living, and is happy to assist Mr Price. Before he can, an estrangement occurs, aided and abetted by the mischievous Mrs Norris. The Bertram and Price marriages are fertile but the Norris marriage is infertile.

Reordering Estate and Church depends on reversing the effects of these ineffective marriages, which depends on an effective marriage between two children of the estranged sisters, Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram. Their marriage reunites an extended family and banishes the forces of evil that caused and perpetuated the disorder. This marriage does not simply happen and neither is it predestined. It only occurs after the biblical stories of fall and preservation and salvation are reworked through a contemporary prism.

Three characters are crucial to understanding *Mansfield Park* as Austen's most religious novel: Sir Thomas as "first cause" and "absentee landlord," who is head of the Estate; Fanny as "suffering servant" and "anointed one," who makes a journey of self-denial and self-discovery before becoming a contemporary messiah; and Edmund as a candidate for ordination, whose moral authority and pastoral focus are at risk from worldly seduction. These three characters do not represent the Trinity but there is a Trinitarian logic about the way their relationship develops throughout the novel. Such a reading is contested, by secular critics who disagree with religious interpretations of ostensibly secular novels, and by religious critics who disagree with those who describe the more didactic and allegorical dimensions of Austen's work, but there is sufficient textual evidence to demonstrate its validity.

Every event in *Mansfield Park* has, as its "first cause," to use an Aristotelian and Scholastic term, an action or inaction of Sir Thomas. He is an "absentee landlord," a deist description of God's relationship with creation. Deism was a prominent religious philosophy in Austen's period, which believes in a supreme creator who is the ultimate source of reality and ground of value but does not intervene in natural or historical processes through providences or revelations or incarnations. Austen may not be consciously critiquing deism but she is a theist, who believes God is personal and present as well as transcendent, and a critique of deism is an extension of her contemporary presentation of the story of the fall and the drama of preservation and salvation, and her interrogation of reason and feeling. Throughout *Mansfield Park*, Austen criticizes Sir Thomas as an emotionally absent parent. The social and economic and moral disorder of the Estate and Church, which includes Sir Thomas's extended family in Mansfield and Portsmouth and his affairs in Antigua, can only improve after he recognizes how bad things are and becomes personally involved. His ability to act, however, is circumscribed by the nature of human free will.

Apart from recent losses, we do not know why Sir Thomas had to go to Antigua for most of volume I. We do know its plantations were not as viable as they once were, its soil was exhausted, there was a boycott of sugar for political and moral reasons, and recent legislation had abolished the slave trade in the colonies although slavery itself had long been abolished in the United Kingdom. Sir Thomas's income was precarious, and the reordering of his affairs in Antigua, which may have involved slavery in some way, took longer than expected. He was greatly altered on his return to England, and while he was away the moral order of his home fell apart because of his absence.

From the beginning of volume II, Sir Thomas focuses his gaze on Fanny, the only character who resisted the staging of *Lovers' Vows*, as he silently goes about doing what he can to prevent further disorder and promote renewal from within his Estate and Church. At the center of the volume, also the center of the novel, during a game of Speculation, he issues a veiled threat to Henry Crawford, telling him he is not welcome to purchase, secularize, and "improve" Thornton Lacey, a living destined for Edmund and necessary for his plan for renewal.

At the beginning of volume III, Sir Thomas enters Fanny's domain, an area of Mansfield that became hers by default because no one else wanted to use it. This domain is the east room and the white attic, which combine to represent Mansfield's mind; particularly in a neoclassical building, within a neoclassical novel, where the term attic

has a double meaning. He has come to bring her news of Henry's proposal of marriage. When she refuses the proposal, he suggests she does not know her own mind, an ambiguous comment that suggests she does not know his mind either.

Is it really Sir Thomas's will that Fanny marries Henry? While it is generally assumed that it is, we cannot be sure because his will, like God's, is complex and hidden. We do know that he has already placed clear boundaries around Henry, and his visit to Fanny's domain does symbolize his shift from deism to theism. When he discovers Fanny's domain is cold, because his sister-in-law Mrs Norris never allowed her to have a fire there, he has one lit. In a novel where symbolism matters, the cold mind signifies pure reason and the hot fire signifies pure feeling. Once these rooms are warm, Fanny's mind, and Mansfield's, become more balanced.

When Fanny first came to Mansfield she had no formal education but brought with her something more important that it lacks: a religious disposition; a spirit of brotherly love. Even so, she needs to make the same journey into maturity as every Austen heroine, which means achieving the right balance of reason and feeling. But Fanny's journey is unique. She is constantly being humbled and reminded that everything she is given is a gift she is not entitled to. Her position as a servant is constantly being reinforced because, like Jesus, she has come to serve not to be served, and to give her life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25–8; Mark 10:42–5). Her emotional trials are necessary if she is to develop the mature religious disposition necessary for the preservation and salvation of Estate and Church.

Austen is clear about Fanny's stark choice. She can serve Edmund, who is good, and never be more to him than a sister, or she can serve Henry, who is evil, and become his wife in a loveless marriage. The choice is highlighted when her beloved brother William, who is visiting Mansfield, gives her a cross without a chain to put it on. Henry and Edmund each give Fanny a chain, so she can wear the cross to her first ball. Naturally, Henry's chain cannot bear the cross, which allows her to wear Edmund's chain with a clear conscience. So Fanny makes her debut with William's cross, which links her to Jesus, and Edmund's chain, which links her to the Church.

During their confrontation in Fanny's domain, Sir Thomas subjects his niece to the kind of emotional pressure he would never subject his daughters to. She responds with a moral conviction they do not have. She stands up to him on principle and she is the only character that does, including his son Edmund. This causes her immense pain, because she honors him above all earthly things and she is mortified that her conscience prevents her from accepting what is apparently his will. When he asks whether she agrees Edmund "has seen the woman he could love," another ambiguous observation, she is thrown into emotional chaos. Fanny is certain Mary Crawford is the wrong wife for Edmund but uncertain whether Edmund feels anything more than brotherly love for her. As she has been programmed to serve, not to be served, she cannot admit her feelings for Edmund, even to herself.

Sir Thomas hands Fanny to Crawford to be tested, just as God hands Job to Satan to be tested (Job 1:6–12), and the Holy Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tested (Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13). Part of her test is banishment to Portsmouth for an extended wilderness experience that coincides with Lent and, ultimately, with the Easter season. By the end of volume III, which coincides with

Ascension and Pentecost, Fanny has survived her passion and suffering and returns to Mansfield where, as its messiah, she becomes a glorified clergy wife.

Sir Thomas's gaze has also been on Edmund. On his return from Antigua, he blames Edmund for staging *Lovers' Vows*, rather than Tom, his first son and heir, even though staging the play was Tom's idea. This does not make sense until the reader realizes Edmund, a second son destined for the Church, is meant to be his brother's keeper. Edmund represents the authority of a Church that is unable to preserve the integrity of the Estate. In this way the testing of Edmund's vocation becomes bound up with the testing of Fanny's vocation. The drama facing Edmund is the drama facing a Church that will lose its moral and spiritual authority if it allows itself to be seduced by the world, represented by Mary Crawford, and forgets its focus must be on Jesus, represented by Fanny. The Church must decide between the world and Jesus. Edmund must decide between Mary and Fanny.

Apart from that, Edmund needs to become a resident priest and not participate in the widespread culture of non-residence, which encourages some priests to become more worldly than pastoral. Early in the novel, Sir Thomas is forced to pay for Tom's dissipation and extravagance, which means giving the Mansfield living to Dr Grant. For as long as Dr Grant is incumbent, Edmund is deprived of the primary living intended for him. Thornton Lacey, another parish within the estate, is the only living left for Edmund, and establishing his residency there, as soon as he is ordained, is fundamental to Sir Thomas's plan for renewal. However, Mary Crawford supports her brother's wish to purchase and secularize and "improve" Thornton Lacey, as her asides during a game of Speculation reveal, because his wish promotes her desire "to shut out the church, sink the clergyman, and see only the respectable, elegant, modernized, and occasional residence of a man of independent fortune." She has no intention of marrying a resident priest. She will only marry Edmund if he becomes a wealthy pluralist with as many absentee livings as he can obtain.

The last chapter is delineated in broad strokes. As Mansfield Park moves forward, beyond Lent and Easter and Ascension and Pentecost, the forces of evil are banished. But those forces are not conquered. The forces of good reign, for the time being at least, since preservation and salvation are frail and contingent things and both Estate and Church will no doubt fall again. In a dramatic reversal of fortune, Lady Bertram's daughter, Maria, who is her mother's namesake, is banished from the estate with Mrs Norris, the character whose mischief promoted the original estrangement. Mrs Price's daughter, Fanny, who is her mother's namesake, returns to Mansfield Park as its messiah. Once the Estate and Church are reordered, and Sir Thomas becomes more comfortable with his theistic persona, the relationship between himself and Fanny and Edmund has every chance of developing its Trinitarian character beyond the end of the novel.

The Prototypical Destiny of the Heroine

There is a relationship between the prototype a heroine represents and whether Austen intends her to become first lady of the Estate or clergy wife in the Church. The ideal

marriages established in the mansions of Delaford in *Sense and Sensibility* and Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice* represent feeling tempered by reason, which is appropriate in a gentry couple more worldly than religious. The ideal marriages established in the parsonages of Delaford and Mansfield represent reason tempered by feeling, which is appropriate in a clergy couple more religious than worldly. Marianne Dashwood and Elizabeth Bennet suffer from an excess of feeling that needs to be tempered by reason before they assume their role as effective first lady. Elinor Dashwood and Fanny Price suffer from an excess of reason that needs to be tempered by feeling before they assume their role as effective clergy wife; neither is destined to become first lady; this is their complementary but necessary role in Austen's narrative scheme.

Emma Woodhouse, the heroine of *Emma*, and Catherine Morland, the heroine of *Northanger Abbey*, share these lay and clerical destinies, but the destiny of Anne Elliot, the heroine of *Persuasion*, is unique. Austen's last heroine is being groomed to follow in Sophia Croft's footsteps and become the effective mistress of a home without traditional boundaries. Within this global province Anne will never be able to command a ship at sea, but then she will never need to as long as she has a husband who can do it for her. Austen is clear, however, that Anne has more command on land than her future husband does, hence the way in which everyone, including her future husband, looks to her for guidance after Louisa's fall from the Cobb. This is one of the more striking and radical propositions *Persuasion* makes. Anne could have become first lady of an estate had she accepted Charles Musgrove as a husband but that was not what Austen had in mind. As Mrs Frederick Wentworth, Anne becomes a naval wife whose home is a wider and more dangerous world.

When read in this context, Austen's literary vision becomes prophetic. She represents her heroines not only as Eve, the first woman of biblical myth to have fallen, but as agents of preservation and salvation from a fall that is as contemporary as it is biblical. Her vision, then, is not unlike the vision of other prophetic women who feature strongly in the scriptures, four thousand years of Jewish and Christian history, and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel.

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