

## ‘Above all, the peace and tranquility of Mansfield:’ *Mansfield Park* and Islands: A Deleuzian Reading

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*Abstract: For a novel set in England's interior, Jane Austen's Mansfield Park introduces a surprising number of literal islands, from Portsmouth's Ports to Antigua to the Isle of Wight. Mansfield Park itself functions as a metaphoric island, and Portsmouth and Antigua share a connection as two central British dockyards during a period of warfare. Using constructs proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, this paper explores Lord Bertram's and Fanny Price attempts to protect the Mansfield estate as an originative pre-industrial "island," cutting off modernity's and imperialism's flows. This paper also examines how this attempt is undermined by the estate's literal dependence on the flow of capital from an Antigua slave plantation and the flows created by the Napoleonic wars, represented by Fanny Price's brother William. In light of Deleuze and Guattari, Mansfield Park raises the issue of gendered responses to flow and the dangers of Deleuzian "becomings" to females in patriarchal society.*

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I

*Mansfield Park*, though set largely in England's interior, abounds with islands: real islands, metaphoric islands and islands of the imagination. Literal island areas include Portsmouth, England's only island city, located on Portsea, birthplace of the novel's heroine, Fanny Price. Other islands are Brit: itself, the Isle of Wight, and Antigua, home to a plantation all important to the Bertram finances. Imaginary or metaphoric islands include both Mansfield Park, the White attic, and the "desert" island of Maria and Mrs. Norris's final exile. This paper will explore how these islands interconnect to reveal a clash of stasis and energy that permeates the text — and to argue that *Mansfield Park* offers a woman's perspective on the value of high energy flows.

In *Mansfield Park*, imperial islands — Antigua, Portsea's Portsmouth, and England — connect with the pre-industrial "island" of Mansfield. The bulk the novel concerns the volcano of change that dances and strains and boils up to a crisis beneath the surface of an ostensible story of romantic love and courtship. In this reading, the novel's theme centers on an island's defense: detecting, expelling and ejecting unwelcome invaders from Mansfield Park. Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* help lay bare the underlying flows and relationships in this universe whose central character turns inward to protect herself from a deluge of potentially anarchic reterritorializations.

As described by Deleuze and Guattari, reterritorialization is a process of restructuring, of creating new assemblages out of disparate parts that intersect. It is change brought about by the connection of geographies. A wasp and an orchid intersect in a specific place, and each deterritorializes taking a bit of the other that they then reterritorialize. The wasp, write Deleuze and Guattari, "reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen." In so doing, "the two becomings interlink" and new forms flow (*Plateaus* 10).

Despite Sir Thomas's — and Fanny Price's — wish that it be otherwise, characters flow in and out of Mansfield Park, generating change, energy, de- and reterritorializations. Characters enter the estate, leave and reenter, until many leave forever, too destabilizing for this metaphoric island's desired stasis. In *Mansfield Park*, Henry and Mary Crawford, Maria, William and Mrs. Norris represent Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of a world of interconnecting rhizomes (a non-hierarchical image of plants sending out underground roots in all directions). Henry Crawford, especially, becomes symbol of the rhizome: an "acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system ..." (*Plateaus* 21). He represents as well the "schizophrenic process of desire," the attempt at "I am all that exists, all the names in history" (*Anti-Oedipus* 10). These high energy characters collide with the traditional "tree of hierarchy" (*Plateaus* 18) and rooted stability represented by Sir Thomas, Fanny, Edmund and Rushworth — who reveal the difficulties inherent in maintaining stasis in a globally interconnected world.

*Mansfield Park* itself is a metaphoric island, marking a step back into a pre-industrial world. Outsider Mary Crawford describes it as fit "to be in any collection of engravings," and we hear in her word "grave" a pun on both the solemn and the funereal. She describes the place as "a gentlemen's seat" but in need of being "completely new furnished" (*MP* 55). The home itself is surrounded by five miles of park, that like a moat or a sea, hold modernity at bay. The "Mansfield Commons" also borders the estate. These commons underscore the pre-industrialized, rural and bucolic ethos of Mansfield: at a time when enclosing (building a fence or wall around) and privatizing what was once open land used by villagers for fodder or forage was increasing rapidly, Mansfield maintained an ancient tradition of openly available communal space. Mansfield's pastoral (in both senses of the word — much is made of second son Edmund's entry into the pastorate) and pre-industrial ethos collide in the novel's action with the flows represented by London's symbol, Mary Crawford, who can't, for instance, understand why a horse and cart might not be available during the harvest for "hire" to transport her harp (*MP* 68). More significantly, Mansfield is supported in part (and a vital part, as Sir Thomas's journey shows) by imperialism's flows of capital from Antigua to England.

In "Desert Islands," Deleuze explores islands as representations of possibility, imagination, myth, birth and rebirth, as fertile and creative terrains of potentiality ripe for reformulation and reinvention, yet deplors that the island metaphor has become an imaginative dead-end in novels such *Robinson Crusoe* and *Suzanne and the Pacific*. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Deleuze finds creative failure: "The mythical recreation of the world from the desert island gives way to the reconstitution of everyday bourgeois life from a reserve of capital. Everything is taken from the ship. Nothing is invented" ("Desert Islands" 12). Likewise, Suzanne's island is "a depository of ready made luxurious, objects. ... Suzanne has nothing to create anew" ("Desert Islands" 12). Further, as Stewart Williams writes, "the protagonists in both tales are deprived of partners in any meaningful sort of relationship

and each instead engages with 'cadavers' [Suzanne] or 'a slave,' [Robinson] respectively, in their reproduction of what Deleuze considers was becoming or had become there (there in Europe as well as the island) a familiar but banal, bourgeois political economy" (217). The island could — at perhaps should — represent the mythic recreation of paradise, but too often it does not.

## II

Deterritorializing flows have already crept into and begun to change Mansfield's would-be "engraved" society before the novel's action begins, both through the Antigua plantation, and through Mrs. Norris, a figure, like the wasp lighting on the orchid, representing both the energetic accumulation of goods and the connection of places.

Mrs. Norris's energy sets the novel in motion: she suggests and energetically advocates for bringing her and Lady Bertram's niece into the household. This niece, Fanny Price, is the daughter of a sister who made an economically improvident marriage, and has born an overflow of children. After some discussion, Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, who apparently would have never entertained — on their own — the idea of bringing another into their enclave, agree to take her in. Sir Thomas chiefly worries about status quo and hierarchy: he decrees that the new entry into their system not disturb the flow of an already functioning machine. In this old-fashioned, aristocratic machine, Sir Thomas is a baronet, not a peer, and yet a member of the titled and hereditary gentry, a gentry class, which as Marilyn Butler points out, had "complete legal ownership of the land" (99). He is determined his children and no one else's will inherit the estate: His chief concern is how to properly graft Fanny onto the family tree. "There will be some difficulty . . . observed Sir Thomas . . . how to preserve in the minds of my *daughters* the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a *Miss Bertram*" (MP 11-12). Wary of disruption, he openly speaks of expelling Fanny should she cause trouble.

Fanny, thus, flows into Mansfield Park as the novel opens, journeying from Portsmouth. With its dockyards, Portsmouth was a center of shipbuilding, a key naval port during the wars with France that were ongoing in this period, and a bustling center of commerce. Such a hub was this crowded, overflowing island city that Fanny would later think of it as a place where "nobody sat still" (MP 407). Mansfield's serenity and empty spaces, with rooms so big that the young Fanny can't feel comfortable in them, provide a sharp contrast.

Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram assume that the childless Mrs. and Mr. Norris will take Fanny as a companion into the parsonage, but that is not her intent: Mrs. Norris both accumulates goods (Wiltshire calls Fanny a "transported commodity" (lxxv)), and socializes the costs of her acquisitions, an expense that Sir Thomas, coming out of a patrician mindset, is willing to bear, as he does the Mansfield Commons. In raising Fanny, however, Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris's different ideologies lead them tacitly to collude on Fanny's deprivations: Sir Thomas allows deprivation in an attempt to assure a proper distance between Fanny and his own, more hereditarily privileged children, and Mrs. Norris to reterritorialize her into a docile slave/worker.

Fanny arrives as a ten-year-old to Mansfield with a mix of shyness, sensitivity and formerly lively spirits — we learn later that she and her brother used to dance in the streets of Portsmouth to the organ grinder. Early in her stay at Mansfield, the young Fanny will chatter on too much about an island: the Isle of Wight, which is in view of Portsmouth. Her more sophisticated Bertram cousins, Maria and Julia, jeer at her for it: "She calls it *the Island*, as if there were no other island in the world," (MP 20) they complain to their Aunt Norris. This place of imagination soon fades from Fanny's view, as she is reterritorialized to a newer, lower status. Marooned at Mansfield, for her, a deserted island — deserted of love and esteem and positive attention (except for Edmund and from time to time, her governess Miss Lee), Fanny is molded into subservience, not least by Edmund's well-intentioned instruction, but more vigorously by Mrs. Norris. Fanny, reterritorialized to be egoless, lives to serve others, to be invisible — she is called a "creep-mouse" (MP 171) — and, as Mrs. Norris reminds her, she must always "remember wherever you are, that you must be the lowest and the last." (MP 258).

Fanny learns to escape to her refuge, her Isle of Wight turned inward to the deserted island of the white (Wight) attic, once a schoolroom, a place of more imaginative potential.<sup>[1]</sup> Like Crusoe on his island, she furnishes her domain with scavenged odds and ends from the larger "civilization" outside the room. Here she finds the solace of the desert island — here she can cry alone and, "after anything unpleasant below," through books and projects "find immediate consolation." (MP 178) In her white attic, she enacts a Deleuzian vision, "dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone . . ." The white attic becomes her "sacred" place. ("Desert Islands" 10).

## III

An island causes profound change when Sir Thomas and Tom leave for Antigua. Debate continues about *Mansfield Park's* dating, especially as to whether the bulk of the novel's action takes place from 1805-08 (or thereabouts) or in a later 1810-13 frame. Both schemas have difficulties, as scholar Ellen Moody points out in an e-mail, in part because of "large swathes of indeterminate time," and a general consensus that the novel revises and combines two earlier works from the 1790s. Internally, the novel conflicts as Fanny's question about the "slave trade," banned in England in 1807, clashes with her reading of Crabbe's 1812 *Tales in Verse*. Nevertheless, whether Austen intended the novel to be set circa 1805-08 or later, as documented by Alexander Jorge Berland and Georgina Endfield, Antigua suffered the entire period from a combination of warfare, internal issues and climate problems that sharply impacted sugar crops and plantation profits, bringing the West Indies to the forefront of the Bertram's lives.

Moody's preferred mid-decade dating coincides with a series of actual sugar crop calamities severe enough to have plausibly motivated even a character like Sir Thomas, who hated to leave home, to travel to his plantation. In 1804, low rainfall, a September cyclone and the imposition of martial law, which interfered with "agricultural operations" for six weeks, led to a "ruinously small harvest" in Antigua in the summer of 1805. Adding to that, the French captured the fleet transporting the bulk of the small harvest. This led to crisis, with "insolvency [on Antigua becoming] . . . widespread." (Berland and Endfield).

We learn in the novel, likewise, of “some recent losses on his [Sir Thomas’s] West India Estate” (MP 27). Mrs. Norris comments to Lady Bertram that “Sir Thomas’s means will be rather straitened if the Antigua estate is to make such poor returns” (MP 34). Lady Bertram coolly responds that all will well in Antiqua: “Oh! *that* will soon be settled. Sir Thomas has been writing about it, I know” (MP 34).

Despite Lady Bertram’s dismissal, the intimate fabric of the Bertram life relies on Antigua. Austen drops oblique hints of the impact of the “losses.” We learn, for example, almost offhandedly, that Miss Lee, the governess, is gone, for “as Miss Lee had left Mansfield, she [Fanny] naturally became everything to Lady Bertram during the night of a ball or a party.” A hole blown in the family income would also explain Sir Thomas’s strain at covering Tom’s “extravagances,” leading to a need to sell the Mansfield living to Mr. Grant that might have been avoided had Sir Thomas’s sugar sale proceeds been higher — or if he has any at all. Sir Thomas would like Mrs. Norris to take the “expense” and “obligation of her future provision” (MP 28) off his hands. Clearly the rents and agricultural profits the Bertrams derived from their five miles of English estate were not enough to maintain an industrial age standard of living. The old-fashioned Sir Thomas, unlike others of his class, was also not ruthlessly enclosing his commons, making the Antigua profits all the more important to the family.

Thus, in a flow that sweeps off Sir Thomas and Tom, probably the following summer as that would have the safest travel time, and most likely having sailed south to Portugal, from there to the Canary Islands and thence to the West Indies, the two arrive safely at Antigua. But alas, the threads of commerce that blow Sir Thomas halfway around the world to act as the patriarch reterritorializing a far-flung tropical estate leave a wide hole in the patriarchy of Mansfield into which the Crawfords flow. Sir Thomas is forced out of his paternal role by his involvement in global flows — and it is worth noting that the disruption of this flow, leading to selling the Mansfield clergy living to Mr. Grant, allows in Henry and Mary Crawford, representatives of all the restless, far-flung energies Sir Thomas wants to keep at bay.

Henry and Mary Crawford, in contrast to Sir Thomas and Fanny, dislike the quiet of the country when they arrive on the Mansfield Park scene, coming to stay with their half-sister and Mr. Grant. Henry, especially, brings overflowing and anarchic sexual energy to the Bertram household, manipulating both Bertram sisters, Maria (by now engaged to Rushworth) and Julia, to fall in love with him, then pursuing Fanny as a conquest. He embodies enthusiasm, imagination and living fully in the moment: as Elizabeth Bowen says, “he towers outside the book” and “counters the moral rhythms of Mansfield Park.” (14) He is an actor, a seducer, a man who seldom sits still: he has, says Edmund, “unsettled habits.” (MP 136). The play, *Lovers’ Vows*, represents the pinnacle of the Crawfords’ reterritorialization in the wake of Sir Thomas’s absence. Even Edmund, who Sir Thomas has trusted as chief bulwark against enemy incursions onto the “island,” is seduced into collaboration with this subversive theatre entering the heart of Mansfield Park. Mary, witty, sparkling, intelligent and creative, enchants Edmund, who wants to marry her, but from the start he is alert to the danger she represents: her flow, in Deleuzian terms, threatens to radically destabilize his rigidly constructed world, as she does when she pulls him into a role in what Butte calls the “anarchic” (107) *Lovers’ Vows*.

As we later learn, it is not a play that upsets Sir Thomas, for, on his return, in an attempt to mollify him, Tom says the play’s scope grew “the faster, probably, from *your* having so often encouraged the sort of thing in us formerly. It was like treading old ground again” (MP 216). It was hardly old ground, however: the scandal of *this* play, “*Lovers’ Vows*,” and the energetic extent to which the production grew towards the flow of public spectacle caused Sir Thomas’s distress.

The play and jealousy and mistrust of the Crawfords strengthens Fanny in her self-reliance, and for the first time she opposes Edmund. This prepares her to wage an even stronger battle against the Crawfords when Henry proposes to marry her.

#### IV

Sir Thomas returns from Antigua physically changed. He “was grown thinner, and had the burnt, fagged, worn look of fatigue and a hot climate” (MP 208-09). He hurried home in the last stage of his journey, “directly from Liverpool, having had an opportunity of making his passage thither in a private vessel,” and suggests, if ambiguously, that his Antigua affairs had made a turn for the better: “His business in Antigua had latterly been prosperous! rapid” (MP 209). He’s mentally changed as well, is delighted to be home, and expresses a new tenderness towards Fanny.

Sir Thomas more than ever desires stasis: he stands for morality, traditional virtues and values but holds little more important than peace and quiet: “for a home which shuts out noisy pleasures.” (MP 218) His children interpret his desire for quiet as “sameness and gloom” (MP 229) when, following his return from Antigua, he initially and deliberately excludes everyone outside of his “own domestic circle” (MP 229) except for Rushworth. From his arrival home, Mrs. Norris and her energized flows sour on him as he begins to recognize her as an agent of change and disruption.

Of the play which Sir Thomas shuts down, Henry waxes nostalgic: “such an animation ... We were all alive” (MP 262). Fanny, in contrast, thinks “Oh! What a corrupted mind.” (263) Henry is the consummate actor who plays all roles, as he does when he reads aloud sections of *Henry VIII*, where he was the “King, the Queen, Buckingham, Wolsey Cromwell ... whether it were dignity, or pride, or tenderness, or remorse ... [he was] truly dramatic” (MP 389-90).

In energy and acquisitive abilities, Henry parallels Mrs. Norris, and notably both are associated with eggs, to Deleuze a symbol of island rebirth. Mrs. Norris comes home happily with pheasant eggs she has sponged from Sotherton (along with cream cheese) hoping to hatch the eggs and begin a flock. Henry cracks and eats eggs for breakfast on the morning of William’s departure for sea, his plate littered with broken egg shells. (MP 327) And he does crack life open: it is he, not Sir Thomas who gets William a commission to be made a lieutenant, a position that William explicitly ties to fecundity, complaining that the girls at balls ignore midshipmen in favor of officers. William is all flow: “young as he was, William ... had been in the Mediterranean; in the West Indies; in the Mediterranean again” (MP 275). We further learn that “in the course of seven years [he] had known every variety of danger which sea and war together could offer” (MP 275). Understanding his function, Lady Bertram will hope that as an officer he will travel to the other end of the globe, the East Indies, so that he can bring her back not one, but two, shawls, while she sits static. Understanding what ener

he represents, Henry Crawford identifies with him and so helps his career: "He longed to have been at sea, and seen and done and suffered as much. His heart was warmed, his fancy fired . . ." (MP 275). It is Henry too who offers Fanny a more expansive future than that of the constricted Mansfield dependent consigned to a specific notch on the family tree.

When Fanny refuses Henry's marriage offer, a penniless dependent turning down a wealthy and socially acceptable match, Sir Thomas exiles her to the island of her birth, Portsmouth, to come to her senses. Fanny thinks of it as her "exile from good society" (MP 455).

From the start of the novel, Portsea island's Portsmouth has been juxtaposed with Antigua. On the first pages, we both learn of Fanny in Portsmouth and of the West India property. The two far-flung islands share similarities. Antigua, like Portsmouth, was home to an important dockyard, called the English Dockyard, a major port and imperial naval hub in the West Indies during England's frequent wars ("Antigua"). Naval as well as financial and familial flows therefore connected Mansfield Park to both Portsmouth and Antigua. In a parallel with Fanny's future banishment back to Portsmouth, Sir Thomas's Antigua journey is also represented as an exile from "domestic tranquility," (MP 218) a painful removal from Mansfield Park. Both uncle and niece are or will be marked by their enforced exiles: neither will want to leave Mansfield again.

Like the fatigued Sir Thomas in Antigua, Fanny's health in Portsmouth suffers. Henry, on visiting her, says: "I wish you were not so tired . . . I wish I left you in stronger health" (MP 477). If Fanny suffers from crowding, noise, dirt, and disorder, we might imagine similar disorder greeting Sir Thomas in Antigua. Contemporary records speak of droughts, which led to lack of food and clean water for the slaves, some of whom died of dysentery. In Portsmouth, we learn of Fanny's sister Maria's death and witness a disorder that might have also existed on the Antigua estate upon Lord Bertram's arrival. Further, Mr. Price's desire to beat Maria — "if she *belonged* [my emphasis] to me, I'd give her the rope's end as long as I could stand over her" (MP 509) might parallel literal beatings on the Antigua plantation.

As much as Sir Thomas, Fanny abhors noise, confusion and bustle, which she encounters in abundance in Portsmouth's thriving mercantile economy and in her parents' home. Fanny now thinks, "above all, of the peace and tranquility of Mansfield." She is a "full contrast" to Portsmouth where "nobody [except her] sat still." (MP 454) Mansfield, once an island of tears, where she suffered the "pains of tyranny, of ridicule and neglect" (MP 17) becomes in her imagination magically transformed to an island paradise, a place of "liberty, freshness, fragrance, and verdure," (MP 500) in contrast to Portsmouth's noise "confinement, bad air, bad smells" (MP 500). In Portsmouth, too, Fanny begins to soften towards Henry: "Sir Thomas, had he known all, might have thought his niece in a promising way of being starved, both mind and body, into a much juster value of Mr. Crawford's good company and good fortune" (MP 479). ("Cruelty," write Deleuze and Guattari, "is the movement of culture that is realized in bodies and inscribed on them, belaboring them. This is what cruelty means." (*Anti-Oedipus* 145)) . Under her new regime, Fanny herself "was quite persuaded of his [Henry] being astonishingly more gentle and regardful of others than formerly" (MP 479).

Yet Fanny remains passive, functioning at the level of contemplation, not action, in her love life. In the end, sitting immobile works, for Henry's boundless energy causes his own undoing: his decoded flows, his assurance that "I am all that exists" persuades him he can manage an affair with the married Maria while still pursuing marriage with Fanny. Against all his warmth and energy he possesses "freaks of a cold-blooded vanity" (MP 540).

And so, we end up with oppositions: Sir Thomas's hierarchical "tree" of a carefully calibrated and "engraved" universe squaring off against Henry's anarchic flows. If Henry seems to follow Deleuze and Guattari's advice: "Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant!" (*Plateaus* 24), Sir Thomas stays rooted in his plantations (plantings) around Mansfield "plantations." Fanny views these as "the freshest green" upon her return to Mansfield. Sir Thomas's "tree" in Deleuze and Guattari's words, "imposes the verb "to be," a world most welcome to Fanny, while Henry stands as "the conjunctive 'and. . . and. . . and. . .'" (*Plateaus* 24-25).

Like her brother, Mary aspires to "'and. . . and. . . and. . .'" She clearly feels strongly attracted to Edmund and finds safety in his character, but she passionately urges him to eschew the quiet, ordered life of a country clergyman and to embark on a more risk-taking, energetic and lucrative career. She grows angry and frustrated, because, if he really does love her, she believes he should be willing to change. This Edmund has no intention of doing; in fact, he can't really conceive of it. By the end of the novel, her threat has become too real: when she exposes the hypocrisy of a morality that heaps inordinate censure on marital infidelity and, moreover, proposes defying it, Edmund can no longer accept her: the rigid male ownership of women in marriage is too fundamental to his worldview to countenance her ideas. In what Deleuze calls the threat of "a mouth with too unfamiliar a smile," (*Anti-Oedipus* 211) Edmund discovers an enemy: it is Mary's final smile that repulses Edmund: "a saucy, playful smile, seeming to invite *in order to subdue me.*" (MP 531, italics mine). With that smile, the relationship ends.

Removed from Mary's dangers, Edmund feels "the greatest relief" (MP 531) and begins to turn his eyes to the cousin who has grown up with him as sister. He comes quickly to hope "that her warm and *sisterly* (my italics) regard for him would be foundation enough for wedded love" (MP 544). With Fanny, he faces no threat, for "her mind [has been] in so great a degree formed by his care" that he has "no fear of opposition of taste," nor worry about "dissimilarity of temper" (MP 545).

There's little doubt that Austen misunderstood the incestuous underpinnings of her duo: "I like first cousins to be first cousins and interested about each other. They are but one remove from brother and sister," (283) she wrote in a letter to her niece, Anna Lefroy in 1814, a few months after *Mansfield Park's* publication. With his marriage to Fanny, Edmund achieves peace: "Family squabbling is the greatest evil of all" (MP 151); married to sister-self, serenity, not squabbling, is likely to emerge.

In "Desert Islands," Deleuze associates the imagined island and its new beginning or "second origin" with the egg, a symbol of reproduction: often what we find on the island "is an egg, a cosmic egg." Yet by the end of *Mansfield Park*, the two characters associated with eggs have been expelled. Mrs. Norris's fecundity, symbolized not only by eggs but by the apricots she planted at the parsonage and Maria's abortive marriage, produce bad fruit, while Henry eats his egg: "I have been a devourer of my own [happiness]," (MP 72) he says.

Maria and Mrs. Norris, emblems of out-of-control energy, find themselves exiled to a metaphoric desert island, one that offers a dystopic inversion of Deleuze's mythic island of imagination and possibility. "An establishment [is] ... formed for them in another country, remote and private, where, shut together with little society ... it may be reasonably supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment" (MP 538).

With Edmund married to a mirror image, and the destabilizing flows of Mrs. Norris, Maria, Henry and Mary expelled, we're left with a more deserted Mansfield "island" than the one with which we began. Through this novel, Austen communicates that society's most energized flows, from Henry Crawford to Maria to Portsmouth, are sources of danger and death more than life. For Butler, this would reflect Austen's historical surround, in which fears engendered by the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars meant a sharp turn from liberalism to reactionary politics that last through Austen's adult life. Articulating female independence and "sexual incontinence" became "virtually taboo," (Butler 94) and as a result, says Butler, women's writing was rendered "compromised, or altogether frustrated" (95). Butler's condemnation of "the elevation of the close-knit family unit to symbolic status," (94) and all the repressions that entails, represented by Austen through Edmund and Fanny as his Friday-like wife, not to mention Sir Thomas, would seem congruent with Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Freud's Oedipal family as "the figurehead of imperialism ... 'the interior colony ... our intimate colonial education ... what teaches us to desire our own repression'" (Seem xx).

But perhaps there's another reading. *Mansfield Park*, even if based on early works, is a mature novel, a product of the security Austen achieved at Chawton cottage, safely under the care of her wealthy landed brother Edward Austen Knight after the death of his 35-year-old wife Elizabeth, shortly after delivering her eleventh child. And not dealt with directly in Deleuze, but perhaps acutely a part of Austen's consciousness, are the threats posed particularly to vulnerable women by too many flows, be they serial childbirth, predatory men or too much movement. In this vein, *Mansfield Park* can be read as a woman's fantasy of retreat into stasis's safety, and an acknowledgement of a reality that a vital engagement with life can be too destructive for women like Fanny — or Austen.

While the newly reformulated society of Mansfield may seem to represent Derrida's notion of the island as a retreat into the past, "closing off into its own identity," (Williams 225), Deleuze's island concept offers greater potential for Mansfield's future: a permeable place "at the very center of life and fecundity. ... becoming-other. ... unfolding and refolding on a line of flight in all directions across the surface of the globe." (Williams 218-19) Mansfield Park as Fanny's center may be exactly what Deleuze and Guattari call having "a small plot of.. land at all times" (Plateaus 161) as a secure base from which to find her fuller potential. Certainly, a home base worked for Austen, happy to be settled after her wandering years in Bath and Southampton and able from her own small "plot" at Chawton to find, like Fanny, the "liberty" of stasis that allowed her to soar through her work "on a line of flight all directions across the surface of the globe."

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## Notes

1. I am indebted to independent scholar Arnie Perlstein for detecting the pun Wight/white.

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