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THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF A CLEAR CONSCIENCE IN SUPPORTING THE THEORY OF EDUCATION: A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO JANE AUSTEN'S MANSFIELD PARK

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ABSTRACT

Referred to as a novel on female education, Austen criticizes the grooming patterns of parents and the society of the young teenage girls, where formal and informal education for females focuses on accomplishments and superficiality rather than the Christian virtues and the holistic development of women. The aim of this research paper is to highlight Austen's exemplary heroine Fanny Price who is neglected by her biological parents but her exposure and experiences in Mansfield Park enlightens her consciousness in acknowledging the hardships and struggles in her life. Fanny emerges as an ideal daughter and a wife in the nineteenth century Victorian England. Also, this paper is multi-disciplinary in approach to the parenting styles, communication patterns and the theory of education. This paper also points out to the consequences of the social hierarchy of Austen's England on the future of young women, the significance of birth and status in being privileged and socially judged as an agreeable or disagreeable woman.

Keywords: Female education, Jane Austen, Mansfield Park, Victorian England, multi-disciplinary.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Mansfield Park represents the rural upper middle-class England comprising of a few families, where Fanny, Austen's exemplary heroine is brought up by her wealthy maternal aunt because of her parents' financial condition and their short-sightedness as parents. Fanny comes to realize her true identity as being deep-rooted in the rural community she originates from, as inbred with modesty, compassion, and humanity for the larger good of the Universe when compared to the selfishness and insensitivity of the urban life. Locke also asserts a congenial environment for the development of a sound mind in a sound body as a

pre-requisite for a well-rounded education. In the instance of failure in providing appropriate nourishment, guidance, and education, Mrs. Price is fortunate in being relieved of the burden of her eldest daughter, Fanny by her sister Lady Bertram, wife of Sir Thomas Bertram.

Austen conveys the importance of female grooming, the Lockean philosophy of instructing the mind and governing their actions, in the words of Lady Bertram, " Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without farther expense to anybody. "(Austen 9) Sir Thomas is initially hesitant for shouldering the responsibility

of Fanny as it may be an act of cruelty for separating her from her family if not provided adequately. However, in assuming responsibility he is willing to secure for Fanny "the provision of a gentlewoman if no such establishment should offer." (10) Moreover, Fanny is a representation of ignorance, meanness, and vulgarity of manners for her ten years of upbringing in Portsmouth under conditions of poverty and low social rank. In doing so Lady Bertram feels superior and is flamboyant in pointing out the difference between her children and Fanny for their social status.

The nineteenth century Victorian England was discriminating based on wealth and social class, and noble birth was a privilege and symbol of gentility. Lady Bertram feels that Fanny would be groomed with many advantages within the surroundings of Mansfield Park, but is overconfident that in growing up with her children, Fanny would not be so handsome as her cousins but would "... be introduced into the society of this country under such very favourable circumstances as, in all human probability, would get her a credible establishment." (10) The intentions of the Bertrams are clear in providing her an environment of learning in her years of adolescence. Aunt Norris remarks, "It will be an education for the child, said I, only being with her cousins; if Miss Lee taught her nothing, she would learn to be good and clever from them." (12) Fanny's education is intended to groom her for a credible and advantageous establishment under the tutoring of Miss Lee the governess at Mansfield Park. "She had begun to feel undecided as to what she ought to do, and; as she walked around the room her doubts were increasing. Was she right in refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for?" (128) Fanny's obsession of doing things correctly, and her sensitivity to every situation, in behaving appropriately as a part of the larger Universe, in meeting the expectations for her extraordinary fortune at Mansfield Park fills Fanny with gratitude in being useful to the Bertram family by reciprocating their fine intentions in grooming her while educating her for society.

2. MANSFIELD PARK: FANNY'S SECOND HOME

When Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park, "there might not be much in her first appearance to captivate; there was nothing to disgust her relations. She was small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty, exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice, but her air, though awkward, was not vulgar, her voice was sweet, and when she spoke her countenance was pretty....but needed a lot of encouragement." (14) The suppression and fear in her appearance reflect Fanny's grooming through childhood under the care of her impoverished parents, Mr. and Mrs. Price. Fanny's mind is not a blank slate when she arrives at Mansfield Park, but carries her experiences and memories of her childhood. Fanny is devoid of parental guidance and supervision, and her ultimate separation at a tender age when she should have lived within the cocoon of her mother's affection and nourishment puts Fanny in a psychological turmoil.

She is fearful and speculative of her future in Mansfield Park which takes the form of tears when she is rendered helpless with the thought of her parents and siblings in Portsmouth. Fanny has to overcome her inherent fear which is the biggest challenge to her self-actualization and ultimate happiness. Initially, Fanny is faced with the hardship of leaving her home, and though unintentional, no one in the Bertram family makes an extra effort in reducing her anxiety and improving her comfort at Mansfield Park.

As compared to the Bertram girls, Fanny is inferior in accomplishments in music, art, French and is an object of amusement for having no education in history and the world. As her appearance improves Fanny is able to read, write and work, which are her only accomplishments. She is lonely at Mansfield Park, but develops a friendship with the younger Bertram son, Edmund whose affections and concerns console her in times of grief and is a source of encouragement to her, whom she closely associates with her brother William, her dearest sibling.

Fanny's fears stem from her low self-esteem associated with her impoverished family background, social class differences felt in Mansfield

Park and her alienation from her biological parents and siblings. The privilege of being groomed at Mansfield Park, the exposure to the new environment and the encouragement of Edmund transform Fanny into a rational adult with reason and a good sense of judgment, which she is able to achieve in capitalizing her areas of weaknesses into strengths.

Fanny is not deprived of her nourishment and grooming that she deserves and Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas fulfil this moral responsibility in being useful not only to her family but the society at large, which John Locke himself propagates as the duty of parents or the society in his philosophy of education for children. Fanny's visit to Portsmouth at the turn of adolescence, when her education by the Bertram family is almost complete proves the reason and rationality that the freedom in MP has endowed upon her, the ability to judge people and circumstances.

Austen highlights the importance of grooming by contrasting Fanny's personality when she arrives at MP and her short trip back to her humble home through Fanny's observations itself. Fanny's sense of autonomy and independence in reasoning and judging objectively and rationally becomes her strength and the path to true happiness. In Portsmouth, Fanny realizes the lack of warmth and concern in her parents for her, the damn-care attitude of her father, his language, the smell of liquor from him is the same when she left for MP. Mr. and Mrs. Price are neglectful in grooming their children appropriately besides being unable to provide the nourishment, care, and warmth, shirking their parental responsibilities that also forced Fanny into unpredictable circumstances making fear her inherent personality trait. The Price family does not indulge in any meaningful conversations with the house becoming an abode of noise, disorder, and confusion, the reverse of what she sees in MP. No family traditions, cultures, rules and regulations exist in the Price family lacking cohesiveness. The siblings showed no respect for their elders characterized by an emotional disconnect between them, each one left to their destiny. The Price family is characteristic of an uninvolved parenting style with the *laissez-faire*

pattern of communication. The exertions and self-denials placed on Mrs. Price as a result of her imprudent marriage had placed her into such circumstances.

Living through her adolescence in Mansfield Park, Fanny's individuality is marked by reason and rationalism; besides becoming Locke's useful person. Fanny is curious to be useful, and not appear above her humble background because of her distinct grooming outside her home. She derives great pleasure in being useful to the family, but unable to conceive their life in Portsmouth when she leaves home. She closely observes one of her brothers Sam who intelligent and clever when she leaves home is then loud, overbearing and prefers to remain outdoors at every opportunity he gets. All her siblings seem disagreeable, unaccomplished and ignorant to reading and learning.

The fears which Fanny initially has on entering MP transforms into the realization of being her real home. "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." (349-350) For Fanny, Mansfield Park is not devoid of pains, but her home could have no pleasures either. At nineteen, Fanny has overcome the challenge of her fears transforming her weaknesses into strengths with her exposure to a wider environment at Mansfield Park. Fanny emerges as the daughter Sir Thomas desired. Lady Bertram, Sir Thomas and her cousins, Tom, Maria, Julia, and Edmund are crucial in her education at home.

Fanny herself is mindful in learning from her cousins by participating in their experiences and the frequent discussions at home. Fanny's ignorance initially sneered at in MP is metamorphosed into the ultimate essence of education. Fanny enters MP with the good intentions of her maternal aunts Lady Bertram and Aunt Norris, and Uncle Sir Thomas Bertram. However, she is treated inferior to her cousins and her grooming is intended to be less in accomplishments as compared to her cousins which

put her to shame in front of her foster parents especially when ridiculed by her two cousin sisters. Sir Thomas is the patriarchal head of the family and the ultimate decision maker. Sir Thomas Bertram's parenting style and the patterns of family communication have a profound impact on the development of Fanny's overall personality.

He has high expectations from his children in retaining the name of Bertram in being socially graced, disciplined, accomplished and well mannered according to societal demands. The children are under the supervision of the governess, Miss Lee. Sir Thomas's anxiety is fulfilled in seeing his daughters become in person, manners, and accomplishments. Sir Thomas lives in the town away from his family to attend to his duties in the Parliament and is physically absent from his daughters during the most crucial years of adolescence. As a parent, he fulfils the basic physiological needs of his daughters but is unaware of their emotional and psychological needs because of the communication gap created by his absence. Moreover, he is not expressive which prohibits the flow of spirits before him. His daughters exploit the freedom of his absence and prefer in living away from their father. John Locke refers to the importance of disciplining the children by the father in ensuring good habit formation that eventually leads to the formation of virtues. Sir Bertram is unable to closely observe his daughters in governing their actions that they are full of vanity and pride, have mercenary inclinations in being upper class, and lack compassion and empathy for humanity. Fanny considers herself too lowly to be injured by the mortifications of Maria and Julia.

Sir Thomas is big-hearted and compassionate towards Fanny and her siblings in rendering any financial aid for which she is obliged and grateful and even considers it selfish to think any evil of him, as his daughters. He does not forgo his duty of providing for Fanny and assists her liberally in her education at home. The lack of open communication within the family is one of the reasons for the contradictory behaviour of children. His lack of warmth, love, patience, and discussions leads to him being misinterpreted by the daughters. However Fanny is guilty of having the same opinion

of Sir Thomas as a father, but her gratitude for his goodwill towards her and her brothers transcends the shameful insensibility and she is filled with tears for which she is labeled as a hypocrite by her cousins. Fanny has a sense of duty towards the Bertram family for providing her through her most crucial adolescent years of learning and being socially competent.

Fanny's thoughts and reflections are a result of her observations and realization. Fanny's hardships and struggles in sharing her parents' impoverished life makes Fanny practical and grateful for all the education and protection she is receiving under the charity of Sir Thomas which moulds her personality in having reason and being pragmatic. She is a helping hand to the Bertrams in carrying out small odd jobs and running short errands making her accomplished in domestic chores, unlike the Bertram girls. The Bertram girls have no experience of hardships and struggle living by their father's status and money with all their needs and desires available on a platter making them vain and ignorant; whereas Fanny must struggle for the status and reputation the Bertram girls are privileged to, modeling her as a humble and level-headed teen. Lady Bertram is not actively involved in the grooming of her young adolescent girls.

Fanny is a good company to her when the Bertram girls attend parties and balls, keeping her engaged in conversations which eventually make Lady Bertram dependent on her; but Lady Bertram has not groomed her own daughters in investing quality family time that could strengthen the bond between the mother and daughters. Fanny is curious to learn about the balls that Mary and Julia attend which according to Locke: Curiosity is natural of the young ignorant mind.

The Bertram children are permitted to attend socials with no constraints and lack the guidance of appropriate mannerisms in society; Lady Bertram does not even accompany them to balls. According to the Victorian England codes of conduct, the young girls must be accompanied by an adult; Locke also insists that the parents must guide them before and during the social events rather than verbally instructing them. The Bertram parents

discriminate Fanny in providing her the same exposure as their daughters but are equally ignorant in guiding their children which puts their reputation at stake later when the girls are flirting because of the unrestricted freedom in society. Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas are emotionally detached from their children, although Sir Thomas is conscious of his status and concerned with the right grooming of his daughters, though uninvolved. The family lacks an open communication and consensus in decision making.

The parents do not involve their children in open discussions regarding their experiences with peers and are unaware of their interactions with the company they keep. The lack of bonding and openness with parents is a barrier to the formation of right habits and virtues. Sir Thomas is patriarchal in his approach and does not grant his daughters the wisdom to decision-making in handling their life situations. The teenage girls in their years of curiosity exploit the freedom in experiencing and discovering the world with no parental guidance. Lady Bertram is discriminating in her parenting style with Fanny but Lord Bertram does not project any discrimination between the Bertram girls and Fanny. Fanny accepts the discrimination she faces who has no share in the festivities of the season and happily talks and listens to Lady Bertram reading out to her when her daughters are busy socializing in balls. Fanny is curious, but has no temptations and anger within her, possessing the virtues of self-control and self-denial.

Edmund plays a crucial role in Fanny's informal grooming and education. He is true to her interests, considerate of her feelings, giving advice, consolation, and encouragement even when he leaves for Oxford. His close attention, empathy, and instructions assist Fanny in improving her mind. Besides, Fanny is clever to have a quick apprehension and good sense and a fondness for reading, an education in itself. Austen highlights the importance of self-grooming and self-education through reading in a male-dominated society. Miss Lee teaches Fanny French and hears her read the history portion daily. Edmund recommends Fanny the books which please her, for her idle pastime. He encourages her taste and guides her in her

judgment. He involves himself in conversation which makes her reading more useful praising her for her judgments which heightens her self esteem. Edmund is a mentor to her making her worthy in her own eyes too. This kind of learning and sharing views with Edmund as the mentor and guide encourage and provokes her independent critical thinking skills that further develop her reason which according to Locke is an essential characteristic of an individual who can be useful to the family, community, and nation. Edmund takes on the parental role of grooming Fanny and Fanny's blind faith in Edmund increases her dependency on him, which was expected from the nineteenth-century woman in the male-dominated society Fanny even overcomes her fear of horse riding with Edmund's patience and support.

Austen highlights the male domination of the nineteenth century where Edmund unintentionally controls Fanny and Fanny as the weaker sex subdues to his control for want of emotional support. Edmund is protective about Fanny and corrects the impression formed by Miss Crawford, "My cousin is grown up. She has the age and sense of a woman."(44). This also projects Fanny's development in Mansfield Park and the good image she carries that makes people she lives with, proud of her.

3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FANNY'S DEVELOPMENT OF HER CONSCIOUSNESS:

At the turn of adolescence, Fanny is timid and shy, and the obstacle to her growth and development is her fears and feelings of insecurity which stems from the low esteem of her childhood experiences with her impoverished parents. She is privileged to the physiological needs required for her survival in Mansfield Park. Her sense of security and belongingness is strengthened with her bonding with Edmund who instils a feeling of belongingness to the Bertram family and reminds her of her strengths in being important to them. Fanny has an affectionate heart that Edmund realizes and helps her to get rid of her timidity through his kindness and encouragement, and advises her to spend more time with his sisters, Mary and Julia.

She is considered dull and stupid requiring more pains in coming up to the level of the Bertram girls, but she is feminine according to the social demands in being domestically accomplished. Fanny is compassionate, grateful and sensitive to the people around her accepting herself and the environment she lives in, considering herself fortunate. Fanny's bonding with her elder brother William gives her a sense of belongingness with the strong sibling ties she shares with him. Both of them remain in constant touch with each other, and Fanny is also frequently called on by William. His visits to MP empower her with a sense of esteem in his love and concern for her.

As Fanny advances through her adolescence, her self esteem heightens from the appreciation and praise she earns from the Bertram family. On her journey to self-actualization, Fanny must achieve ultimate happiness in her social recognition, autonomy, and recognition while transcending her psychological barriers. As Fanny's personality unfolds through adolescence while conforming to the social feminine stereotypes, she overcomes her internal conflicts of fear and feelings of insecurity. Fanny is open to learning which reconstructs her personality. In achieving self-actualization, Fanny has the ability of risk-taking and accepting her mistakes.

In grooming to be accomplished, Fanny overcomes her fear and learns horse riding with the encouragement of Edmund. Fanny's learning is not restricted to her education by the Bertram family; her own thoughts and reflections are her companion in her solitary moments. Fanny loves Nature and observes things closely. She is quiet and disinterested in meaningless conversations; although lonely she is not a loner. Fanny has a delicacy of taste, mind, and feelings. In spite of the challenges she faces, she is strong-willed and determined to transcend all barriers in being her complete self and achieve happiness in her individuality. Fanny is curious to learn about the social situations of balls and dances but is not privileged enough to experience one with her cousins; she fulfils her curiosity by questioning them of the events. Fanny is an ardent reader which Edmund also encourages that leads to self-

awareness and the knowledge of the world she lives in.

At the turn of adolescence, Fanny visits her home in Portsmouth and observes the chaos; noise and disorder which makes her acknowledge the pains of her home and considers herself fortunate for her upbringing in MP. Fanny is filled with gratitude for Mansfield Park for the modesty, morals, and virtues that become her characteristic personality traits. But Fanny is level-headed and acknowledges her humble background, and the strength and endurance she develops from the hardships and struggles at home without any pride in her distinct education at Mansfield Park. Fanny has learned to appreciate the sunny side of life and views every situation positively. She acknowledges the discrimination she faces with a smile and looks for happiness by reminding herself of her blessings in Mansfield Park.

Fanny spends quiet moments to herself in thoughts and reflections that enable her to develop her reason and rationalism in judging people and circumstances. She is able to use her weakness of being an introvert in observing closely and learning through her observations. Fanny foregoes her ego and accepts every human as an individual with the same needs and feelings. Like the self-actualized, Fanny accepts herself, others and the environment without any unnecessary inhibitions and shame. Maslow emphasizes the moral and ethical behaviour in discovering and becoming oneself. Unlike the Bertram girls Fanny is cautious in every stride she takes ensuring that she does not harm the status and reputation of Sir Thomas; she does not use her liberty in discovering and experiencing the world for which she is an example to the upper-class girls for her sweet temper and modesty. In being ignorant about social situations, Fanny is quiet and avoids meaningless interactions quietly observing the society and learning from her experiences. Edmund praises Fanny for being agreeable in society for her simplicity and mannerisms, in being reserved. Fanny has the greatest sense of gratitude for Sir Thomas who has taken on the parental role and is even misinterpreted as being a hypocrite.

But Fanny retains her individuality and is not affected by the practices and feelings of the Bertram girls towards Sir Thomas. Maslow's self-actualized individuals are not self-centred, rather other-centred and devoted to their duties. Fanny has pride in being useful to her family when in Portsmouth, and in Mansfield Park. She takes initiative and a keen interest in being useful to Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas. Fanny is accomplished in domestic chores and is proactive in running short errands for the family with no sense of shame or regret. Fanny's achievement lies in her being acknowledged and longed for in MP caused by the reversal of opinion of Fanny that creeps up eventually from her sweetness of temper and a strong sense of belongingness to the Bertram family. Though financially poor in wealth, Fanny radiates love through her gratitude and warmth. She is able to overcome the physical and emotional stigma that arose out of her parents' negligence in grooming her appropriately and make a place in the hearts of the inhabitants of Mansfield Park. Fanny's reciprocation of warmth, respect, and genuine gratitude for the Bertram family is reflected in her becoming an object of pride for the Bertram family and in being the ideal daughter.

Fanny brings praise and a good reputation to the family; unlike the Bertram girls who are a disgrace to the status and reputation of Sir Thomas. At the same time, Fanny learns to exercise her autonomy in leaving and returning to MP, yet she maintains her sweet temper on taking this decision. Like the self-actualized, Fanny is lonely but not a loner but is an introvert. She enjoys the company of Edmund and is emotionally dependent on him, and the self-actualized individuals with peak experiences can have intimate and close relations with few. Fanny's secret love and admiration for Edmund that develops from his kindness, encouragement, and mentorship gives Fanny hopes for the future. Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas also contribute to her education in MP in a monumental manner. With the approval of the Bertram family, Fanny finds her ultimate happiness in marrying Edmund who becomes a clergyman. She is acknowledged for her consciousness of being born to struggle and endure.

4 CONCLUSION

Fanny's quiet, timid, and shy and inexpressiveness makes Fanny observant, thoughtful and reflective in ultimately achieving a sense of autonomy. Fanny represents the ideal Lockean individual with a sense of reason and freedom who is ultimately useful to themselves, the community and the society. Locke asserts the privilege of every child to the physiological, psychological growth and development which is fulfilled not by Fanny's parents, but her maternal aunt and uncle. Fanny supports the theory of education from her early hardships and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure", and transpires to be an ideal daughter, wife, and woman. The development of Fanny's morals, character and her sense of gratitude is an outcome of the awakening of her consciousness to her distinct upbringing in Mansfield Park. Austen draws the readers' special attention to manners and appearances for which girls are groomed and make them distinct, through the male eye since courtships and marriages in the nineteenth century were based on the superficial elements which Austen critiques.

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