
Original Paper

“Immoral” Fanny-Choices of Following the Guide of Animal Factors

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Abstract

Fanny in *Mansfield Park* has always been considered a model of morality and traditional customs by many critics. “Fanny’s strict adherence to her own ethical code places her as the moral center of her household” (Sturrock, 2006, pp. 176-184). Few scholars associate her with the independent or rebellious image. But by analyzing Fanny’s three choices from the perspective of Ethical Literary Criticism, it can be found that Fanny is not a follower of traditional values. She did not agree with the morals of money-worship, hierarchy, and parental authority at that time. Her disobedience makes her an “immoral” girl with an independent spirit.

Keywords: Fanny, Ethical Literary Criticism, “immoral”, rebellious

Introduction

Antonia Susan Byatt argues that *Mansfield Park* can be seen as one of the most excellent works in western literature history, but at the same time, the heroine of the novel is hard to accept (2011, pp. 160-174). Juan Austin has created many impressive female characters. But Fanny is too plain to interest readers.

Elizabeth is not plain in her independent thought. Emma is not plain in her vivid personality. Catherine is not plain in her Cinderella-style love experience. Anne is not plain in her emotional development. Marianne is not plain in her enthusiastic manner. Compared with these female characters, Fanny seems to be the plainest character Jane Austin has created. In many critics and readers' eyes, she is a sincere supporter of moral values and traditional customs and is timid in expressing her attitudes and opinions. She is a moral model. A representative of old fashions. Fanny is not a girl with a rebellious spirit and a woman controlled by inner desire. She is a typical traditional woman.

But is that true? In Shakespeare’s *Othello*, Desdemona has been discarded by her family because she has not followed her father’s arrangement of her marriage. She has been criticized by her father as an immoral girl. Following the family senior’s arrangement of her marriage is one of the most important standards of a traditional girl. But Fanny has not obeyed these rules. She followed the instructions of her inner feelings and emotions. In this sense, she is not a moral girl.

Ethical Literary Criticism holds that every person is a Sphinx factor. Sphinx factor is the combination of human factors and animal factors. Human factors represent social rules and moral values. Animal factors refer to desires and instincts (Nie, 2011, pp. 1-130). Traditionally, moral persons are more likely

to be controlled by human factors and brains when making a choice, while rebellious characters are more likely to be ruled by animal factors and hearts. By careful reading, it can be found that when faced with difficult choices Fanny tends to follow the guide of her heart, not the social rules. In this sense, Fanny is an “immoral” girl and is guided by her inner animal factors.

First choice-Leaving Home

Fanny was born into a poor family. The parents were not patient, the sister and brother were aggressive and the living conditions were disappointing. To lighten the pressure of her sister, Lady Bertram decided to raise her niece, Fanny. Fanny will live in Mansfield where Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas are decent, cousins are well-educated, and living conditions are superior and prosperous. Mrs. Norris, Fanny’s other aunt, thought it was Fanny's good fortune to be raised in Mansfield Park. “Mrs Norris had been talking to her the whole way from Northampton of her wonderful good fortune, and the extraordinary degree of gratitude” (Jane Austin, 2014, p. 12).

Everyone thought Fanny should be happy. Leaving her poor family is a start to having a decent and better life. It is a common sense and moral thought. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy has not been much criticized for his impolite manner and words because of his decent parentage and rich income. Marianne’s marriage with a gentleman who is almost as old as her father has not been deplored. Instead, many people considered it Marianne’s luck to get married to such a rich gentleman. It seems that it is a common morality to pursue richness and wealth at that time. When faced with the choice between a poor family and a rich family, a wise and “moral” person should choose the latter. One should not feel unhappy and disappointed by this moral choice. But Fanny was different.

“The little visitor meanwhile was as unhappy as possible” (Jane Austin, 2014, p. 12). Here, “the little” refers to Fanny. She was “longing for the home she has left” (Jane Austin, 2014, p. 12). At this age, Fanny was already a girl who understood social morality. In Mrs. Norris and Sir Thomas’s opinions, she should be happy with what has happened to her. But she cannot feel happiness out of her instincts. Ethical Literary Criticism holds that attachment and dependence on parents are normal instincts and emotions for animals and humans. It belongs to animal factors. In this sense, Fanny was influenced by animal instincts rather than morality.

She criticized Fanny as “immoral” and ruthless. Being adopted by a rich family is a lucky thing. Fanny should not show negative emotions. Her crying can only bring uneasy feelings to Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram.

Second choice- Acting

Ethical Literary Criticism states that every civilized moral person attaches great importance to the acceptance of their peers and society (Nie, 2020, pp. 159-178). It seems that Fanny disagrees with this common moral value.

Maria and Julia are Fanny’s cousins, and daughters of her aunt. But they had shown contempt for her from an early age, which can be observed from their daily conversations.

“But aunt, she is so very ignorant! - Do you know, we asked her last night which way she would go to

get to Ireland; and she said, she should cross the Isle of Wight. She thinks of nothing but the Isle of Wight, and she calls it the Island as if there were no other island in the world. I am sure I should have been ashamed of myself if I had known better long before I was so old as she is” (Jane Austin, 2014, p. 18).

Fanny’s cousins used “so” and “very” to stress their astonishment at Fanny’s ignorance and limited knowledge. They have a sense of superiority. Even Mrs. Norris expressed “I could never feel of this little girl the hundredth part of the regard I bear your dear children” (Jane Austin, 2014, p. 6). In this sentence, “this little girl” refers to Fanny. In Mrs. Norris’s opinion, Fanny is less important than Lady Bertram’s children. And Sir Thomas, Lady Bertram’s husband, tacitly approved this. There is a hierarchy between Fanny and her cousins. This sense of hierarchy is a common moral value at that time, which holds that the inferior has no right to reject the superior’s advice. Instead, the inferior should try their best to seek recognition from the superior. But Fanny did not it.

In the novel, Fanny was asked by her cousin to act as a character in a play. They thought that Fanny would accept this “invitation” without consideration. Because it is a good chance for her to be recognized by them. But she refused it. “No, she is quite determined. She certainly will not act” (Jane Austin, 2014, p. 171). She rejected acting just because she abominated it. She did it out of her emotion. Ironically, Fanny’s refusal earned their respect. They found that Fanny was not someone they could control, she had her preferences. They decided let Edmund to persuade Fanny. But Fanny was not shaken. “*Her heart and her judgment were equally against Edmund’s decision*” (Jane Austin, 2014, p. 172).

Her cousins were irritated by Fanny’s rejection. They told it to Mrs. Norris. She criticized Fanny. Mrs. Norris thought that Fanny was cruel and selfish. In her understanding, it is impolite to reject Maria and Julia’s request for their parent have raise Fanny. From the point of view of hierarchy, Fanny should accept the request unconditionally. Fanny’s rejection made Mrs. Norris think she is an “immoral” girl.

Third choice-Marriage

Samuel has emphasized in his work *The Whole Duty of Man According to the Law of Nature* that children must obey their parents and elders when it comes to marriage (2003, p. 179). It is a traditional moral.

In the novel, Sir Thomas is Fanny’s uncle. He raised her as her elder. On the subject of marriage, Fanny should obey his opinions. This is in line with traditional morals and values. But Fanny did not obey Sir Thomas’s instruction.

Fanny was proposed by Henry Crawford, a rich young man with a frivolous character. And his proposal was pleasant. “You have qualities which I had not before supposed to exist in such a degree in any human creature. You have some touches of the angel in you beyond what- not merely beyond what one fancies might be” (Jane Austin, 2014, p. 370). But Fanny was reluctant to accept this proposal.

This event has been noticed by her uncle Sir Thomas, and he told it to Lady Bertram. Lady Bertram persuaded Fanny to accept this marriage. She said, “if you were married to a man of such good estate

as Mr. Crawford. And you must aware, Fanny, that it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this" (Jane Austin, 2014, p. 358).

Sir Thomas held the same attitude. He created opportunities for Mr. Crawford to see Fanny and analyzed the benefits of this marriage to her. But Fanny's mind was not changed. She did not want to consider this marriage even though her aunt and uncle advised her to accept it. From this point, Fanny is not a traditional girl. Her disobeying the suggestion of her aunt and uncle is a conduct contrary to traditional morality. Fanny was more willing to follow her heart and nature. Fanny felt instinctively that Mr. Crawford was not a reliable and virtuous man. According to Ethical Literary Criticism, following human nature and instinct is a typical characteristic of animal factors (Nie, 2011, pp. 1-13). Disobeying the advice of elders and doing things willfully. In this sense, Fanny is not a moral girl but an immoral one. Sir Thomas agreed it so. To cultivate Fanny with morality, he decided to give her punishment. Then, Fanny was asked by him to return to her own family.

"She had tasted of consequence in its most flattering form; and he did hope that the loss of it, the sinking again into nothing, would awaken very wholesome regrets in her mind" (Jane Austin, 2014, p. 394).

Sir Thomas hoped that the poor condition of her family would make her realize the benefits of this marriage. But Fanny was not disappointed by this insulting decision. Instead, she felt happy that she could see her family members after so many years.

Judging from her disobeying Sir Thomas's arrangement, Fanny is not a supporter of traditional morals but an "immoral" girl who acts on instincts.

Conclusion

Ethical Literary Criticism states that character's choice can reflect their attitudes toward social moralities (Nie, 2011, pp. 1-13). When a person is more controlled by human factors, he or she is more likely to obey social morals. When a person is controlled by animal factors, he or she is more likely to act on desires and instincts.

Fanny is not a traditional girl in the sense that she does not take much of the morality of that time to her heart and mind. She refused to leave her poor family, her cousins' act request, and her uncle's arrangement of marriage. These conducts make her look like an "immoral" girl.

Money is not the measure of everything. The pain of leaving family members cannot be lessened by money. Hierarchy is unjust. Everyone is equal and has the right to say no to things you don't like. Arranged marriage cannot be accepted. Girl's opinions should be respected. These are the values Fanny displayed. Fanny is not a traditional or plain female character without an independent spirit. She is an "immoral" girl with free thoughts.

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