

Challenging Class Barriers in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*

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Abstract

Jane Austen can be regarded as an author renowned for her conventional novels at first glance. Nevertheless, reading Austen in a profound way reveals that there lies a hidden critical voice against the irregularities of society. In this article, the novel, *Mansfield Park*, is analysed to demonstrate how the author interrogates class as a constructed notion by employing unusual techniques which are reminiscent of postmodernist devices. After the function of ex-centric characters, Fanny Price and James Rushworth, is focused on, the role of the intertextual references employed by Austen in unearthing artificial class distinctions is examined. It is concluded that the author implicitly challenges the class-oriented social system of her age.

Keywords: Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, class, postmodernism.

Jane Austen'in *Mansfield Park*'nda Sınıf Engellerine Meydan Okuma

Öz

İlk bakışta Jane Austen geleneksel romanlarıyla tanınmış bir yazar olarak düşünülebilir. Buna karşın Austen'in derinlemesine okunması romanlarında toplumsal düzensizliklere karşı yükselen gizli bir eleştirel ses bulunduğunu ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Bu makalede *Mansfield Park* isimli roman yazarın sonradan inşa edilmiş bir kavram olarak sınıfı postmodern araçları hatırlatan sıradışı teknikler vasıtasıyla nasıl sorguladığını göstermek için analiz edilmiştir. Romanda öteki karakterler olarak betimlenen Fanny Price ve James Rushworth'un işlevine odaklandıktan sonra Austen tarafından kullanılan metinlerarası atıfların yapay sınıf farklarının ortaya çıkarılmasındaki rolü incelenmiştir. Yazarın çağının sınıf merkezli toplumsal sistemine üstü kapalı bir şekilde meydan okuduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, sınıf, postmodernizm.

INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen can be regarded as an author renowned for her conventional novels at first glance. Nevertheless, reading Austen in a profound way reveals that there lies a hidden critical voice against the irregularities of society. As Nigel Nicolson (1985) puts forward, Austen felt a sort of social responsibility and strived for being “didactic” while entertaining the reader with her romantic stories. (pp. 173-174). Furthermore, as Susan Gubar and Sandra M. Gilbert (2000) underline, women writers like Jane Austen could create works of art “whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less sociably acceptable) levels of meaning” (p. 74). Therefore, *Mansfield Park* should also be viewed as a novel which implicitly displays class disparity, and how Austen challenges the class-oriented social structure of her age through distinctive techniques will be the main concern of this article.

Edward Said (2002) blames Austen for veiling the historical facts concerning slavery and validating the colonizing mentality of Britain through Sir Thomas who guarantees the middle-class welfare in Antigua (pp. 92-96). Nevertheless, without rejecting Austen’s hierarchic perspective, Allen Dunn (1995) views such an approach as simplistic and argues that Austen, indeed, indicates a need for change in the existing corrupted society through the ethical principles of the protagonist (pp. 485-486). Reminding Raymond Williams’ (1973) detection that Austen displays the absence of connection between class and morality in her novels (p. 117), Dunn (1995) emphasizes that the novel could even criticize presumed class superiority when Fanny’s conformist traits are detached (p. 498). Considering Alan Sinfield’s (1994) statement that “the main effects of cultural production will generally be the reproduction of the existing order” (p. 154), the novel has the potential to consolidate the imperialistic mentality that Said emphasizes. However, Sinfield (1994) further states that this reproduction process is complex and provides an opportunity for “interventions” (p. 154). In this case, it is impossible to disagree with Dunn as well. Therefore, Austen’s novel can seem like a work of art that consolidates the dominant order, but it contains a hidden questioning spirit.

The way Austen questions class is beyond the narrative traditions of her age, and it is possible to argue that her style is reminiscent of postmodernist techniques to some extent. There is no doubt that postmodernism flourished considerably in the second half of the 20th century and includes various techniques like fragmented narration and parody which are not possible to observe in the novel. Nevertheless, certain other characteristics that Linda Hutcheon (2004) indicates such as the functional use of the ex-centric figures, the inclusion of various intertextual links, and challenging accepted centres render the novel closer to the postmodernist style. Hence, it could be argued that the author challenges class barriers by employing fairly unusual techniques which show affinity with the postmodernist ones.

Karl Marx and Frederic Engels (1970) argued that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (p. 31) and believed that “only a change in the material conditions of existence, in economical relations” (p. 69) could terminate such a conflict. Therefore, it could be observed that economic conditions are deemed to be a crucial factor in the construction of class distinctions for the Marxist approach. Max Weber (2008) considers class one of the main components in the circulation of power and states that “we may speak of class when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or

labour markets" (p. 168). In fact, as Scott Appelrouth and Laura Desfol Edles (2008) underline, despite certain similar perspectives with Marxism concerning its dependence on economic relations, Weber defines class as unstable groups and views them as a result of class situation¹ (p. 166). In addition, Raymond Williams (1960) states that the structure of class is closely connected to social changes, highlighting the occurrence of the concept of class as a social position towards the end of the 18th century. Similarly, E. P. Thompson (1966) views class as "*an historical phenomenon*" and notes that class must be regarded as "*a social and cultural formation*" (pp. 9-11). As could be observed, there are various approaches to the notion of class. Some highlight its dependence on economic conditions and others indicate its being a product of historical and social conditions. Nevertheless, all signify the constructed nature of class in society as Jane Austen does in *Mansfield Park*.

1. CHALLENGING CLASS BARRIERS THROUGH POSTMODERNIST TECHNIQUES

In the novel, Austen emphasizes how giant gaps exist among the classes through various details ranging from educational background of the characters to their language, social activities to the houses of the characters, choices of clothes to jewellery and so on. The author "*examines the hierarchy of the late eighteenth century, its rigid class system, its social cruelties, its hypocrisies*" (Nicolson, 1985, p. 174) through these details in the novel. The prevalent class bias is revealed at a very early stage through Sir Thomas Bertram who shares his ideas about Fanny and her own daughters, Maria and Julia. He says "*I should wish to see them very good friends, and would, on no account, authorize in my girls the smallest degree of arrogance towards their relation; but still they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, expectations will always be different*" (Austen, 2003, p. 9). The author highlights the existing class-oriented mentality of the middle class through making Sir Thomas a spokesperson of that community but also makes the reader focus on Fanny Price. Putting Fanny, a lower middle-class girl adopted by her wealthy aunt, Lady Bertram, at the centre of the novel, the author finds an opportunity to display class disparity and challenge class-oriented mentality in Britain.

As highlighted before, some of Austen's narrative techniques are very similar to postmodernist narrative devices, and the author's positioning Fanny whom Amy J. Pawl (2004) describes as "*an insignificant outsider*" (p. 294) at the centre of the novel consolidates this affinity. Linda Hutcheon (2004) argues that marginalized and "*ex-centred*" figures of society due to certain differences such as race, gender, class and so on appear in postmodernist fiction and function to reconsider various accepted truths (pp. 58-65). Fanny who proves to be as equal as her cousins at the end of the novel could also be regarded as an ex-centric protagonist employed by Austen to interrogate class bias in society.

In the novel, Fanny is displayed as physically weak and vulnerable to both illnesses and exhaustion. As the narrator underlines "*she was small of her age with no glow of complexion, nor any other beauty; exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice*" (Austen, 2003, p. 10). She seems to be outside the standards of the middle-class even in terms of physical appearance. Moreover, as a timid girl, she rarely expresses her ideas and feelings to the

¹ The concept which is used by Weber after outlining three significant factors in the formation of class is clarified by Scott Appelrouth and Laura Desfol Edles (2008) as "*a situation that reflects the type and amount of exchanges one can pursue in the market*" (p. 166).

members of the Bertrams except for her considerate cousin, Edmund. Mostly, she feels desolate and isolated, and she cannot embrace the lifestyle and attitudes of Mansfield folk. In short, with Fanny's appearance and marginalized position, Jane Austen starts to emphasize how she is treated as the other among the Bertrams and displays suffocating class bias.

The ex-centric protagonist also functions as a camera to display divergent social environments. As could be discovered through a later visit of Fanny to her own house in Portsmouth, which David Monaghan (1980) regards as a kind of exile sentenced by Sir Thomas since she did not accept a very wealthy and prestigious man's, Henry Crawford's, marriage proposal (p. 110), her family live in very poor condition. Furthermore, as Amy J. Pawl (2004) states, Austen contrasts the disordered nature of the house in Portsmouth with the tidy and serene atmosphere of Mansfield (p. 315) through tiny and uncomfortable rooms, half-washed cups, slammed doors, scarce candles, the vulgar language of her father, and the cacophony created by the untamed behaviour of her siblings (Austen, 2003, pp. 296-304). In this way, the author unearths that these people are deprived of various facilities the middle class and upper-middle-class figures enjoy.² Thus, such a comparison enables Austen to reveal class disparity masterfully and how these distinctions are the result of economic and cultural conditions.

Economically and culturally disadvantageous position which is a crucial factor that renders Fanny the other is also displayed through the ball held by Sir Thomas to honour both of her cousins before William leaves Mansfield. Fanny is obliged to wear a low-priced cross which is bought by her brother since he does not have enough money for a gold chain. Compared to the belongings of materialistic Mary Crawford and her own cousins, Fanny has only a piece of ribbon to fasten that cross (Austen, 2003, p. 199) if it weren't for Edmund and Mary's gifts. In addition, she could only wear simple clothes compared to the ostentatious dresses of her cousins and Mary Crawford in general. In this case, it could be argued that Fanny, as a young woman, lacks not only physical but also cultural and economic advantages that her cousins have.

Fanny is assumed by her cousins as a fool to be mocked as well, and she is understood to be lacking education which her cousins acquire with the help of Mrs Lee. For instance, Fanny with two sashes and without proper education in terms of French or music (Austen, 2003, p. 11) can shock her well-educated cousins. The governess, Mrs Lee, is not also different from the cousins when it comes to humiliating Fanny and underlining her ignorance. Unfortunately, her so-called aunt, Mrs Norris, also emphasizes her being inferior at every turn (Pawl, 2004, p. 296). What is more tragic, Fanny, as an ex-centric character, is forced to survive in the attic, the East room, which has been the fate of myriad marginalized women. In fact, rather than most of her relatives in Mansfield, the objects in this room befriend her since "*her motives... [are] often misunderstood, her feelings disregarded, and her comprehension . . . [is] undervalued*" (Austen, 2003, p. 119). In short, economic constraints which are followed by educational negations lead to the alienation of Fanny in Mansfield.

² In Mansfield, the house is so spacious and illuminated. Also, the fire in the fireplace never dies as it does in the house of Fanny's family. Even the social activities they have such as riding, dancing, and dinners are completely different from the ones like reading a used newspaper in Portsmouth. Such details also enable the reader to observe the close connection between class distinctions and living conditions.

Fanny is not considered equal enough to attend the balls with her cousins until the very end of the novel. In general, she reluctantly stays with her aunt, Lady Bertram, or with other elderly people sitting by the fireplace while her peers have fun. Even when Fanny is invited to a dinner by Mrs Grant following her cousin's departure from Mansfield, she is reminded by Mrs Norris to be the lowest wherever she goes (Austen, 2003, p. 173). As could be discerned from these details, Fanny is never given a chance to prove and display her qualities and her being the other has been pumped since her childhood.

Such a marginalized individual in a middle-class community who lacks physical, cultural, and economic assets of that community is elevated to a superior position through the end of the novel by Austen. As Pawl (2004) points out, Fanny's shyness and silence cannot overshadow her worth (p. 293). In fact, a seemingly weak girl turns out to be a determined person with a strong personality. Furthermore, as David Monaghan (1980) underlines, it is even possible to argue that Fanny becomes the one among the few characters that "has *sufficient grasp of Mansfield ideals*" (p. 95). Therefore, Fanny functions as a useful ex-centric character that implicitly traverses the boundaries of class.

Austen continues to elevate Fanny by comparing her with the other members of society. In particular, the ethical principles that Fanny is committed to are emphasized to be absent in Mansfield (Dunn, 1995, p. 490). For example, Mary Crawford is displayed as a corrupted person who is in the pursuit of materialistic profit even when Tom is on his deathbed. Maria Bertram who has enjoyed all the facilities of the middle-class elopes with Henry Crawford which is unacceptable in terms of the middle-class morality. Also, as Dunn (1995) states, Julia Bertram is deprived of various traits that Fanny has such as "*self-control, concern for justice, and self-knowledge*" (p. 489). Furthermore, Henry Crawford is portrayed as a middle-class man who is inclined to deceive women. Even Edmund could be assumed as a character that violates his principles by accepting to act the role of Anhalt during the rehearsals for the sake of her love for Mary.

Fanny, on the other hand, is displayed as a character that can reject the marriage proposal of Henry despite enormous pressure by Sir Thomas (Pawl, 2004, 310) and reveal Henry's moral weakness (Monaghan, 1980, p.96). What is more, she is displayed as an autonomous individual who can analyze the individuals around her impartially (Dunn, 1995, p. 492). The previously marginalized character, Fanny, then, is implied to become a powerful woman who achieves the unity of mind and soul. As Pawl (2004) indicates, even Sir Thomas acknowledges Fanny's worth who could perform the role of her daughters towards the end of the novel (p. 312). Most importantly, whereas Fanny is not the natural heir, her worth as a virtuous woman enables Fanny to inherit Mansfield Park following her marriage to Edmund (Dunn, 1995, p. 496). In short, it could be discovered that Fanny, as the marginalized character, is portrayed not to be less intelligent, moral, and powerful than the middle-class people of Mansfield.

Considering all these details in the novel, it could be argued that Jane Austen emphasizes that cultural and economic assets or the class which people belong to cannot measure an individual's value, and it is revealed that Fanny is not less valuable than another individual in that middle-class society. Austen challenges class barriers that artificially categorize human beings, and she endeavours to subvert the constructed notion of class through the marginalized but witty and moral girl as postmodernist authors do through their ex-centric characters.

Apart from Fanny, Austen employs another ex-centric character in Mansfield, James Rushworth, to examine and interrogate the constructed nature of class. In spite of Mrs. Norris' overvaluing him since he is a perfect suitor for her niece with his remarkable wealth and mansion, Sotherton Court, he could be assumed as a marginalized character like Fanny. Similar to the cousins who view Fanny as a fool, a great number of characters in the novel including his future wife, Maria, Sir Thomas, and even Edmund do not take Mr Rushworth into account as a gentleman. As the narrator underlines, his "*principal business seems to be to hear the others*" (Austen, 2003, p. 77) like the quiet girl, Fanny. He also seems to lack educational background when his vulgar attitudes and ineffective speech are considered. As Esra Melikoğlu (2017) states, the origin of Mr Rushworth is implied to be uncertain as well (para. 2). Thus, it could be argued that the author reminds the reader Fanny's past and possibly indicates identical backgrounds of these two characters through blurring his past and displaying such details.

Austen underlines certain similarities between these characters more clearly in Sotherton scene. For instance, while Maria and Henry go for a flirtatious walk in the garden of the estate after going over the locked door, Rushworth is asked to bring the keys of the door and later left alone similar to Fanny who feels lonely while Edmund and Mary enjoy having conversations along the paths of the garden. Both feel disappointed as isolated characters and they are displayed like the ugly ducklings in that community.

Fanny and Mr Rushworth retain certain similarities in the novel as the marginalized figures of society. However, Mr Rushworth is not displayed as a character who could achieve wholeness as Fanny could even though he is in an advantageous position in terms of economic prosperity. He is rather dependent on others and cannot make his own decisions. For instance, Mr Harding's endeavour to reach reconciliation between the Bertrams and the Rushworths after the scandalous elopement of Maria fizzles out due to the fact that Mrs Rushworth objects to it, and Mr Rushworth is displayed as a man who even fails to control and run his household (Melikoğlu, 2017, para. 20). Considering the fact that "*postmodernist discourses . . . try to avoid the trap of reversing and valorizing the other, of making the margin into a center*" (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 65), it could be argued that Mr Rushworth, as an ex-centric figure, functions as a safety valve in the novel that prevents the overvaluing of marginalized characters.

Mr Rushworth is not used in the same way Fanny is employed to challenge class although both are implied to have similar backgrounds and experiences. While displaying Fanny as an individual with a strong personality who has not had a chance to be in a favoured position, Austen portrays Mr Rushworth as an individual who lacks a strong personality but finds a chance to continue his life from a favoured position. In other words, allowing the reader to compare and contrast James Rushworth and Fanny Price who are implied to have a similar educational, cultural, and economic background in their earlier lives, Austen emphasizes the significance of human character rather than the boundaries of class. Remembering the fact that Austen "*expected her readers to be sensitive to questions of social status, but she remorselessly satirised characters who were obsessed with fine social distinctions*" (Mullan, 2014, para. 1), James Rushworth becomes a target to be satirised. In this way, she could not only criticize individuals who are obsessed with class but also unveil the artificial construction of class in society.

Embodying the characteristics of the popular comic figure of Restoration drama, the fop, on Mr Rushworth (Melikoğlu, 2017, para. 3), Austen moves Mr Rushworth's marginalized position into another dimension. Robert B. Heilman (1982) defines the fop as "*the hyperfashionable man about town, attitudinizing and often more mannered than well-mannered, a coterie type, flourishing an ostentatious with-it-ness, is set off from the rather large and amorphous society of persons who are called stupid and silly because they are so, or are thought so, or are simply displeasing to those who call them so*" (p. 365). Susan Staves (1982) also considers jaunty clothes, effeminate attitudes, ostentation, and foolish behaviours among the common characteristics of the fop (1982, pp. 415 -421). On the whole, they emphasize that excessive manners, obsession with clothes, and foolishness are mostly observed among the characters with foppish attitudes.

The question that should be answered is how these characters function to question class distinctions. It needs to be remembered that the fop cannot be viewed independent from certain class tensions throughout the Restoration and the 18th century, and it is in close connection with the weakening aristocracy that paved the way for the wealthy to cross the limitations of class when these people could reach the bombastic definers of the aristocracy (Staves, 1982, pp. 426-428). Mark S. Dawson (2005) confirms Stave's argument and underlines that "*the comic fop represented an individual who was preoccupied with displaying his gentility, with appearing janty*" (p. 146). One's preoccupation with his appearance onstage may seem ineffective in examining class distinctions. Nevertheless, the impossibility of testing pedigree and dependence on cultural agents to prove gentility put both the gentle class and the fop at the same position (Dawson, 2005, p. 161). Therefore, the constructed nature of class is implied and questioned through these characters.

James Rushworth's ignorance and foolishness which could be realized even by Sir Thomas, his failure to express his ideas wisely, and his boastful spirit which is displayed when he shares "*the repeated details of his day's sport, good or bad, his boast of his dogs . . . his zeal after poachers*" (Austen, 2003, p. 91) are reminiscent of certain characteristics of the fop. What is more, the author displays Mr Rushworth as a wealthy gentleman inheriting the country house, Sotherten Court, which is a signifier of gentility, but she also implies Mr Rushworth's being a pseudo-gentleman through his ambiguous inheritance, passivity, and dependence on vanity (Melikoğlu, 2017, para. 2). In this way, Austen indicates that not only the gentle class but also the fop is "*a product of discourse and performance*" and signifies with Mr Rushworth that "*power . . . in society depend[s] on virtue rather than a dubious birth*" (Melikoğlu, 2017, para. 21). Hence, the fop could be viewed as a tool that both demystifies the absurdity of class distinctions and highlights the marginalized position of Mr Rushworth from another angle.

Intertextuality is one of the most common techniques of postmodernism and has a crucial role in interrogating class in *Manfield Park*. Roland Barthes (1977) states that "*a text is a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash*" (p. 146). Similarly, Julia Kristeva (1986) resembles a text to a mosaic and highlights the inevitable connection among texts (p. 37). The uniqueness of a text begins to be doubted with the notion of intertextuality, and as Linda Hutcheon (2004) underlines, intertextuality becomes a multifunctional device of postmodernism which "*challenges . . . single, centralized meaning*" (p.127). She also notes that parody and intentionally constructed differences are indispensable characteristics of postmodernist intertextuality (pp. 124- 127). Unfortunately,

there are not clear parodies or deliberate subversions of the intertexts that Huthcheon indicates in *Mansfield Park*. Nevertheless, employing intertexts as early as the 19th century could be viewed as an example of a fairly progressive style, and the function of the intertexts to interrogate the notion of class which is one of the accepted centres of society evokes a striking similarity with postmodernist intertextuality.

Jane Austen, as Paula Byrne (2002) notes, employs various intertextual links with several plays such as *Lovers' Vows* by Elizabeth Inchibald, *The Heir at Law* by George Colman the Younger, and *The Clandestine Marriage* by George Colman and David Garrick. Among these plays, the first two indicate certain class-triggered tensions apparent in that period. For example, *Lovers' Vows* is a significant intertext that "puts into question the notion of inherited rank" (Melikoğlu, 2017, para. 15). Therefore, the role of Mr Rushworth as the fop (Melikoğlu, 2017) and Fanny as the marginalized figure in the play provide another opportunity to reveal the insignificance of constructed class distinctions.

When *Lovers' Vows* is decided to be acted out in Mansfield by the members of the Crawfords and the Bertrams despite Edmund's initial rejection since it might be improper to act such a play considering conservativeness of his father, certain roles are selected by the family members. The chosen roles enable the characters of the novel to reveal their suppressed and real emotions considering certain examples such as Edmund's expressing his feeling more openly to Mary through his role as Anhalt and Henry Crawford's continuing a socially distasteful flirtation freely with Maria Bertram thanks to his role as Frederick (Byrne, 2002, p. 200). In this case, it is possible to argue that Austen allows the characters to perform their disguised identities with the help of the play.

The role of the Cottager's Wife is deemed suitable for Fanny to act while the roles are being assigned to the characters in the novel. As Mr Yates, a friend of Tom Bertram, reminds, this is one of the most insignificant roles in the play, has very few lines, and it is very similar to the role that Fanny plays in Mansfield society (Pawl, 2004, p. 295). Austen fortifies Fanny's position as the other through the role allocated to Fanny and reveals the expectations of the people in Mansfield. Also, the author displays that she is blamed for being ungrateful to the Bertrams when she rejects to act in that performance. In this case, it could be argued that the author highlights how class bias is prevalent among the individuals in Mansfield displaying Fanny's marginalized position both in the play and throughout the novel. Nevertheless, as Byrne (2002) states, Fanny is forced to be a sort of critic and observer during the rehearsals of the play (p. 200). Despite her assigned insignificant role, Austen positions the ex-centric Fanny above the actors of the play as an observer. Therefore, the author achieves to display and challenge class barriers with the help of this intertext.

The marginalized position of James Rushworth is maintained during the rehearsals of *Lovers' Vows*. James Rushworth is so lonely in Mansfield that he cannot even find anybody to rehearse his lines except for Fanny since he is viewed as a fool and uncultured man. Austen also indicates his frivolousness displaying Mr Rushworth's failure to behave properly upon Sir Thomas' interrupting the rehearsal. The author displays how he is manipulated by Henry Crawford in case of an emergency despite his pretension as a gentleman. What is more, Austen makes Mr Rushworth choose the role of Count Cassel which is another insignificant role similar to Fanny's role in the play. As Melikoğlu (2017) points out, Count Cassel is a sort of fool and fop who is engaged with ornamentations and fancy clothes, and Mr Rushworth tries to show his gentility through this role in the play (para. 15). In other words, Mr

Rushworth tries to seem like a prospering social figure but becomes a kind of “*underachiever*” (Heilman, 1982, p. 391). In addition, Mr Rushworth points out his being uneasy with his “blue dress” and “pink satin cloak” (Austen, 2003, p. 109) during the rehearsals, yet he likes the idea of ostentatious clothes and he is obsessed with his appearance like Count Cassel (Melikoğlu, 2017). Thus, “*Rushworth, as an actor who plays the fop, unwittingly becomes instrumental in undermining the notion of inherent gentility*” (Melikoğlu, 2017, para. 15). Mr Rushworth’s role in the intertext, then, enables the interrogation of the constructed nature of class as well.

The interrogation continues with the play *The Heir at Law* by George Colman the Younger as well. Colman’s play is a “*striking example of the era’s devotion to comedies depicting social transformation*” (Byrne, 2002, p. 192). The plot of the play describes the experiences of Daniel Dowlas, a merchant who becomes Lord Duberly due to the lack of a natural heir, and his endeavours to adapt his social environment with the help of Dr Pangloss fizzle out when the natural heir, Henry, appears in the end.³ Focusing on the plot of the play, Byrne (2002) associates Daniel Dowlas with Tom Bertram, the elder son of Sir Thomas Bertram, due to his being an unsuitable heir like Dowlas (pp. 193-194). Likewise, Peter C. Giotta (1998) states that the play is functional to display Tom’s being insufficient to be the true inheritor and argues that Tom is the counterpart of Dick Dowlas, the son of Daniel Dowlas, who resembles Tom in terms of being irresponsible and prodigal (pp. 468-469). Melikoğlu (2017), on the other hand, draws similarities between Daniel Dowlas and James Rushworth since they are both pretenders in society and argues that the play functions to imply Mr Rushworth’s uncertain social status. Such parallelism also becomes more apparent when Mr Rushworth’s asking for help from Mr Crawford in order to improve his land is considered since it reminds Daniel’s asking for help from Dr Pangloss. As could be observed, the associations of the roles in the play vary, yet it is clear that Austen displays her doubts over “*natural superiority*” (Dawson, 2005, p. 162) in society through the intertext.

Although these plays cannot be regarded as parodic intertexts, they become fairly useful tools to ponder on class distinctions. They provide a “*decentred perspective*” (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 12) as intertextual references in postmodernist works of art do. Fanny’s marginalized social position is implied through her roles as Cottager’s Wife in *Lovers’ Vows*, and the prevalent class bias is reminded. Most importantly, class barriers are challenged once again by displaying Fanny as an observer above the other actors or actresses during the rehearsals. Furthermore, Austen emphasises Mr Rushworth’s being a product of masquerade more powerfully when she displays Mr Rushworth as a “*fop and pretender*” not only in *Mansfield* but also in the plays, *Lovers’ Vows* and *The Heir at Law* (Melikoğlu, 2017, para. 12). In the novel, Austen achieves to obscure “*the distinctions between role-playing and social conduct*” (Byrne, 2002, p. 203) and allows the reader to question the constructed class barriers apparent in society through these intertextual references.

³ For a more detailed description of the play please see the article, “The Characterization in *Mansfield Park*: Tom Bertram and Colman’s *The Heir at Law*,” by Peter C. Giotta (1998) on p.467 and see the chapter, “*Mansfield Park*,” in *Jane Austen and the Theatre* by Paula Byrne (2002) on p. 192.

CONCLUSION

All in all, although Jane Austen is regarded as a conventional novelist, a detailed analysis of *Mansfield Park* reveals that Austen has a nonconformist stance in society. She displays that class distinctions are the result of economic, social, and cultural conditions as various theoreticians emphasize in their attempts to define class. Furthermore, the author employs fairly unprecedented techniques such as the inclusion of ex-centric characters and intertextuality to ponder on the unjust class system, and they show affinity with postmodernist techniques even though Austen is a 19th-century novelist.

It has been concluded that Austen interrogates one of the internalized centres of society, the notion of class, as postmodernist authors do. She employs ex-centric characters in the novel in this questioning process. The novelist unearths the class-biased mentality and surmounts class barriers by displaying the ex-centric protagonist, Fanny, as an individual with the capacity to reach mental, emotional, and moral depth unlike most of the members of Mansfield. Also, Austen analyses the artificiality of the class distinctions by employing another marginalized character, Mr Rushworth. Thus, the ex-centric characters enable Austen to scrutinize and subvert the class conscious social system of her age. Furthermore, one of the most common devices of postmodernism, intertextuality, becomes a useful tool for Austen to force the reader to realize the constructed nature of class. Although the intertexts in the novel are deficient in providing irony unlike the intertexts in postmodernist fiction, they still function to question the centralized notions in the novel. In short, it has been proven in this article that Austen subtly challenges the class barriers that artificially define the value of individuals through her distinctive techniques.

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