> From Amelioration to Redemption: Discussing Patricia Rozema's Adaptation of *Mansfield Park*

> De *amelioration* à redenção: uma discussão acerca da adaptação de *Mansfield Park*, de Patricia Rozema

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Abstract

In 1814, Jane Austen published *Mansfield Park*, which, despite being one of her lesser-known works raised important discussions about the depiction of its historical context. Having one of the characters as a landowner in Antigua, the novel prompted readings from post-colonialist perspectives, such as Edward Said's interpretation of the "dead silence" scene, and George Boulukos' discussion about amelioration. These approaches to the text have probably led Patricia Rozema into using the slave-dependency as central to the Bertrams' lives in her 1999 adaptation of the book. From this point of view, this article intends to compare Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Patricia Rozema's film taking into account their different approaches to slavery.

Keywords: Slavery. Adaptation. Jane Austen. Patricia Rozema. *Mansfield Park*.

Resumo

Em 1814, Jane Austen publicou *Mansfield Park* que, apesar de ser uma de suas obras menos conhecidas, gerou importantes discussões acerca da representação de seu contexto histórico. O fato de uma das personagens ser um proprietário de terras na colônia britânica de Antigua levou a uma série de interpretações a partir de estudos pós-colonialistas, como Edward Said, em sua análise da cena do silêncio profundo, e George Boulukos, em sua discussão sobre *amelioration*. Essas leituras podem ter influenciado Patricia Rozema a fazer da dependência da escravidão uma marca da vida moral dos Bertram em sua adaptação do livro para o cinema. Nesse sentido, este artigo busca analisar as diferentes interpretações da escravidão no romance e no filme.

Palavras-chave: Escravidão. Adaptação. Jane Austen. Patricia Rozema. *Mansfield Park*.

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Jane Austen's third published book, *Mansfield Park* deals with the lives of a baronet's family – the Bertrams – and his wife's impoverished niece, taken under his care at the early age of ten. Fanny Price, the niece, is the protagonist and her condition as a dependent relative sets the tone for the story. The novel owes its title to the family estate in Northampton where most of the action takes place. According to Moody, the central dramatic action occurs between 1807 and 1809.¹ Moreover, "as usual in Austen's novels, *Mansfield Park* is about money and social status. Although Fanny's mother, Mrs. Norris, and Lady Bertram are sisters, they represent three different social levels, defined chiefly by money"².

Among moral and social issues of British rural gentry, *Mansfield Park* highlights women's dependency on matrimony for a living. Fanny's own situation results on her mother's marriage to "a lieutenant of marines, without education, fortune, or connections"³, which led her ever-increasing family into such financial difficulties that she had to send her eldest daughter to the care of her brother-in-law. On the other hand, Lady Bertram, Fanny's aunt, married to a wealthy landowner, lived quite a comfortable if not indolent life. The third sister, Mrs. Norris, as a widow of a clergyman is in the middle in terms of social position. Although not as impoverished as Mrs. Price, she is also dependent on the Bertrams for her living.

This 1814 novel is not one of the best known and read of Austen's works. Actually, this controversial novel has a sometimes-insipid protagonist, especially when compared to the sparkling Elizabeth Bennet from the preceding *Pride and Prejudice*. It became famously discussed, however, for the fact that Sir Thomas Bertram owns a property in Antigua – where he even spends two years –, and is a slave-owner. Edward Said dedicated a whole chapter of his *Culture and Imperialism* to the aspects of slavery presented in the narrative of *Mansfield Park*.

In 1999, Canadian author-director Patricia Rozema made an adaptation of this book in which the theme of slavery became central to the plot. Sue Parril has

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¹ Ellen Moody, *A Calendar for Mansfield Park*, 2012.

² Sue Parril, *Mansfield Park*, 2002, p. 81.

³ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 2009, p. 307.

even mentioned that many Austen fans “were horrified at the very thought of this most moral of novel being made into a film which exhibited nudity and emphasized slavery, drug use, and madness”⁴. Clearly influenced by post-colonialist studies, which were by their turn influenced by Said’s perspective, the film links most of the Bertrams moral failures to their dependency on slave labor.

As Linda Hutcheon asserts, “like classical imitation, adaptation also is not slavish copying; it is a process of making the adapted material one’s own. In both, the novelty is in what one does with the other text”⁵. Kamilla Elliott goes even further when she states that doing adaptation is in itself a form of criticism, in a sense that it can be read “as signs, narratives, cultural productions, ideologies, mental constructs, and commodities, assessed under theories besides aesthetics and studied in disciplines other than the arts”⁶. From this point of view, we understand that Rozema intended to give a twist to some of the readings of the novel, centered on Fanny’s dependency on her uncle, and by extension on women’s conditions in the 1800s. In the movie, the protagonist’s subaltern position in *Mansfield Park* seems to parallel the exploitation of the slaves abroad.

In this article, we intend to analyze the treatment of slavery both in the novel and in the film⁷, believing that their different contexts of production have changed the perspective on which the oppression of slavery appears in each work.

1. Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* and Amelioration

Taking into consideration that “Austen’s fiction includes the discussion of moral and political issues, and it does so with the same realistic texture that sets her narrative method”⁸, the reader might assume that there is more to this novel

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⁴ Sue Parril, *Op. Cit.*, 2002, p. 84. Lady Bertram is represented as addicted to laudanum, while her eldest son, Tom, not only has drinking habits, but also presents what could be seen as a mental breakdown.

⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2013, p. 20.

⁶ Kamilla Elliott, *Doing Adaptation*, 2014, p. 74.

⁷ This article results from a communication presented at Jane Austen Day, a 2017 University Extension activity under the coordination of Prof. Elaine Barros Indruziak.

⁸ George Boulukos, *The Politics of Silence...*, 2006, p. 366.

than nineteenth-century marriage market and family relations. The events within the limited society of *Mansfield Park* determine a plot that deals with many debated subject matters that constitute the novel's historical background. In this regard, "the domestic order was tied to, located in, even illuminated by a specifically English order abroad"⁹, that is, the Napoleonic Wars on the one side, and the context of the West Indian colonies on the other:

during the first half of the eighteenth century, Anglo-French competition in North America and India was intense; in the second half there were numerous violent encounters between England and France in the Americas, the Caribbean, and the Levant, and of course in Europe itself. The major pre-Romantic literature in France and England contains a constant stream of references to the overseas dominions¹⁰.

Although seldom directly mentioned, the fictional representation of those historical circumstances plays an important role in the novel. Right at the beginning, Fanny's mother asks in a letter if her eldest boy might have "any chance of his being hereafter useful to Sir Thomas in the concerns of his West Indian property"¹¹. Thus, the reader is informed that Sir Thomas owns a property in the Caribbean and, therefore, is most certainly a slave owner. This fact made of *Mansfield Park* "the most explicit in its ideological and moral affirmations of Austen's novels"¹², and raised a series of studies that intended to link the issues of colonialism and slavery to the development of the story.¹³

For Said¹⁴, the family income heavily depended on their offshore holding, which was not doing fine, as shown by the dialogue between Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris:

'You are very good, but do not trouble yourself about them. They are sure of being well provided for. Sir Thomas will take care of that.'

'Why you know, Sir Thomas's means will be rather straitened if the Antigua estate is to make such poor returns'¹⁵.

⁹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993, p. 73.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

¹¹ Jane Austen, *Op. Cit.*, 2009, p. 308.

¹² Edward Said, *Op. Cit.*, 1993, p. 84.

¹³ Sue Parril, *Op. Cit.*, 2002, p. 80.

¹⁴ Edward Said, *Op. Cit.*, 1993, p. 85.

¹⁵ Jane Austen, *Op. Cit.*, 2009, p. 326.

In fact, not a year after that conversation, Sir Thomas and his eldest son, Tom, under “the necessity of the measure of a pecuniary light”, leave Mansfield “to go to Antigua [themselves] for the better arrangement of his affairs [...]. They left England with the probability of being nearly a twelvemonth absent”¹⁶. Although softened by Franco Moretti, for whom “the ‘recent losses in the West India estate’ [...] leave no trace on the life at Mansfield Park”¹⁷, those losses are important enough for keeping Sir Thomas away for around two years:

when September came, Sir Thomas was still abroad, and without any near prospect of finishing his business. Unfavorable circumstances had suddenly arisen at a moment when he was beginning to turn all his thoughts towards England; and the very great uncertainty in which everything was then involved determined him on sending home his son, and waiting the final arrangement by himself¹⁸.

The Italian scholar establishes that the Antigua property and the necessity of Sir Bertram’s trip are but narrative maneuvers, whose purpose is to “remove the production of wealth to faraway worlds, in whose effective reality most nineteenth-century readers were probably not ‘at all interested’ [...] – *pecunia ex machina*”¹⁹. With this statement, he undervalues the importance of the slave colonies as a literary theme in the period, one that Austen was quite aware of, as shown by her making Fanny quote a poem of William Cowper, a well-known anti-slavery writer²⁰. In addition, one should not forget that the 1807 Slave Trade Act banned the importation of slaves to the British colonies in the period around which the main events of *Mansfield Park* take place:

Regarding the novel, Avrom Fleishman has pointed out that Jane Austen's contemporaries would have been well aware of the novel's historical context – the economic situation in Antigua resulting from the French embargo which impeded the marketing of the produce of the British-owned sugar plantations and of the abolitionist efforts which led to the Abolition Act²¹.

Hence, it is our opinion that Sir Thomas’s trip to Antigua structures the plot both narratively and historically. His being away moves the plot in a very

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¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 2009, p. 327.

¹⁷ Franco Moretti, *The recent losses on the West India Estates*, 1998, p. 26.

¹⁸ Jane Austen, *Op. Cit.*, 2009, p. 331.

¹⁹ Franco Moretti, *Op. Cit.*, 1998, p. 27.

²⁰ George Boulukos, *Op. Cit.*, 2006, p. 375.

²¹ Sue Parril, *Op. Cit.*, 2002, p. 96.

historically accurate manner, no matter how subtle the mention of a slave colony in a novel written and situated in the first decades of the nineteenth century was²². The discussion around human rights were intense in the period due to the American colonies *Declaration of Independence* (1776) and the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789).²³ Therefore, contemporary readers most probably connected the events in the small community of Mansfield Park to the wider context.

Shortly after arriving from his business in the Caribbean, Sir Thomas occupies himself in setting the affairs in order at home too. After the whole *Lover's Vows* fiasco²⁴, Fanny and her uncle start to show more respect and affection towards each other. That being said, the question that follows concerns the position of Fanny's uncle regarding slavery and colonialism: in a context of abolitionist campaign such as that of Austen's days, how could a slave owner represent a figure of authority, justice and kindness, "the real and consistent patron"²⁵ of the novel's heroine?

Surely, Fanny's feelings towards him change from fear to respect, and even tenderness throughout the novel. If as a child she was constantly afraid of his "frown and cold address"²⁶, she ends up wanting his admiration and consideration: "But her uncle's anger gave her the severest pain of all. Selfish and ungrateful! to have appeared so to him! She was miserable for ever"²⁷. Equally, her uncle changes his impressions of his niece and by the end of the story considers her "the daughter that he wanted"²⁸.

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²² This apparent silence could be linked to Austen's own position as a female author dealing with what were considered masculine, that is, serious topics.

²³ Lynn Hunt, *A invenção dos direitos humanos*, 2009, p. 134.

²⁴ During Sir Thomas's absence, his children and their new acquaintances, the Crawfords, planned to stage Elizabeth Inchbald's play *Lover's Vows*, which Fanny's disapproves due to the play's scandalous theme. Arriving by surprise, Sir Thomas interrupts their endeavours and praises Fanny for her moral fortitude.

²⁵ Jane Austen, *Op. Cit.*, 2009, p. 310.

²⁶ Jane Austen, *Op. Cit.*, 2009, p. 328.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 537.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 648.

The shift in their relationship might explain why she brings the slave trade to an evening conversation:

'I suppose I am graver than other people,' said Fanny. 'The evenings do not appear long to me. I love to hear my uncle talk of the West Indies. I could listen to him for an hour together. It entertains me more than many other things have done; but then I am unlike other people, I dare say'²⁹.

This shows that not only Fanny presented a different disposition towards her uncle; she was also interested on his affairs in Antigua, as shown in the following dialogue between Fanny and her cousin Edmund:

'But I do talk to him more than I used. I am sure I do. Did not you hear me ask him about the slave-trade last night?'

'I did – and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others. It would have pleased your uncle to be enquired of farther.'

'And I longed to do it – but there was such a dead silence!'³⁰

On the one hand, Edward Said has famously read this passage as a suggestion "that one world could not be connected with the other since there simply is no common language for both"³¹. For him, the famous "dead silence" would actually point to the family's shock and uneasiness towards their way of living. On the other hand, Boulukos states that the dialogue above reveals that Fanny demonstrates, more than curiosity, her will to please Sir Thomas:³²

if we imagine that Fanny asks her uncle about the "slave trade" enthusiastically, because she sees him as a morally exemplary slave-owner, the exchange as Austen represents it makes far more sense. Despite the fact that it leads to the notorious 'dead silence,' Fanny's discussion of the slave trade with her uncle appears to be a pleasant one, and one that, notably, appeals to her uncle³³.

From Boulukos's point of view, the silence of her cousins indicates their "moral indifference"³⁴ to the subject matter. He also brings a different context to the abolitionist discourse: the context of "amelioration", which "was central to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British discussions of slavery as a

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 446.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 447.

³¹ Edward Said, *Op. Cit.*, 1993, p. 96.

³² Neither Said nor Boulukos discuss the possibility that the family were in shock because a young and poor girl were trying to talk about serious matters.

³³ George Boulukos, *Op. Cit.*, 2006, p. 362.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

‘moral’ position that acknowledges its practice as problematic while nonetheless working to improve it and preserve it as an institution”³⁵. The Leeward Islands Amelioration Act of 1798 has established the notion of humanization of slavery as a common ground where abolitionists and slaveholders could meet. In addition, it morally separated the trader from the owner, with the former playing the role of the villain, and the latter occupying a moderate position in the business. In the context of the Caribbean rebellions, it also used the human rights discourse as a means to control the outbreaks of violence by reducing the cruel treatment of the slaves. In fact, both the Amelioration and the Slave Trade Acts aimed at preserving the labor basis of the economy, but could not prevent the emancipation that eventually came with the Slave Abolition Act of 1833.

Throughout the novel, Sir Thomas shows no sign of discomfort about his doings in the West Indies. Quite the contrary, at a dinner in the parsonage he even “was so well engaged in describing the balls of Antigua”³⁶ to his nephew William that he lost track of time. As an ameliorationist, Sir Thomas could be portrayed in a positive light, a planter that left his homeland, facing a long and dangerous trip, to improve his holdings overseas. Thus, the reader might be “left with the sense that Fanny sees Sir Thomas's trip to Antigua as fulfilling his moral obligation to ensure the humane treatment of his slaves”³⁷. At the same time, Fanny, a reader of Cowper and the moral compass of the novel, is able to show interest in her uncle affairs in the Caribbean without being herself depicted as a hypocrite.

2. Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* and Redemption

Patricia Rozema's adaptation of *Mansfield Park* keeps the general idea of Fanny being the person with the highest moral fiber in the plot. Her character resembles Jane Austen's spirits, so that whenever she “reads to Edmund or speaks in voiceover what she has written, we hear passages taken from Jane

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³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 367.

³⁶ Jane Austen, *Op. Cit.*, 2009, p. 486.

³⁷ George Boulukos, *Op. Cit.*, 2009, p. 375.

Austen's juvenilia”³⁸. In a certain way, Rozema agrees with Said when he states that the protagonist “becomes the spiritual mistress of Mansfield Park”³⁹.

However, the Canadian director presents a radical transformation regarding the role of slavery in the story. Whereas the notion of amelioration of slavery seems to set the tone for the novel, in the film the topic is represented from a different perspective, one that pervades the whole plot. Four minutes into the movie, the then ten-year-old Fanny asks the coachman who drives her to Mansfield Park about a “black cargo” moored in a bay, and the man informs her, “probably some captain or heroic ship doctor [...] brought home some darkies as gifts for the wife”⁴⁰. From that moment on, the subject will be a constant in the life at the estate. For example, in the film, Sir Thomas’s reserve and seriousness are caused by his difficulties with his slaves offshore. His problems abroad are now directly linked to abolitionist rebellions:

Fanny: I'm sure Sir Thomas would agree.

Edmond: Don't concern yourself with his gravity. He has much to preoccupy him.

Fanny: Such as? [Silence] Edmund!

Edmund: It's complex.

Fanny: And I'm too simple?

Edmond: Fanny!

Fanny: He regrets taking me in, doesn't he?

Edmond: No, it's... It's just... it's problems with the slaves on the plantation. The abolitionists are making inroads.

Fanny: That's a good thing, isn't it?

Edmond: [Hesitating] Well, we all live off the profits, Fanny. Including you⁴¹.

In another scene, while the family listens to a music presentation of the Bertram girls in a greenhouse, the statue of a child slave is seen holding a bottle

³⁸ Sue Parril, *Op. Cit.*, 2002, p. 87.

³⁹ Edward Said, *Op. Cit.*, 1993, p. 84.

⁴⁰ *Mansfield Park*, 1999.

⁴¹ *Mansfield Park*, 1999.

(Figure 1); the child is dressed as a house slave, one that usually performed domestic labor. More than a decoration, the statue works as a reminder of the family dependency on slave labor, while the tropic plants allude to the Caribbean.

Figure 1
Mansfield Park, 1999.

Apart from Tom and Fanny, most characters resemble those in Austen's book. Instead of the indulgent heir of the novel, Tom is portrayed as a young man deeply disturbed by the situation in Antigua. When he comes back home, after his period abroad, he arrives heavily intoxicated and demonstrates his disgust with his family's exploitation of slaves:

Mrs. Norris: Tom, are you well? Is there war? Where's Sir Thomas?
Edmund, come quickly!

Edmond: Tom, what of Antigua? Where's Father?

Tom: Antigua... All the lovely people there paying for this party⁴².

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⁴² *Ibidem*.

According to Parril, “Sir Thomas is to blame for his son's self-destructive and rebellious behavior. It is interesting that Tom, who is a minor character in the novel, takes on the role of his father's conscience in this film”⁴³. The youngster's own illness results from the traumatic displays of violence he has been forced to witness in their property abroad as shown in a series of drawings (Figure 2) that depicts his father applying physical punishment on slaves and sexually abusing a black girl.

Figure 2
Mansfield Park, 1999.

Fanny also acquires a new feature beyond that of a creative writer. She becomes an abolitionist, one that even dares to question his uncle's opinions. The film's version of the “dead silence” scene assumes a diverse meaning with the introduction of new elements to the dialogue:

Lady Bertram: Do tell us more about the Negroes, dear.

Sir Thomas: The mulattos are well-shaped, and the women especially well-featured. I have one, so easy and graceful in her movements and intelligent

⁴³ Sue Parril, *Op. Cit.*, 2002, p. 90.

as well. Strangely, two mulattos can never have children. They're like mules in that respect.

Edmond: Excuse me, Father, for contradicting you, but that is nonsense. You cannot say such things.

Sir Thomas: I did not say they are mules. I said they are like mules. Long's 'History of Jamaica'. Read it before you challenge me. I've a good mind to bring one back with me to work here as a domestic.

Fanny: Correct if I am in error, but if you were to bring a slave back to England, there would be some argument whether or not they should be freed. [Silence] If I'm not mistaken...

Sir Thomas: I must say, you've changed considerably.

Fanny: I've done some reading on it... Thomas Clarkson, under Edmund's guidance.

Edmond: Fanny has a voracious mind, as hungry as any man's. And her writing is remarkable, in a style entirely new⁴⁴.

Here, the audience actually sees the family embarrassment that Said has found in the episode of the book, where “all the evidence says that even the most routine aspects of holding slaves on a West Indian sugar plantation were cruel stuff”⁴⁵. More than that, by placing English abolitionist Thomas Clarkson as opposed to Edward Long, she puts herself on the opposite side of her uncle. Fanny's perspective situates her along with the Romantic ideals of emancipation, whereas Sir Thomas defends a racist discourse associated to the Enlightenment ideas of natural state. At the same time, their opposite positions illustrate the conflict between the universalist notion of human rights and the British traditional hierarchical society, a common topic at the period.⁴⁶

The setting of the scene (Figure 3) is emblematic of the situation. As Fanny serves the others, she stands in the middle of the room (unlike Mr. Rushmore, who also stands but separated from the group, foretelling his own condition afterwards) where the Bertrams and the Crawfords comfortably remain seated. Her place and her actions highlight the protagonist as a person capable of empathizing with the slaves' circumstances. She is positioned in the opposite side of her uncle, however not in a mirrored composition: Fanny is standing, but also

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⁴⁴ Mansfield Park, 1999.

⁴⁵ Edward Said, *Op. Cit.*, 1993, p. 96.

⁴⁶ Lynn Hunt, *Op. Cit.*, 2009, p. 178.

serving the others, while Sir Thomas, even seated, maintains the posture of authority.

Figure 3

Mansfield Park, 1999.

In this sense, placing the person with the highest moral fiber as an abolitionist, Rozema's film traces a parallel between moral failure and slavery, which becomes the actual illness that inflicts the Bertrams. In a certain way, Tom's sickness purges Sir Bertram of his guilt, and as a result, redeems the entire family⁴⁷, which seems to be a narrative issue in the movie. When discussing *Heart of Darkness*, Said has explained that

Conrad speaks of redemption, a step in a sense beyond salvation. If salvation saves us, saves time and money, and also saves us from the ruin of mere short-term conquest, then redemption extends salvation further still. Redemption is found in the self-justifying practice of an idea or mission over time, in a structure that completely encircles and is revered

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⁴⁷ Almost the entire family, as Maria and Mrs. Norris, the ones that directly affronted Fanny, end up banished from Mansfield Park.

by you, even though you set up the structure in the first place, ironically enough, and no longer study it closely because you take it for granted⁴⁸.

Rozema faces a similar problem when she decides to find a narrative path that allows her film to meet the novel's happy ending. For Parril, Fanny gaining both Sir Thomas's admiration and Edmund's love implies

that Fanny has the key – spiritually and physically – to Mansfield Park. With her intelligence, her keen sense of morality, and her persistence, she has emerged triumphant over those who have sought to corrupt Mansfield Park and, by reforming even the master of the house, has established herself as the true daughter of the house⁴⁹.

By keeping the problem – and the solution – of slavery within the family circle of Mansfield Park, the film fails to question the slavery as the institution that supported the British Empire. It becomes a moral problem solved through familial bond. Completely disconnected from the reality of the colonies, the events that follow Tom's illness and eventual cure indicate that the consequences of slave labor only matter in the lives of the colonists, which only reinforces their power and importance.

In the end of the film, Fanny's voiceover informs the audience that Sir Thomas has given up his Antigua estate and moved to a new business (tobacco, in an obvious nod to Austen's irony) to provide for his family. At the same time, it is implied that all the improvements in the family behavior – Tom is sober, Julia is calm, Lady Bertram is free of her addiction to laudanum – are a direct consequence of his actions. As a sign of those transformations, Mansfield Park is finally being remodeled and embellished.

3. Adaptation and historicity: from Amelioration to Redemption

From one *Mansfield Park* to the other, more than 185 years have passed. More than the passage of time, we have to agree that “in the move from telling to showing, a performance adaptation must dramatize: description, narration, and represented thought must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds, and visual

⁴⁸ Edward Said, *Op. Cit.*, 1993, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Sue Parril, *Op. Cit.*, 2002, p. 105.

images”⁵⁰, which on its own lead to some differences from one work to the other. However, with the passing of the years, many ideological transformations took place, and it would be hard to a twentieth-century born moviemaker to remain faithful to ideas and practices that have long been questioned:

These ways of engaging with stories do not, of course, ever take place in a vacuum. We engage in time and space, within a particular society and a general culture. The contexts of creation and reception are material, public, and economic as much as they are cultural, personal, and aesthetic. This explains why, even in today's globalized world, major shifts in a story's context – that is, for example, in a national setting or time period – can change radically how the transposed story is interpreted, ideologically and literally⁵¹.

Thus, although both the novel and the film work deeply rooted in their own historical interpretation, the accumulation of ideological layers that separates Austen's world from Rozema's demands from the latter a reinterpretation of the work that goes beyond the passage from one media to another.

This might explain the shift in Fanny's disposition towards her uncle. In the novel, she is depicted as eager to know as much as she can of Sir Thomas's affairs, affairs that are not in opposition to her moral conscience. According to Hutcheon, “in the process of dramatization there is inevitably a certain amount of re-accentuation and refocusing of themes, characters, and plot”⁵². In the passage from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, a time of conscience of the trauma of slavery, the ameliorationist position of the protagonist would not be admissible. In addition, a family that lived off slavery should not find happiness at the end of the film.

Those changes might actually be responsible for the two main transformations that Rozema's work brought to *Mansfield Park*: that of Tom's desolation and illness, and the “dead silence” scene. The famous scene in the novel, as discussed in the first part of this paper, depicts Fanny's attempts of connection to her slave-owner uncle. In the film, on the other hand, she stands as

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⁵⁰ Linda Hutcheon, *Op. Cit.*, 2013, p. 40.

⁵¹ Linda Hutcheon, *Op. Cit.*, 2013, p. 28.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 40.

a figure of resistance, whereas his own position shifts from that of a “kind owner” to a racist and abusive one.

Arguably, the ideological turn of the “dead silence” scene might be directly connected to Tom’s modification. The heir to Mansfield Park embodied the possibility of his family’s redemption and, therefore guaranteed an acceptable happy conclusion to contemporary audiences.

In the process of adaptation, the accumulation of discourses and the selection of topics led to an important inversion of the underlining ideology about slavery. Taking into account that the adapted film is itself an independent work, there is no actual problem in making different ideological choices. However, according to Stovel⁵³, the attempt of turning Fanny into a more “palatable for contemporaries audiences” character resulted on “anomalous anachronisms” when Rozema avoided changing some aspects of the source text. By keeping the end of the story as close to the original as possible the real problem turned out to be

implicit in the radical reinterpretation of the novel – the problem of Sir Thomas's penance, the problem of Edmund's acceptance of the family's dependence on slaves, the problem of Fanny's love for Mansfield Park. Perhaps the reinterpretation was not radical enough⁵⁴.

After all, in the end of the story, through Tom’s self-sacrificing sickness and Fanny’s honest and caring disposition, the audience still gets to see the slave-dependent Bertrams finding prosperity and happiness. Furthermore, the abolitionist protagonist still gets to marry into them.

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⁵⁴ Sue Parril, *Op. Cit.*, 2002, p. 106.

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