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An Aristotelian Approach to Jane Austen's Mansfield Park

Katherine A. (Katherine Amanda) Guin



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

AN ARISTOTELIAN APPROACH TO JANE AUSTEN'S *MANSFIELD PARK*

By

KATHERINE A. GUIN

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The members of the supervisory committee were:

David McNaughton
Professor Directing Dissertation

Eric Walker
University Representative

John Roberts
Committee Member

J. Piers Rawling
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.

To my father and mother,
And
To my husband

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ABSTRACT

Many argue that Jane Austen's novels exemplify a distinctly Aristotelian view of ethics. In *An Aristotelian Approach to Jane Austen's Mansfield Park*, I argue that Austen presents the development of *Mansfield Park's* protagonist, Fanny Price, as well as the other young people in the novel in terms of characteristically-Aristotelian understandings of virtue, character, and habituation. To demonstrate this, I draw primarily from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to analyze characters and events from *Mansfield Park*. For instance, I argue that Jane Austen's criticisms of marriage from wrong motives parallel Aristotle's own criticisms of friendships for utility and for pleasure. Interestingly, *Mansfield Park* both clarifies and lends support to Aristotle's ethical theory.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Many authors have held that Austen was a follower of one philosopher or another. In a short paper entitled “Jane Austen and the Moralists”, Gilbert Ryle argued that Austen was an Aristotelian by means of being a Shaftesburian. D.D. Devlin in his book *Jane Austen and Education* claimed that Austen was a Lockean when it comes to her philosophy of education. In *After Virtue*—his call for a return to a broadly Aristotelian virtue ethics—Alasdair MacIntyre devotes a chapter to comparing what he argues are the virtue-based theories of Homer, Jane Austen, and Benjamin Franklin, suggesting that for Austen the most important virtue is constancy. Anne Crippen Ruderman’s book *The Pleasures of Virtue: Political Thought in the Novels of Jane Austen* also pursues the increasingly popular line that Jane Austen was an Aristotelian. In a short article called “Jane Austen and the Aristotelian Ethic,” David Gallop gives his own support to the idea that Austen is an Aristotelian. Sarah Emsley’s short book *Jane Austen’s Philosophy of the Virtues* is another argument in favor of Austen’s being an Aristotelian. In her book *Constancy and the Ethics of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*, Joyce Kerr Tarpley explores further MacIntyre’s idea of constancy in the specific context of the novel *Mansfield Park*. Jeanine Grenberg’s “Courageous Humility in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*” makes use of Austen in a longer examination of Kant’s virtue theory. Although she does make the strong claim that Austen herself is a Kantian, Grenberg uses *Mansfield Park*’s heroine, Fanny Price, to illustrate the Kantian virtue of “courageous humility.” Most recently, E.M. Dadlez has argued that Austen is a Humean in her book *Mirrors to One Another: Emotion and Value in Jane Austen and David Hume*. In this introduction, I will briefly examine some of these arguments and I will suggest that a good deal of the evidence provided by these authors in support of their favored philosopher can function equally well as evidence for Jane Austen’s having a broadly Aristotelian view of ethics.

The work on Austen can be divided roughly into two camps. The first is what I will call the Aristotelian camp. This camp includes MacIntyre, Ruderman, Gallop, Emsley, Tarpley and, for the most part, Ryle. Members of this group explicitly make claims for Austen’s Aristotelianism. Ryle is a problem since although he does indeed argue that Austen is an

Aristotelian, he also specifies that this comes via Shaftesbury. This proves problematic since there are some areas in which it is clear that some of the views Austen endorses are in conflict with some of Shaftesbury's views (see Devlin). The second camp is what I will call the non-Aristotelian camp. This camp includes the rest: Devlin, Grenberg, and Dadlez. Though I will give some attention to criticism of the Aristotelian camp, I devote most of my attention to showing how the evidence harnessed by some members of the non-Aristotelian camp is, at least, not inconsistent with Aristotle and, at most, actually better supports the conclusion that Austen is an Aristotelian.

To endorse the Aristotelian view of Austen, as I shall, is not to suggest that there are not many criticisms to be made of the authors listed above who also support the Aristotelian view. There are many examples from which to draw. Devlin points out that Ryle takes things a step too far in making Shaftesbury Austen's primary route to Aristotle (Devlin, 52). MacIntyre's treatment of Austen's Aristotelianism is suggestive but too brief. It suffers also from the use of the nebulous notion of constancy that also plagues Tarpley's lengthier account. Ruderman fails to specify explicitly that the happiness she speaks of is the Aristotelian kind that can best be described as flourishing or well-being.¹

One strange assumption made by some of those within the Aristotelian camp (e.g., Ryle, 297 and Gallop, 2) is that one cannot be an Aristotelian and a Christian. More specifically, they take an absence of religious cant in Austen's novels to be a sign that she is a committed secularist. Ryle takes what he believes is an absence of religious sentiment in Austen's novels to support his argument that Austen is an Aristotelian. Yet, Ryle is certainly wrong in claiming that Jane Austen's ethic was "secular as opposed to religious" (Ryle, 297). The lack of preachiness and the failure of characters to consult clergymen for moral advice do not mark Austen's book as secular (Ryle, 297).² As Laura Mooneyham White makes plain in her *Jane Austen's Anglicanism*, it is easy for contemporary readers to miss religious references in the novels to things such as "serious reflection" which refers to prayer (White, 60). When Fanny Price tells

¹ Perhaps this is not such a terrible problem since context indicates that she cannot be speaking merely of happiness as some sort of affective state.

² Such content is, however, the matter of the inferior and more straightforwardly didactic novels of, for example, Fanny Burney or Elizabeth Inchbald.

Edmund that she is “persuaded that [Henry] does not think as he ought on serious subjects,” she is referring to Henry’s lack of a real religious commitment (*MP*, 350). When Henry is said to have “too much sense not to feel the worth of good principles in a wife, though he was too little accustomed to serious reflection to call them by their proper name” and that what he admires in her is “inspired by the knowledge of her being well principled and religious” (*MP*, 294), Austen is making a criticism of Henry’s lack of real engagement or familiarity with the religion. Even Ryle’s contention that Mansfield Park’s Edmund gives no indication that “he regards his clerical duty as saving souls” is false (Ryle, 297): Edmund very clearly makes reference to the fact that the clergyman “has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and *eternally* [emphasis mine]—which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners that result from their influence” (*MP*, 92). To point out that, indeed, Austen was a Christian and that her Christianity does figure in her novels is not to say that she is not an Aristotelian. Certainly, Austen does not follow strictly Aristotle’s metaphysical support for his virtue ethics, but this does not disqualify her any more than it disqualifies St. Thomas Aquinas as an Aristotelian.

I have called the other camp the non-Aristotelian camp. When it comes to the members of this camp, some of the seemingly strongest evidence they offer for viewing Austen as a follower of some other philosopher can function equally well as evidence for her being an adherent of Aristotle; and none of the evidence is threatening to the Aristotelian view of Austen. While admitting that Austen’s outlook is broadly Aristotelian, Dadlez wants to argue “that acknowledging an Aristotelian flavor in Austen’s work is not to deny an even more distinctive Humean quality” (Dadlez, 53). Insofar as Aristotle and Hume are in alignment, her comparisons of Austen to Hume hold. The trouble comes when Hume makes claims foreign to Aristotle. One example is Hume’s sentimentalism. Dadlez claims that the emphasis Austen places on her virtuous characters’ having the right feelings, as well as on the idea that “a failure to respond to events with proper moral feeling is a genuine failure of character,” indicates that Austen believes that morality arises from sentiment rather than reason (Dadlez, 69). In support of this view, Dadlez references Mary Crawford’s own lack of appropriate feelings regarding the deeply immoral actions of her brother and Edmund’s sister: “Edmund’s real horror at Mary Crawford’s failure to respond as he thinks she ought (i.e., with distress and disapproval) lies ‘in her total ignorance, unsuspectingness of there being such feelings’” (Dadlez, 69; cf. *MP*, 456). That Mary

Crawford has no idea that decent people would have such feelings is a sign that she never had them, but it is not obviously a sign that mere possession of the feelings is enough to make one a good person, as it might be according to a Humean. Rather, it is a sign that she has never been habituated to have such feelings. For Aristotle, being habituated to feel pleasure and pain appropriately is essential to becoming a virtuous person. Yet, this is not all that is necessary. These responses must be consistent and be confirmed by reason. It is not enough to have what might be called a “good nature” since this cannot be depended upon in the same way that virtue can be. Mary Crawford is responsive to Fanny’s distress when she is treated harshly by Mrs. Norris, but this is no indication of her virtue. Instead, it is an indication of a good nature that cannot always be depended upon. This is evidenced by the fact that Fanny’s potential distress at being trifled with by Henry does not affect Mary at all. Rather, Mary’s lack of the proper feelings in response to Maria and Henry’s crime points to a faulty education. In Austen novels, in contrast to Hume, whether a person is vicious does not depend on whether others respond to her with feelings of disapproval; rather, a person’s vice makes it appropriate to respond to her with feelings of disapproval.

Grenberg claims that Fanny Price is an example of a person who possesses a distinctively Kantian virtue.³ Grenberg discusses the Kantian virtue she calls ‘courageous humility’. This virtue contains two important elements. The courageously humble person is not humble in comparison to other human beings but in comparison to the standards of the moral law. The courageously humble person compares herself to the moral law and finds herself wanting. By this comparison to the moral law, she recognizes “her genuine limits as a dependent and corrupt being” (Grenberg, 650-651). At the same time, the courageously humble person does not let this recognition of inferiority cause her to give up on her moral goals. Rather, she has the courage to strive for her moral goals in spite of the fear that it may be impossible to meet them (Grenberg, 651). What underlies this Kantian formulation is the recognition that there is a standard of moral perfection that is beyond our reach but toward which we must still find the strength to strive. This recognition is not unique to a Kantian virtue theory but is common to both Aristotle and to Christianity. If Fanny is courageously humble, it is just as likely that she is courageously humble in the Aristotelian or Christian sense as it is that she is in the specifically Kantian sense.

³ Grenberg could be read to suggest, even further, that Austen herself endorses a Kantian view.

Devlin argues that the idea of education in Austen's novels is drawn directly from Austen's reading of Locke (Devlin, 7). In outlining Locke's theory of education which appears in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Devlin stresses the importance that Locke places on beginning education in "infancy," on using a private tutor rather than a school (lest the student be subject to distraction and other students' bad examples), and on engaging in constant "conversation" with the tutor rather than formal instruction (Devlin, 8-10). On this view of education, the acquisition of virtue is considered of the first importance followed by "wisdom, breeding, and learning" (Devlin, 11; cf. Locke, 96). Devlin writes that "The emphasis in *Thoughts* is on education of the whole person and not on the child's intellectual development" (Devlin, 11). All of what Devlin attributes to Locke and to Austen's reading of Locke could just as easily be attributed to Aristotle much earlier. In fact, reading *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* is very much like reading a rehashing of Aristotle with some useful practical observations and the addition of some questionable advice about strengthening a child's constitution by allowing him to have cold, wet feet (Locke, 10). Jane Austen may very well have read Locke, but the theory she acquired from Locke would have remained distinctively Aristotelian.

The worst thing about most of the accounts in both camps—Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian alike—is that they consistently run together the private views of the author with the views implied by the novels. While it is unlikely that Austen would present in her novels a world that functioned according to different moral rules from her own, it is often unclear whether the members of these two camps are arguing that the novels present a certain view of the moral universe or that Austen herself holds this view.

The view I take is more akin to the camp of the Aristotelian; however, in this dissertation my interest is less in arguing for Austen's Aristotelianism than it is in showing how a particular novel depends on characteristically Aristotelian notions of virtue, practical wisdom, and habituation. I do not think it likely that Austen spent time perusing the complete works of Aristotle. Rather, it is likely that her generally Aristotelian outlook came to her via her Christianity and her own observations of human beings. The implications of an Aristotelian ethic can be explored in a novel in a way unavailable to a primarily theoretical philosophical work. As Sarah Emsley points out, "the fact that [Austen] is writing fiction means that she can do things

that philosophers writing treatises cannot: she can take an ethical concept and turn it into a ‘living argument’” (Emsley, 41).

My dissertation is divided into two major sections: Theory and Practice. Chapters two through four make up the section on Theory, while chapters five through eight make up the section on Practice. The section on Theory discusses how the very early parts of *Mansfield Park*, which provide background and context for the novel, support Aristotelian views on topics such as marriage, benefactors, and education. The section on Practice draws from the section on Theory to discuss how the developing moral characters of the young people bear on their choices in the main episodes of the book and on their eventual happiness.

CHAPTER TWO

MARRIAGE

1. The Ward Sisters' Marriages: Marriages of Utility and Marriages of Pleasure

The first chapters of *Mansfield Park* give us the family background of these three Ward sisters who have made three very different kinds of marriages. The Ward sisters—Maria, Julia, and Frances—made marriages of varying degrees of success in both a worldly sense and in what I will call an Aristotelian ethical sense. The worldly sense of success has to do with compatibility primarily in terms of wealth and social position; the Aristotelian ethical sense of a successful marriage has to do with compatibility of character with respect to virtue. From a worldly point of view, Maria Ward certainly made the best marriage as she married the wealthy and noble Sir Thomas Bertram: Maria Ward is able to be a suitable wife to Sir Thomas as she has the manner and beauty expected of a baronet's wife. Julia Ward made the second best marriage in worldly terms as she married the respectable and well-connected clergyman Mr. Norris: Julia Ward is able to make a moderately good wife to Mr. Norris as she possesses the industriousness and frugality necessary for a clergyman's wife living on a moderate income. Frances Ward makes what is clearly the worst match in a worldly sense as she married the insolvent and unsuccessful Marine Lieutenant Price: Frances Ward is least able to make a good wife since she is incapable of the kind of industry, frugality, and prudence necessary to work with such a small and uncertain income. From an Aristotelian ethical point of view, it is less clear initially whose marriage is best. Still, when the final sums are done, the ranking ends the same for different reasons.⁴ In the Aristotelian ethical sense—shortly to be explained—not one of the three marriages made by the Ward sisters is a success. At the same time, some are less bad than others. These marriages exemplify the different ways in which marriages can go wrong in what might be called an Aristotelian ethical sense. These ways correspond to some of the ways in which Aristotle argues friendships can fall short of being virtuous (see Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,

⁴ This overlap in rankings convinces some that the worldly sense is identical to or entails the ethical sense and that superior wealth and status somehow translates to superiority of character. Mrs. Norris and, to some extent, Sir Thomas Bertram are under the sway of this view.

Books VIII and IX).⁵ If we think of marriage as a kind of friendship, we can use Aristotle's view of friendship to explain what is wrong with each of the Ward sisters' marriages. This will also shed light on the deficiencies of character present in Fanny's parents and Mansfield Park guardians. These marriages and their rankings with respect to worldly and to Aristotelian ethical standards play an important role in how both the young and older characters understand marriage, what sorts of marriages the older characters envision as best for the younger characters, and in what sort of partners the young people eventually choose for themselves.

Love and Friendship play an important role in *Mansfield Park*. Friendship or a corrupt version of it is the basis of the marriages which form our introduction to the family in the first chapter. Friendship with Edmund is also the means by which Fanny is habituated. Friendship even partially determines how Fanny ought to behave with respect to her guardian, Sir Thomas. I argue that the version of friendship presented in *Mansfield Park* is Aristotelian. This is demonstrated by Aristotle's theory's fitness as a framework for understanding the relationships in the novel and the judgments of these relationships implicit in the novel. It is best to spend some time on Aristotle's friendship since it will not only be useful in discussing the marriages of the Ward sisters; it will be equally useful in analyzing other relationships central to the novel. Aristotle's conception of friendship will inform later discussions of, for example, the friendship between Edmund and Fanny, Edmund and Mary, and Fanny and Henry, as well as the marriage between Maria Bertram and Mr. Rushworth. In addition, friendship informs how Fanny's relationship to Sir Thomas is to be construed and what 'gratitude' means in the context of their relationship. Later sections will make use of what is said here about friendship.

Aristotle describes friendship as "reciprocated goodwill" or reciprocated love⁶ of which both friends are aware (*NE*, 1155b30). This goodwill consists in wishing good things for one's friend. Aristotle distinguishes between complete friendship and other kinds of "friendship" which are called so based only on their resemblance to the complete kind. Aristotle begins by

⁵ All references to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* will be abbreviated *NE* henceforth. All references to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* will be abbreviated *R* henceforth.

⁶ Irwin uses the word 'friendship' for the Greek word 'philia,' and because 'friendship' has no cognate verb, he uses 'love' (Aristotle, *NE*, Irwin's notes 330).

discussing the need-love⁷ that is common to the complete friendship and the incomplete friendship. According to Aristotle, each friend loves what appears to be good for himself in the other friend. In this sense, love is not disinterested because we love on account of the object of love's being (or seeming to be) good for us in some way. There is a sort of neediness on both sides, in the form of a desire for what is or seems good, pleasurable, or useful in the other. A person will love his friend based on his loving certain advantageous characteristics of that friend or he will love the friend in a more complete way. Aristotle describes three types of friendships each of which corresponds to one of the three causes of love or what Aristotle calls the species of what is lovable⁸ (*NE*, 1156a6-10). There are three species of what is lovable: (1) What seems to a person to be good in itself, (2) what seems to be pleasant, and (3) what seems to be useful to himself. Aristotle also points out that what is useful is useful for procuring some apparent good or some pleasure, so that only the good and the pleasant are lovable as ends in themselves (*NE*, 1155b20). The three types of friendships then are those in which a friend is loved (1) for his own sake, (2) for the sake of pleasure, or (3) for the sake of utility. The most complete friendship is

⁷ In the case of this need-love, Aristotle trades on the version of love (Eros) suggested by Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*. Socrates' love-mentor, Diotima, explains the origins of love by representing Love as a person—a minor god—and claiming that Love is the offspring of Resource and Need, born on the same day as Aphrodite (*Symposium*, 203b-c). Love is “always needy” and “harsh and arid” rather than lovely. Love is resourceful and clever “gallant, impetuous, and energetic,” but also “a master of artifice and device” (203d). Diotima is describing the kind of love had by a person who craves and desires something from his beloved rather than the kind of love that makes a gift to the beloved. The Lover wants to make the good from his beloved his own and by that means the Lover gains happiness (*Symposium*, 204e). This need-love can be contrasted with gift-love in which a person bestows a good on the one loved without any expectation of return. See also C.S. Lewis's *The Four Loves*.

⁸ According to Irwin, the word Aristotle used and that Irwin rendered as “lovable” in his translation is ambiguous between several meanings: It might be translated “ ‘what can be loved’, ‘the proper object of love’, [or] ‘what deserves to be loved’ ” (*NE*, Note on Book VIII, Ch. 2, 1). Sometimes what is loved is what deserves in some sense to be loved while at other times we love under a misapprehension that the beloved deserves our love.

the friendship in which each friend loves his friend for his own sake and each friend is virtuous. Complete friendship is friendship proper. For the sake of clarity, the incomplete friendships might better go by the name of pseudo-friendships.

The relationship between friends can be described in the following way: Let us use *X* and *Y* to stand for the names of the two friends. In all cases of friendship, the goodwill of one friend *X* is aimed at the preservation of what *X* finds lovable in his friend *Y*. Friend *X* wills that *Y* continue to be able to provide *X* with the good *X* desires from *Y* (*NE*, 1156a10-20). In the friendships where *Y* is loved for his own sake, friend *X* will wish for *Y* to continue to be what *Y* is in his entirety because *Y* is good in himself. This is complete friendship. But in the case of friendships for pleasure or for utility, *X* will wish that *Y* maintains or increases the characteristics that either serve as a source of pleasure or are useful for *X*. This is incomplete friendship or what, for the sake of making it clear that it falls short of what Aristotle considers a real friendship, I will call “pseudo-friendship”.

In each friendship relation, the friend on one side of the relation loves the friend on the other side, but the reasons for the love may not be same. Friends may have similar aims—both parties seeking the same from one another—or friends may have dissimilar aims (*NE*, 1163b35). Those friendships with dissimilar aims are pseudo-friendships as well since at least one “friend” will love the other on account of something other than virtue. A case of friends with dissimilar aims may look like the following: *X* loves *Y* for the sake of *Y*’s beauty, while *Y* loves *X* for sake of *X*’s wealth. It might even be the case that friend *X* loves *Y* on account of what is only the appearance of virtue while *Y* loves *X* on account of some other thing. The friendship based on the misapprehension of another’s virtue is also a pseudo-friendship.

In complete friendships each friend loves the other on account of the same characteristic—that is, virtue—and in loving his friend on account of virtue and wishing for the continuance of this good in his friend, each friend is wishing for the good of the other for the other’s own sake. Wishing for the good of another for his own sake goes beyond the need-love discussed earlier since this is to wish for the other’s good even when it can be of no further benefit to the wisher (e.g., the wisher knows that he himself will die soon or the wisher is forced to move far away from his friend). Therein lies complete friendship’s completeness. In pseudo-friendships based on utility, pleasure, or the illusion of virtue, the relation is often neither stable nor is it always based on love of the same characteristic in each friend since it is based solely on

the need-love of each pseudo-friend. When pseudo-friend *X* loves *Y*, he loves him on account of some characteristic *Y* has that might satisfy *X*'s desire and *X* wishes his friend *Y* to remain in possession of the characteristic only so it can satisfy *X*'s desire. Whether this characteristic is beneficial or destructive to its possessor is of no concern to *X*. Hence, what is good for *X*'s pseudo-friend *Y* is of no real consequence to *X*. *X* cares only for *X*'s good and *Y* is seen as an instrument for bringing about *X*'s good.

According to Aristotle, goodwill⁹ and concord are features of true friendship (*NE*, 1166b30-1168a25). Friends of utility or pleasure cannot be said to have goodwill toward one another, but rather, in wishing for the continuation of some benefit from their pseudo-friend have goodwill only toward themselves (*NE*, 1167a15). In the case in which virtue is merely apparent in another, there is goodwill on the part of the person deceived (*NE*, 1167a20). This results in another kind of pseudo-friendship based on a mistake about the other person's character. Concord concerns what ought to be done for the sake of satisfying one or both friends' desires or needs (Aristotle, *NE*, 1167a30). Since only the virtuous are in concord with themselves only the virtuous can be in true concord with one another, "for their wishes are stable, not flowing back and forth like a tidal strait" (*NE*, 1167b5). Friends of utility or pleasure and other pseudo-friends cannot be in concord since the bases of their relationships are unstable and at least one party is always trying to maximize the benefit he receives while minimizing what he must give in return (*NE*, 1167b).

Aristotle holds that in a complete friendship the friends are like "other selves"; friend *X* loves friend *Y* as friend *X* loves himself and the same holds true of *Y*'s love for *X*. Aristotle assumes that being virtuous is what is truly in one's self-interest and that true self-love requires that we seek virtue above all: "And so the good person must be a self-lover, since he will both help himself and benefit others by doing fine actions. But the vicious person must not love himself, since he will harm both himself and his neighbors following his base feelings" (*NE*,

⁹ More specifically, Aristotle claims that reciprocated goodwill is the beginning of friendship. Goodwill between two people when it has lasted a long time can become friendship (*NE*, 1166b30-1168a25).

1169a15). It is only through seeking virtue that we arrive at happiness¹⁰ and happiness is that at which we all aim. Happiness cannot be sought directly, but comes to us only by means of seeking virtue. According to Aristotle, it is the case that “one person is a friend to another most of all if he wishes goods to the other for the other’s sake” (*NE*, 1168b5). One wishes such things most of all to himself. Therefore, a man is most of all a friend to himself. Complete friendship requires that a person treat his friend as “another self” and, as virtue is what is best, he wishes virtue for his friend as much as he wishes it for himself. A friend is then in a way disinterested since he wishes good to his friend for the friend’s own sake and in a way self-interested since the virtue of this friend will also often benefit him.¹¹ Aristotle also quotes Theognis saying that, “good people’s life together allows the cultivation of virtue” (*NE*, 1170a10).

It is easy to see how Aristotle’s view of friendship might be translated into a view of marriage. Aristotle acknowledges that his account applies equally to “friendships between man and woman” and that such relationships can just as easily be for the sake of pleasure, utility, or even virtue (*NE*, 1162a15-25). When such a relationship is based solely on utility or pleasure or on some combination of the two to the exclusion of virtue, the relationship corresponds to the “worldly” conception of marriage mentioned earlier. If there is any relationship in which we are called on to love our “friend” as a second self, it is marriage.¹² As marriage is also meant to be a

¹⁰ By “happiness”, I mean Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* which is often referred to as “flourishing” or “doing well and faring well” as a human being. We now often mean something different by happiness and hold that it has to do merely with affect. This is not what is meant by happiness in Aristotle’s context or for that matter often in Austen’s use of the word. Even in Austen’s time, the happiness still had sometimes to do with fitness and suitability or blessedness (OED,1253; 80).

¹¹ When Aristotle asks what need we have of friends if we are virtuous, he argues that as the virtuous person bears the same relation to his friend as he does to himself and he believes that his “own being is choiceworthy,” the virtuous person will find his friend’s being choiceworthy as well (*NE*, 1170b10).

¹² The Anglican "Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" (1662) compares a man’s relationship to his wife to that of Christ to his Church: “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.

permanent relationship, it requires the same stability arising from the virtue of both parties as does complete friendship. Without a love based firmly on virtue, the marriage ceases to be a true marriage¹³ when utility or pleasure cannot be provided by one party. This loss of love between parties is particularly bad in a marriage since the parties cannot easily separate¹⁴ but will often live together in resentment and mutual disappointment for the rest of their lives.

He that loveth his wife loveth himself: for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife; and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife, even as himself.”

¹³ One of the avowed purposes of marriage “the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one [partner] ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity” (Anglican "Form of Solemnization of Matrimony" [1662]).

¹⁴ According to Pool, “Happy or unhappy, a marriage was difficult to dissolve. Divorces until 1857 were the exclusive concern of the Church of England, at the Consistory Courts in Doctor’s Commons in London. Three types of divorce were possible. Divorce *a vinculo matrimonii* meant that the marriage was a nullity from the beginning due to an improperly close blood relationship, insanity, impotence, or a similar impediment. It permitted you to remarry but made your children illegitimate. Divorce *a mensa et a thoro* did not let you remarry but permitted you to separate and was available in cases of adultery, sodomy, or cruelty, which last was usually understood to mean actual violence. Parliamentary divorce (usually for men) offered a third alternative; you got a divorce *a mensa et a thoro* and then sued your wife (successfully) for adultery and then Parliament granted you a real divorce that did not make your children illegitimate” (185). Women were very unlikely to be able to obtain this last kind of divorce because they usually did not have enough money to afford the process (Pool, 185).

In the case of the Ward sisters, all three of the sisters marry from some other motive than from the love of a husband's virtue.¹⁵ Consequently, from the beginning, these marriages are Aristotelian pseudo-friendships; these marriages are not in a sense true or complete marriages. The first sister to marry is Miss Maria Ward who becomes Lady Bertram. The defects of this marriage are more complicated than those of the other two Ward sisters so I will lay aside Maria Ward's motives in marrying Sir Thomas to be discussed later. Still, Maria Ward's marriage is important in setting the stage for the other two marriages. This marriage, said by her own uncle to be greater than her worth as measured in money, set the standard for her family: Maria Ward had been said by her uncle "to be at least three thousand pounds short of any equitable claim to [the match]" (*MP*, 3)¹⁶. Everyone with knowledge of this advantageous marriage judges from it that her equally-attractive sisters will marry just as well. The second sister Julia Ward evidently expected a match equal to her older sister's; after waiting a disappointing six years to do better, she "found herself obliged to be attached" to a friend of Sir Thomas Bertram, a clergyman with little money but some connections named Mr. Norris (*MP*, 3). As one of Mr. Norris's connections, Sir Thomas is able to provide the Norris family with a small income by installing Mr. Norris as clergyman at Mansfield Park. The youngest sister, Frances, chooses to marry a man whom her family considers unsuitable: She chooses Lieutenant Price, a man with no money, education, or friends who might act in his interest with respect to promotion in his naval profession.¹⁷

Julia Ward marries Mr. Norris on account of utility while Fanny Ward marries Lieutenant Price on account of pleasure. Julia Ward chooses to become Mrs. Norris as a last ditch effort at having some degree of financial security and respectability. Mrs. Norris had expected to find a second Sir Thomas Bertram in terms of wealth and nobility, but she is disappointed in her

¹⁵ Ruderman makes a similar point about suitability of marriage partners: "The hero and heroine's respect for virtue is what makes them capable of a lasting love that is the highest justification for marriage" (34).

¹⁶ All references to Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* will be abbreviated *MP* henceforth.

¹⁷ It is little surprise that Mrs. Norris and the rest of the Ward family would so strongly disapprove of Frances's match after having formed such high hopes for their the Ward sisters' elevation to material affluence.

expectations when no such man materializes. In order to avoid spinsterhood, Mrs. Norris had to settle for Mr. Norris. The use of the word “obliged” in describing Mrs. Norris’s attachment to her future husband indicates circumstances constrained her choice. Neither Mr. Norris’s virtue nor his person were of much consideration in her choice; Mrs. Norris’s attachment is based not on any love for Mr. Norris’s virtuous character but on love of his ability to provide for her financially in a socially respectable manner. By marrying a clergyman who is under the patronage of Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris has ensured her financial security despite the fact that she had expected a better match; Mrs. Norris, thereby, married for utility. Since she loves on account of something other than his virtue, her marriage is a pseudo-marriage.

Frances Ward’s choice takes into account only pleasure and neither utility nor virtue. Lieutenant Price is a man “without education, fortune, or connections” (*MP*, 5). As he has not the family, wealth, or influence to get promotion, he is not a fit choice for a woman whose motive for marriage is utility.¹⁸ Lieutenant Price’s “profession was such as no interest could reach” (*MP*, 4). The fact that he is a lieutenant proves that early in his career, he did have interest or connections enough to get placed as a midshipman and then after six years take the test for lieutenant.¹⁹ Yet, he is unable to make captain. It is not clear whether this is on account of his character and abilities or because whatever connections he had had abandoned him.²⁰ We hear later of his continued drinking and carousing after being disabled for his job while his family is in dire financial need indicating that his character is not virtuous (*MP*, 6).²¹ We can conclude from this that all Lieutenant Price could have had to truly recommend him were his (fleeting)

¹⁸ The only use that Frances Ward might have gotten out of marrying Lieutenant Price would be, as the narrator suggests, to “disoblige her family” (*MP*, 3). But I suspect that using marriage as a means to the pleasure of displeasing her family was not her intention. Rather, this description of her act must be from the point of view of her family.

¹⁹ See Pool on the navy, 108.

²⁰ According to Pool, few people retired so that it could take years to move from lieutenant to captain and it took a certain amount of “interest” to receive a ship even if you had the requisite number of years (Pool, 108).

²¹ As we learn later, he is indeed a man of dubious character. He is a heavy-drinking, negligent man, who cares little for his children or their well-being.

personal attractions in the form of being a dashing young lieutenant. In marrying Lieutenant Price for these attractions, Mrs. Price has married for pleasure alone. The Price marriage also turns out to be a pseudo-marriage.²²

Mr. Norris and Lieutenant Price married for their own reasons, but we have scant evidence of what their motives might have been. These two Ward sisters are all said to be “quite as handsome” as their sister Lady Bertram, but neither of their husbands could afford to marry for mere pleasure. We can suppose that each of the Ward sisters was to receive seven thousand pounds as her dowry. For Sir Thomas, this is less than what might have been expected from the woman he chose as his wife (*MP*, 3). But for both Mr. Norris and Lieutenant Price, both men with little money, this dowry would have been very attractive. Mr. Norris may well have married his wife for reasons of utility. It would have been advantageous for him to consolidate his connection to his patron, Sir Thomas, by marrying Sir Thomas’s sister in law. He could receive the dowry as well as be assured of the help of Sir Thomas in getting a clerical living. Lieutenant Price, on the other hand, seems to have been taking a gamble in eloping with his Ward sister. He might have hoped that her family would eventually relent and provide her dowry.²³ As the Price family does in fact have some “small income” even after he is disabled for service, there is some reason to believe that Lieutenant Price was correct and the dowry paid (*MP*, 4). Whereas the Norrises seem to have chosen one another for the sake of utility, the Prices may have been misaligned in their connection since Mrs. Price chose Lieutenant Price on account of his sexual attractions while he likely chose her primarily on account of her money. Even were we to disregard the motives of the husbands, given what we know of the motives of the wives the bases of the Norris and Price marriages turn out to be unstable because they are both based partially on love of unstable attributes of the husband.

Aristotle points out that friendships for pleasure and friendships for utility are “easily dissolved” since these friendships are only conditional upon the friend’s maintaining his instrumental value: “Those who love for utility or pleasure, then, are fond of a friend because of

²² Even as early as the first chapter in the novel, we discover that Lieutenant Price’s personal attractions have begun to fail him and the disappointment consequent on that failure is clear from Mrs. Price’s complaints to her sisters.

²³ This sort of gamble works very well for Mr. Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*.

what is good or pleasant for themselves, not insofar as the beloved is who he is, but insofar as he is useful or pleasant” (*NE*, 1156a15). As a result, if one party to the friendship loses that for the sake of which the other loved him, the other ceases to love him (*NE*, 1156a20). In the case of the younger Ward sisters, utility happens to be more durable than pleasure. But this is purely contingent on the health of the husband. Mrs. Price’s husband loses his health and vitality as a result of his vice and becomes disabled for service. In losing his status as a dashing young lieutenant, he has lost the attribute that motivated his wife’s attachment. All that is left to Mrs. Price is the misery of a drunkard husband and a life of poverty for her family. As Aristotle points out, “Friends quarrel when they get results different from those they want; for when someone does not get what he aims at, it is like getting nothing” (*NE*, 1164a15). The Price marriage continues and even continues to produce children long after Mrs. Price has lost her motive for loving her husband. From the point of view of Mrs. Norris, her sister Price’s marriage has proven utility to be superior to pleasure as a motive. For a time, Mrs. Norris is at least better off than her sister Mrs. Price. Since Mrs. Norris’s husband is guaranteed a life income by his friendship with Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris’s attachment to her husband continues to retain its motive as long as long as Mr. Norris retains his income. The love of both partners retains its like motive until the premature death of Mr. Norris. Both get what they desire throughout the duration of the marriage, but only by the happy accident of Mr. Norris’s sickly constitution. The real object of Mrs. Norris’s love is revealed at Mr. Norris’s death: Mrs. Norris “consoled herself for the loss of her husband by considering that she could do very well without him” (*MP*, 23). When Mr. Norris dies so also do his income and Mrs. Norris’s attachment to him. In light of her careful savings during his lifetime and her access to the goods of Mansfield Park, Mrs. Norris finds that she does not really need Mr. Norris at all. Both the Norris and Price marriage aim at the worldly ends of utility and pleasure without much consideration of virtue. Although both the Norrises and Prices adhere to this worldly standard, only the Norrises actually succeed to some extent in meeting this worldly standard by maintaining their utility to one another (during their lifetimes) while the Prices fail when they cannot maintain their ability to please on another. Neither marriage succeeds by the Aristotelian ethical standard of marriage.

According to Aristotle, as long as both friends receive an equal quantity of whatever good they seek—be it pleasure, utility, or overall goodness of the friend in himself—the friendship continues: This is so “since both friends get the same and wish the same to each other,

or exchange one thing for another” (*NE*, 1158b). Only the complete friendship has any durability and this friendship is dependent upon the virtue of the friends. In this friendship, each friend is “good without qualification” and is thereby “good for his friend” (*NE*, 1156b15). As virtue is a “firm and unchanging state” (see *NE*, 1105a30-1106a30), unless one friend is mistaken about the virtue of the other the bases of friendships of virtue will endure. As neither the Price nor the Norris marriage is based on virtue or the illusion of virtue on either side of the connection, these marriages were bound to become unhappy when their unstable bases began to change or dissipate. In the case of Maria Ward’s marriage to Sir Thomas Bertram the situation is more complicated.

The Bertram marriage faces different problems. Neither Sir Thomas nor his wife is virtuous, but they are not as vicious as the partners in the other marriages. Sir Thomas is, on the whole, a decent man. Unfortunately, certain of his responsibilities as a baronet, a landowner, and a *pater familias* make it difficult for him not have a distorted view of the importance of money and social position. As he is the one largely responsible not only for protecting the fortunes of his current family but for protecting the fortunes of the future Bertrams to come, he often finds himself sacrificing pressing ethical concerns to considerations of utility, particularly for the maintenance of wealth and social position. Especially in the realm of marriage, Sir Thomas is willing to ignore other important considerations about the suitability of partners in favor of considerations of money: Later in the novel, he allows his daughter Maria to marry a man for whom he knows she has very little liking; he urges Fanny to marry Henry, a man he knows she does not like and about whom Sir Thomas seeks to know little, taking Henry’s wealth, pleasing manners, and acquaintance with the family as sufficient to recommend him as husband; Sir Thomas would also be glad to marry his son Edmund to Mary Crawford (whom he, at least, knows his son to like) since she would be able to bring Edmund some addition to his clerical income with her own money. This is not say that Sir Thomas does not value the virtues. Rather, it is to say that for him the virtues seem to have primarily instrumental value in promoting the wealth and social advantage of his family.

Sir Thomas is a worldly man to a large degree. Yet as part of his worldly success depends on his ability to live by the standards of his class and fulfill his role as baronet, he desires to have many of the attributes of a virtuous man. In short, these attributes have utility in the society in which he lives. The Christian model of the virtuous man—a model influenced partly by Greek

conceptions of virtue such as Aristotle's—still held on as a model for the gentleman of Sir Thomas's period although often only as an appearance. Around fifty years after the period portrayed in *Mansfield Park*, Cardinal Newman included the following in his description of the manners of the Christian gentleman: "He makes light of favours while he does them, and seems to be receiving while he is conferring. He never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself by mere retort, he has no ears for slander or gossip, is scrupulous in imputing motives to those who interfere with him, and interprets everything for the best" (Newman, 218). Newman means these characteristics to arise from a certain kind of character, but they might just as well be maintained as an appearance. The appearance of such virtue was extremely important and the lack of such an appearance could indicate that one is not a gentleman, effectively barring the way to increased wealth and influence or increasing the risk of losing these things.

This notion of the Christian gentleman bears a strong resemblance to what Aristotle calls the magnanimous man. The virtue of magnanimity comes with the full possession of all the others virtues as well as the greatest good fortune with respect to wealth and family. The magnanimous man is such that he has a high opinion of himself and is justified in having it: "[He] seems to be the one who thinks himself worthy of great things and is really worthy of them" (*NE*, 1123b5). The good in which the magnanimous man interests himself is honor, but he is not interested in being honored by just anyone. He seeks honor only from those who are virtuous like himself rather than from those inferior to himself. He is "moderately pleased" by the honor given by his equals since he believes that he is only receiving what he deserves (*NE*, 1124a10). Since good fortune is necessary for the possession of magnanimity (as well as the other virtues), many people mistakenly believe that the fruits of good fortune—having wealth or power, or being born to a noble family—entitle a person to great honors but, as Aristotle points out, without the full complement of virtues to make him worthy of honor such a person is merely arrogant (*NE*, 1124a25-30). In other words, the possession of these goods helps in allowing a person's virtue to have greater scope but possession of these goods is in no way sufficient for virtue.

In externals, Sir Thomas is very like the magnanimous man despite being deficient in virtue through according too much importance to wealth and social position and being willing to sacrifice virtue for their preservation. The appearances or manners of the magnanimous man are supposed to be the result of his virtue and superiority but can be imitated more or less by those

who want to be taken for the magnanimous man. Sir Thomas takes on the manner of the magnanimous man rather than his internal state. In discussing the magnanimous man, Aristotle gives attention to the appearance of the magnanimous man. Aristotle's description of the magnanimous man's manners is strikingly similar to Newman's description of the gentleman's manners, and Sir Thomas's behavior accords with both descriptions. The magnanimous man is such that he is willing to help others but rarely if ever asks for help himself (*NE*, 1124b15). From the very start of the novel, Sir Thomas is willing to help others and is seldom in need of help himself. Besides being willing to help the Price family by taking Fanny into his home, he has been of assistance to the Norris family for years by providing Mr. Norris with his living and allowing Mrs. Norris to make use of the many goods in his home. The magnanimous man overlooks affronts and does not nurse grievances (*NE*, 1125a5). Sir Thomas is very willing to forgive the harsh words Mrs. Price had written about his pride (*MP*, 4). He is willing also to overlook Mrs. Norris's having disowned her original intention to take some responsibility for Fanny by bringing her to her home (*MP*, 9; 29-30). The magnanimous man has talents and belongings that are "fine and unproductive rather than productive and advantageous" (*NE*, 1125a10). Sir Thomas does have some talents—his ability to run his Antigua estate—and belongings—the money-making Antigua estate as well as the clerical livings in his power—that are productive and advantageous but he does his best to underemphasize these. Even having to allude to these things pains him although he takes very seriously their maintenance. For example, he is embarrassed for the results of his eldest son's extravagance since he has to sell the clerical living being held for his younger son for simple reasons of financial necessity. Sir Thomas's value for the "fine and unproductive" is evidenced in the education he provides for the children he assumes will be financially independent: His children, except for Edmund who must earn his own living, are given educations that are largely ornamental (see *MP*, 18-19 for his daughters' educations). The magnanimous man is said to "have slow movements, a deep voice, and calm speech. For since he is in no hurry, and since he counts nothing great, he is not strident; and these [attitudes he avoids] are the cause of a shrill voice and hasty movements" (*NE*, 1125a15). Sir Thomas is described as possessing "gravity of deportment" and his reactions to provocation are

usually understated²⁴ (*MP*, 12). Sir Thomas, even in moments of great surprise, is not easily discomfited as is evidenced by his calm response to walking into his beloved library which, in his absence, has been transformed into a stage with a ranting stranger pacing upon it (*MP*, 182). Unlike in the case of the truly magnanimous man, the important thing for Sir Thomas is to maintain this appearance as a means to maintaining his estate and not to maintain the sort of character from which this appearance should spring.

As Sir Thomas Bertram, baronet, he has the obligation to act for the good of his family, the “good” being their wealth and social position.²⁵ One of the most striking instances of Sir Thomas’s value of appearances and their utility is his later acceptance of his daughter Maria’s marriage to a foolish man whom Sir Thomas can see she neither loves nor esteems. When Maria rejects Sir Thomas’s offer to extricate her from her engagement, Sir Thomas investigates no further. In order to understand how his reasoning is affected by his value of appearances and their utility, I quote Austen’s description of his thought process at length:

Sir Thomas was satisfied; too glad to be satisfied perhaps to urge the matter quite so far as his judgment might have dictated to others. It was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain; and thus he reasoned. Mr. Rushworth was young enough to improve;—Mr. Rushworth must and could improve in good society; and if Maria could speak so securely of her happiness with him, speaking certainly without prejudice, the blindness of love, she ought to be believed. Her feelings probably were not acute; he had never supposed them to be so; but her comforts might not be less on that account, and if she could dispense with seeing

²⁴ This explains why it is so terrifying for Fanny when Sir Thomas does become angry with her for refusing Henry’s marriage proposal later in the novel. Sir Thomas is not the kind of person who angers or raises his voice easily.

²⁵ See Tarpley. Kerr Tarpley suggests something like this when she discusses Sir Thomas’s inability to discern the truth about other people’s characters and motives: “As discussed earlier, Sir Thomas errs not simply because he values tradition, but because he fails to question what he presumes to be the goods of its institutions and practices” (Tarpley, 187).

her husband a leading, shining character, there would certainly be every thing else in her favour. A well-disposed young woman, who did not marry for love, was in general but the more attached to her own family, and the nearness of Sotherton to Mansfield must naturally hold out the greatest temptation, and would, in all probability, be a continual supply of the most amiable and innocent enjoyments. Such and such-like were the reasonings of Sir Thomas—happy to escape the embarrassing evils of a rupture, the wonder, the reflections, the reproach that must attend it, happy to secure a marriage which would bring him such an addition of respectability and influence, and very happy to think any thing of his daughter's disposition that was most favourable to the purpose. (*MP*, 201)

Although Sir Thomas believes that Maria does not love her future husband, Sir Thomas would rather think that his daughter knows her own mind, including her own ability for self-restraint, and is making a decision appropriate to maintaining her and his own social position. At the root of it all is his fear of embarrassment and the notoriety that would come from a broken engagement and his desire to augment his family's reputation with a marriage to another prominent, wealthy family.

Where the appearance of virtue is paramount, virtue itself might still be useful in maintaining the appearance of virtue despite the fact that appearances can often be maintained without the inner state of virtue. The necessity of having to ignore virtue in order to promote other goods on which he places more value means that Sir Thomas has some of the habits of virtue but not all. Without having had to bring all of his desires into alignment with virtue, Sir Thomas must exercise a high-degree of self-control in order to maintain the necessary appearances. Sir Thomas has had to cultivate strong habits of self-control, and seems to see self-control itself as a virtue. But this sham-virtue of being self-controlled is not to be confused with what Aristotle would call 'continence'.

Self-control and continence are important for understanding the flawed characters of both Sir Thomas Bertram and his wife. To understand continence, how it differs from virtue, and how it differs from mere self-control, an explanation of Aristotle's distinction between acting in accord with virtue and acting from virtue will be useful. According to Aristotle, to be virtuous it is not enough that a person performs that act that in accord with virtue. The person must perform

the act virtuously: It is necessary that (1) the agent “know (that he is doing virtuous actions),” (2) the agent “decide on them, and decide on them for themselves”, and (3) the agent “do them from a firm and unchanging state” (*NE*, 1105a30). A person may act in accord with virtue for a variety of reasons that may spring from only one or two of these requirements or it may have nothing to do with any of these requirements. A person may perform an action or display a pattern of actions that to an outside observer are indistinguishable from those actions performed by a virtuous person. Yet, these actions may be deceiving. For example, these actions or behaviors may spring from unconscious habit without knowledge, be done for some instrumental reason aside from acquiring virtue, or the pattern of seemingly virtuous actions may be subject to change under different psychological pressures. We may be mistaken in attributing virtue to someone based only on such observable actions or behaviors.

On Aristotle’s view, temperance for example is a virtue while continence only resembles temperance in the observable behaviors it prompts. For each real virtue, there is a continence about its subject matter that allows the merely continent person to seem to possess the virtue. In the case of temperance, the temperate person finds pleasure in the right things, and “he finds no intense pleasure in any [bodily pleasures], suffers no pain at their absence, and has no appetite for them, or only a moderate appetite, not to the wrong degree or at the wrong time or anything else at all of the sort” (*NE*, 1119a15). He is not sensitive to base pleasures and he is appropriately sensitive to higher pleasures. He does not struggle to overcome desire for what is base because he does not desire what is base. On the other hand, the continent person does find pleasure in what is base and still desires it, but he controls his desire and acts according to virtue. Aristotle sums up the difference in the following way:

The continent and temperate person are both the sort to do nothing against reason because of bodily pleasures, but the continent person has base appetites, whereas the temperate person lacks them. The temperate person is the sort to find nothing pleasant against reason, but the continent [person] is the sort to find such things pleasant but not be led by them. (1151b35-1152a5)

The continent person is still attracted to what is base despite being able to control whether he acts on this attraction. Continence is not a virtue since the attraction to what is base is still

present. The temperate person has no need to control himself because he does not desire what is base. The temperate person acts from virtue meeting all of the requirements in the previous paragraph. The continent person acts according to virtue since he meets only the first requirement: He knows that the action is considered virtuous, but he does not act from a “firm and unchanging state” or decide on the action for itself. Incidentally, Aristotle downplays the importance of the knowledge requirement since knowing what actions are considered virtuous is less important than having the ability to judge rightly in situations and possessing stability of character. The continent person knows what the virtuous person would do and imitates the behavior of the virtuous person while lacking the virtuous person’s stable character. To the extent that the continent person is able to act in accord with virtue, he is admirable (*NE*, 1145b10).

Sir Thomas is at the very least a self-controlled man. At first glance, this self-control seems to be continence: Sir Thomas often brings himself to act in a way that runs contrary to his inclination. But insofar as what he brings himself to do is not in accord with virtue, he fails to be continent. In common with mere self-control, continence stresses the importance of the act rather than the character of the agent. Yet although the continent person may be full of base desires, he brings himself to act well in spite of these desires. The aim of Sir Thomas’s self-control, being determined by advantage rather than virtue, does not rise to the level of continence. Rather, this type of self-control is a form of what Aristotle calls “stubbornness”. Stubborn people “tend to abide by their belief” and “are hard to persuade into something and not easy to persuade out of it” (*NE*, 1151b5). The stubborn person sticks to his beliefs just as the continent person does but unlike the continent person, he believes the wrong things about what he ought to do. Sir Thomas’s self-control often goes beyond or falls short of continence in that he actually seems sometimes to force himself against inclination to do what is not in accord with virtue since he cannot recognize what true virtue dictates in such a situation. He does this for the sake of his wealth and social position. It is not that Sir Thomas is ruled by an immoderate desire for wealth and social position but that his actual position as baronet sets up these goods as choice worthy regardless of his desire for them. In his role as baronet, Sir Thomas sees himself as having a duty to preserve these goods. He acts against inclination when it is necessary to do so and sometimes even when his inclination is to act in a way that is truly in accord with virtue. Sir Thomas’s stubbornness interferes with his ability to recognize true virtue. He is able to see an act as what

he ought to do only when an act is in accord with what would bring most advantage. What would bring most advantage is sometimes in accord with virtue but only for historically contingent reasons (e.g., the influence of Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Christianity on social norms of the period) or coincidentally. Sir Thomas himself equates the self-control necessary for acting always for advantage—a form of stubbornness—with virtue itself. Fortunately, the standards to which he adheres often turn out to line up, more or less, with what is required by true virtue. Still, the “more or less” has wide-reaching effects for his own and his family’s well-being throughout the novel.

Maria Ward is described as having “had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park” (*MP*, 3).²⁶ I would suggest that although Maria Ward is said to be handsome—at least as handsome as her sisters (*MP*, 3)—that was not the sole or primary means by which she “captivated” Sir Thomas. Rather, Maria Ward seemed to have all of the characteristics that Sir Thomas deemed necessary for a wife in his position. Beauty was one characteristic, but so was her seeming self-control. She appeared to be quiet and self-controlled as well as properly schooled in all the social graces appropriate to Sir Thomas’s position. Sadly for Sir Thomas, he is doubly-deceived. Not only does he have a skewed picture of virtue as only a sort of self-control for the sake of advantage, he is mistaken in attributing Maria Ward’s behaviors to self-control. Lady Bertram’s tendencies are dictated not by a rudimentary self-control, continence, or temperance but by her natural temperament: Maria Ward after becoming Lady Bertram is said to be “a woman of very tranquil feelings, and a temper remarkably easy and indolent” (*MP*, 4). She is a woman who, at most times, is easy-going and easily guided. She does have the manners requisite for the social position Sir Thomas gives her, but she does not have the ability to support or assist Sir Thomas in any other way. Lady Bertram is, as Avrom Fleishman called her, a “moral neuter” (Fleishman, 47).

²⁶ As Joyce Kerr Tarpley points out, ‘captivate’ can mean “to enthrall with charm or attractiveness” and this naturally makes us think of physical beauty or sexual attraction (Tarpley, 143; *OED*, Vol. II, ‘captivate’). Yet, as Tarpley Kerr herself admits, “the union is not represented in narrative as a passionate one” (Tarpley, 143). More basically, to captivate is “to make captive, take prisoner, capture” (*OED*, ‘captivate’). To be made captive one must be “caught” and Maria Ward did manage to “catch” Sir Thomas.

The future Lady Bertram's temperament and its corresponding tendencies are displayed during discussion of Fanny's coming to live at Mansfield Park. When Lady Bertram asks Mrs. Norris where Fanny is to come to live first, it is described as "calm enquiry" and even after Mrs. Norris outrageously denies having ever implied that Fanny would live with her, Lady Bertram's acquiescence to this change is made with "the utmost composure" (*MP*, 9). When Mrs. Norris even goes on to dictate the terms under which Fanny should live in the Bertram house, Lady Bertram is not visibly offended and makes "no opposition" (*MP*, 10). Lady Bertram's speeches are usually of this calm nature, even when the subject recommends a far different treatment. If we make what turns out to be the false assumption that she is an intelligent and rational woman, we might falsely conclude that she is either temperate, continent, or at least self-controlled with respect to some sense of duty. Sir Thomas made this very mistake in marrying her.

Lady Bertram's character combines two elements that prove very deceptive. Lady Bertram is a woman without strong appetites or desires for the base or the noble. She is not quarrelsome or prone to anger; she is not envious or resentful of slights. This makes her appear self-controlled at least, but what desires she does have are not subdued by habit or reason. Rather, her desires are naturally weak. Lady Bertram seems to lack some of the desires altogether. According to the notes in Irwin's translation, Aristotle distinguishes three different kinds of desire: (1) rational desire which "is for an object believed to be good"; (2) appetite which "nonrational desire for an object believed to be pleasant" (e.g., desires for food and comfort); and (3) spirit which "is nonrational desire for objects that appear good, not merely pleasant, because of the agent's spirited feelings" (*NE*, Irwin's notes 323). The only sort of desire Lady Bertram seems to have is of the second kind. She is spiritless, irrational, and merely appetitive. The desires human beings share with beasts are her ruling desires, but even these are weak.

Lady Bertram is what Aristotle terms 'soft' and undisciplined when it comes to her weak appetitive desires. Where she has even these weak desires, she is controlled by them. Lady Bertram is never stubborn since that would imply a sort of spiritedness she does not have. Rather, she is merely immovable sometimes. She engages in a passive rather than an active resistance. The times when Lady Bertram is heard to complain all have to do with minor inconveniences to herself. For example, her greatest concerns with her niece's coming to live in her house have nothing to do with any inconvenience or danger to which a new young person's

presence in the house might expose her own family but have rather to do with whether her niece will “tease [her] poor pug” (*MP*, 10). In this sense, she is not self-controlled and certainly not continent. At the same time, she is not quite incontinent. She is soft. The ‘soft’ person is “deficient in withstanding what most people withstand, and are capable of withstanding” (*NE*, 1150b5). The example Aristotle gives of the soft person is one who “trails his cloak to avoid the labor of lifting it, and imitates the invalid, though he does not think he is miserable” (*NE*, 1150b5). The following gives us a close to complete description of Lady Bertram’s character:

She was woman who spent most of her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter, when it did not put herself to inconvenience, guided in everything important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister.
(*MP*, 20)

Lady Bertram is generally unwilling to exert herself without direction from another. Insofar as she is left to her own devices, we find that as regards the very few things about which Lady Bertram cares at all—her dog, her comfort, her roses—she is soft in just this way.

Lady Bertram has been allowed to remain a perpetual child. Her naturally weak desires make it appear that she is at least self-controlled if not actually continent or temperate. Consequently, it seems that no effort was made in her youth to teach her to moderate the very weak desires that she does have. She acquired some weak habits resembling virtues of character, but has never been trained in the virtues of intellect necessary for developing her self-control. Lady Bertram remains childlike far into her adulthood because there is no developed intellect to confirm habit. For Lady Bertram, almost all control or judgment has to come from an external source just as it would for a pre-rational child. Lady Bertram is entirely dependent on Sir Thomas when it comes to judgment and decision-making. When left to herself, she acts on instinct rather than according to rational deliberation.

This makes it clear that Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram have dissimilar aims in loving one another. What is worse is that one was deceived in what he would receive from the other. While Sir Thomas was deceived in the object of his love, Lady Bertram was not. Sir Thomas loved his wife for the pleasure of her beauty and what seemed to be the self-control necessary for carrying

out all of the duties incumbent upon a wife of Sir Thomas. As he was both mistaken about what virtue was and mistaken about her possession of the characteristic he set up as virtue, he is bound to be disappointed. In the long run, many of Sir Thomas's intentions regarding his honor, his estate, and what he considers his duties are defeated partly as a result of his wife's lack of self-control in the form of her inactivity, softness, and lack of judgment. Lady Bertram's lack of judgment and inactivity also serve to introduce the mischief of her sister Mrs. Norris who comes to serve as Lady Bertram's surrogate in running the household.

Sir Thomas does his duty and continues to treat his wife well despite disappointment. He is attentive to her needs and is always willing to supplement her judgment with his own. Lady Bertram, on the other hand, though she has a needy sort of love for her husband, cares little for his comfort. In pursuing satisfaction of what weak desires she does have, Lady Bertram remains ignorant of her husband's needs. One example of this occurs early in the novel:

From about the time of her [Fanny] entering the family, Lady Bertram, in consequence of a little ill health, and a great deal of indolence, gave up the house in town, which she had been used to occupy every spring, and remained wholly in the country, leaving Sir Thomas to attend to his duty in Parliament, *with whatever increase or diminution of comfort might arise from her absence* [emphasis mine]. (MP, 20)²⁷

This "increase or diminution of comfort" is not taken into consideration by Lady Bertram in her remaining in the country. Sir Thomas's comfort is not consciously ignored or neglected so much as it is not even a subject of thought for Lady Bertram. Lady Bertram, having what are merely appetitive desires that are not strong but still predominant, loves her husband for the sake of utility in satisfying her very mild appetites. His wealth provides her with the means to live the mild, selfish, undisturbed life to which she is suited. His judgment substitutes for the judgment she lacks. With Sir Thomas, she is content in the same way that a domesticated beast would be.

²⁷ Originally, I took this passage to indicate Sir Thomas's not being averse to being away from his wife. It may indicate this, but it more strongly indicates her indifference to whether he cares or not.

Not only are the Bertrams misaligned with respect to their motives for love, they are unequal in the goods they have to offer one another. According to Aristotle, some friendships rest on equality and others on superiority. In the “friendships of equality”, the friends are peers; in “friendships of inequality”, one of the two friends is superior in wealth, status, power, or virtue (*NE*, 1158b). Such friendships in which one friend is superior to the other are found between fathers and sons, men and women²⁸, rich and poor, and, presumably, and also between those with more highly developed virtue and those with less highly developed virtue. Aristotle claims that, while in friendships of equality the friends give the same quantity of good to one another, the superior friend in a friendship of inequality is able to give more pleasure, utility, or is simply more lovable in himself. Since this is the case, Aristotle suggests that the only way to bring balance to a friendship of inequality is for the inferior friend to love the superior more than the superior loves him:

In all the friendships that rest on superiority, the loving must also be proportional; for instance, the better person, and the more beneficial, and each of the others likewise, must be loved more than he loves; for when the loving accords with the comparative worth of the friends, equality is achieved in a way, and this seems to be proper to friendship. (*NE*, 1158b25)

If the superior friend has more to offer the inferior friend in the way of virtue, pleasure, or utility, the inferior friend must love the superior more in order to make up for the deficiency in what the inferior has to offer.

Lady Bertram loves Sir Thomas more because she needs him more than he needs her. This imbalance of love is to be expected on Aristotle’s account. Sir Thomas has given her a life of wealth (utility) and luxury (pleasure), and he has provided her with the guidance and judgment

²⁸ The assumption seems to be that women are limited in their ability to acquire virtue when compared to men. For Austen, the relationship between a husband and wife is a sort of friendship, and unlike Aristotle in one respect, Austen does not see the friendship between a husband and wife as being innately a friendship between a superior and an inferior.

she lacks. Lady Bertram turns out to have little to offer Sir Thomas in return, except for her love, obedience, and whatever beauty she still retains. Their marriage is unbalanced such that one party, Lady Bertram, receives most of the benefits. If anything, Lady Bertram's love of Sir Thomas is abject dependence and she clings to him as an ivy clings to an oak,²⁹ but like ivy she seems to be acting according to nature and that nature is somewhat vegetative.

The Bertram marriage is a marriage of inequality but not one based on virtue. Lady Bertram's love is passive and spaniel-like. The Bertram marriage fits the requirement of a "friendship of inequality" since Sir Thomas is the superior in wealth and something approaching virtue. Sir Thomas loved Lady Bertram on account of an illusion regarding her virtue and her ability to fulfill her role as wife well. It is true that she defers always to his judgment, but she is never educated by it. There can be no real meeting of the minds between them nor can there be any reciprocal concern for one another's virtue since Lady Bertram exercises no agency of her own. Like her beloved dog or the aforementioned ivy, Lady Bertram is neither virtuous nor vicious in the way that adult human beings are. There is only some self-control and duty on Sir Thomas's side and vacancy on Lady Bertram's. Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram do nothing to improve one another's virtue but only serve to corrupt each other further. Lady Bertram is abjectly dependent and, because of her willing obedience, Sir Thomas ceases to make any demands upon her. By this means, she becomes a sluggard expecting never to have to do anything and he becomes a tyrant expecting the same sort of obedience he receives from her from everyone else. This last, ill-assorted marriage stands as the foundation of family life and the upbringing of children in the Bertram house.

When examined carefully, not one of the Ward sisters' marriages fits the standard of a virtuous marriage. Although Aristotle does not give us any explicit description of the ideal marriage, there is some indication of what it might be implicit in his descriptions of different kinds of friendship.³⁰ Insofar as a marriage is like an Aristotelian friendship, the complete or best kind of marriage is the one entered into on account of the virtue of both partners. Marriages based merely on utility, pleasure, or some combination of the two, fall short of the virtuous ideal.

²⁹ See: (Wollstonecraft, 21) and others who describe a certain model of womanhood in this way.

³⁰ This assumes that Aristotle would allow some degree of rationality to women. Even were he to reject this notion, his view is still easily adjusted to fit the facts.

The Norris marriage of utility and the Price marriage of mixed aims—pleasure on Mrs. Price’s side and utility on Lieutenant Price’s side—fail to be virtuous on these terms. The Bertram marriage fails to be virtuous because Sir Thomas’s original love of his wife was based upon combined misapprehensions about virtue itself and Lady Bertram’s character while Lady Bertram’s love of Sir Thomas is based on utility. She offers nothing and he gives everything. Even what at first appears to be the best marriage on offer—that of Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas—is not a truly virtuous marriage. This Aristotelian understanding of friendship and marriage fits well with the judgments about these three marriages implicit in the novel.

The motives of the marriages of *Mansfield Park*’s first few pages set the pattern for future marriages by establishing the ways in which each partner can go wrong in the characteristics valued in a potential spouse. The junior women of the family share the names of their seniors—Maria Bertram, Julia Bertram, and Fanny Price—and, although they do not share fates identical to those of their elders, the marriages of the elders have a profound effect on the marriages of the younger generation. The order of age is the same: Maria Bertram is the eldest, Julia Bertram the middle, and Fanny Price the youngest girl. A goal for each of the junior women is to make a good marriage.³¹ The novel, first, shows how it is that each of these women comes to see certain characteristics as valuable in a husband. The novel goes on to show the ways in which each of these women and their potential husbands achieve or fail to achieve this goal of a good marriage through what characteristics they value in their potential spouses. The choices the young ladies make are largely informed by the marriages with which they are familiar. Unsurprisingly, the best marriage ends up being made between the most virtuous and the worst marriage between the least virtuous.

³¹ This is not to say that this is the sole goal of all women nor is it to say that it is not the goal of the young men in the novel.

CHAPTER THREE

BENEFACTORS

1. Sir Thomas Bertram and Mrs. Norris: Benefactors as Creditors and Gratitude as Flattery

On her arrival at Mansfield Park, young Fanny Price is exhorted to be grateful for her new home and the goods offered there. This presents puzzles about gratitude for the 10-year old Fanny. What merits gratitude? How does one manifest gratitude? Must gratitude be “shown” to its object in some way in order to count? Although this chapter is not an analysis of gratitude itself, it questions whether it is appropriate for Fanny to be grateful to Sir Thomas Bertram and Mrs. Norris. It also investigates what Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris expect as a manifestation of gratitude. In other words, the questions are whether Sir Thomas or Mrs. Norris have done anything that merits Fanny’s gratitude and how—assuming they deserve it—Fanny is expected to display her gratitude to Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris.

It seems to Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris a foregone conclusion that Fanny *ought* to be grateful, but it is unclear to the reader whether Fanny has any obligation to be grateful at all. It is clear from what is said in the novel that, although Mrs. Norris often mentions Fanny’s “wonderful good fortune” (*MP*, 13), Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris desire gratitude directed toward themselves as benefactors. Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris view gratitude as the proper response of beneficiary to benefactor for benefits bestowed. Given that this is the sort of gratitude expected, it appears that gratitude is the proper response to the awareness that one has been intentionally benefitted in some way by another person. In order to understand this kind of gratitude, we must understand the connection between benefactors and their beneficiaries. The presence or absence of the virtues based on benevolence—generosity, for example—affect whether a person can be a true benefactor and, therefore, deserving of gratitude. By examining the characters of Fanny’s putative benefactors, we can also see clearly how both Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris go wrong in their own understandings of what gratitude requires from Fanny. To further confuse matters for Fanny, Fanny’s guardians give her decidedly mixed messages about how to express gratitude.

2. Benefactors and Beneficiaries

Turning to Aristotle again proves useful for understanding the relationships of the novel. Aristotle provides a detailed description of the benefactor as well as the relationship between benefactor and beneficiary. He begins by discussing the intentions of the benefactor. Aristotle holds that a benefactor must be benevolent. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle describes benevolence as “the feeling in accordance with which one who has it is said to do a favor to one who stands in need, not in return for any anything, nor for any advantage to the doer, but for the advantage of the recipient” (*R*, 1385a). It is important to note also that Aristotle’s notion of benevolence excludes actions done for the sake of the agent’s advantage: An action’s being done *quid pro quo* disqualifies it as an act of benevolence (*R*, 1385b). Further, Aristotle offers two other requirements: First, that the act is done freely and, second, that the act is aimed at helping. If it can be shown (1) that an action is done only for the advantage of the agent, (2) that an action only coincidentally helps, or (3) that the agent did not freely choose to act, then the action was not done out of benevolence (*R*, 1385b).

Aristotle next explains how benevolence is translated into action. Beneficence is active benevolence and the true benefactor is the benevolent person who has the reasonable expectation, given his own knowledge and judgment, of helping the person he intends to benefit. The benefactor uses his judgment to discern of what service *he* can be to the person he means to benefit. The needs of the intended beneficiary and the abilities or resources of the intended benefactor are particularly important in this judgment. People are not looked upon as generic and their happiness is not looked upon in the aggregate. If an action is not done out of benevolence, then the agent cannot be said to be a benefactor. But a benevolent person may still fail to benefit his intended beneficiary due to bad luck or something unpredictable. A benefactor, then, is a person who acts on his benevolence and his action is an instance of beneficence.

Aristotle denies that the relationship between benefactor and beneficiary is antagonistic. Aristotle contrasts the situation of true benefactors with that of creditors. According to Aristotle, most people view the benefactor and creditor in the same light. On this common view, the benefactor and creditor care about the beneficiary and debtor only because they are interested in getting a return from their investment. The beneficiary and the debtor’s attitude toward the benefactor and creditor, respectively, is one of antagonism in which the beneficiary and the debtor wish that the benefactor and the creditor did not exist (*NE*, 1167b20). Consequently, the

benefactor and creditor are said to love their beneficiaries and debtors more since benefactors and creditors are still in need of a return on their investment while the beneficiaries and debtors have no further use for those who have benefitted them. Contrary to this view, Aristotle argues that although true benefactors do love their beneficiaries more than their beneficiaries love them, it is not in the way that creditors love their debtors. Whereas the creditor expects a return on his investment in the form of money or services, the benefactor expects no return. Whereas the creditor is solicitous about the well-being of his debtor only until the debtor has repaid his debt, the benefactor cares about his beneficiary “even if [he is] of no present or future use to [him]” (*NE*, 1167b30). The true benefactor wants only to benefit his beneficiary.

Aristotle goes further in contrasting the benefactor with the creditor. Rather than resembling a creditor, the benefactor resembles a craftsman in that “the beneficiary is his product, and hence he likes him more than the product likes its producer” (*NE*, 1168a5). The beneficiary is the actualization of the benefactor’s plan and the benefactor loves him on account of this. The beneficiary does not love his benefactor as much as his benefactor loves him, but there is no antagonism between the two. The benefactor seeks to provide benefit to his beneficiary and, if successful and able to observe, enjoys the improvement of the beneficiary just as a sculptor would enjoy the improvements he makes on the marble. It is the production of some good in the beneficiary—e.g., virtue of character or intellect, health, strength, pleasure, etc.—that is of value to the benefactor, rather than the receipt of some good for the benefactor that the beneficiary can return in exchange for these goods. The benefactor does not himself *require* any return from the beneficiary for his services. At the same time, if the beneficiary is aware of his benefactor’s actions, the beneficiary ought to feel a certain goodwill and appreciation for the good done him and a desire to make some return, even if this is impossible. The nature of the return must be consistent with preserving the good that was aimed at by the benefactor. For example, the child made virtuous by his parent shows gratitude by being and loving what his parent has made him. This awareness and appreciation of benefits received would constitute gratitude.

Now that we have this general idea of the relationship between benefactors and beneficiaries, we must investigate whether Fanny’s two guardians—Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris—are truly the benefactors they claim to be and whether they are deserving of gratitude. Recall the two requirements for an act that benefits another counting as beneficence or being the

product of benevolence: First, that the act is done freely and, second, that the act is aimed at helping. There are three ways in which someone can fail in an attempt to be a benefactor: If it can be shown (1) that an action is done only for the advantage of the agent, (2) that an action only coincidentally helps, or (3) that the agent did not freely choose to act, then the action was not done out of benevolence (*R*, 1385b).

Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris expect constant gratitude from Fanny, not for individual benefits, but for what they conceive of as actions that produce overall benefits that are in the process of unfolding over time. Hence, the sorts of benefits that they have in mind are broad and would be the result of many individual acts. For example, they are not thinking of acts such as buying Fanny a new dress, feeding her dinner that day, or teaching her the capitol of France as requiring gratitude but rather of more grandiose projects for her benefit such as providing her with an education. If it can be shown that the act of entering into any of these projects was either not done freely or was not truly aimed at helping Fanny, then the guardian has failed to be a benefactor and has failed to merit Fanny's gratitude.

So far, we may wonder whether Sir Thomas or Mrs. Norris have met the preliminary requirements for counting as benefactors of Fanny. The projected benefits are to be (1) a home, (2) a good upbringing, including an education fit for a gentleman's daughter, and (3) a permanent establishment either through marriage or, if there is no marriage, through a provision for her life-long support (*MP*, 38). Although the decision to bring Fanny to Mansfield Park was the joint decision of Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris, Sir Thomas decides to take on the role of primary benefactor: "The division of gratifying sensations ought not, in strict justice, to have been equal; for Sir Thomas was fully resolved to be the real and consistent patron of the selected child, and Mrs. Norris had not the least intention of being at any expense whatever in her maintenance" (*MP*, 39). Although it may turn out that he is wrong about how to care for Fanny and, hence, fails to benefit her, Sir Thomas is fully committed to what he sees as necessary for and due to a child he takes under his care. Mrs. Norris, in contrast, is neither committed to doing anything to further the projects she and Sir Thomas have settled on for benefiting Fanny nor is it clear that she even has the desire to benefit Fanny.

First, we should examine Sir Thomas as a candidate for benefactor. Sir Thomas's taking on the care of Fanny meets one requirement of a benevolent act: Sir Thomas is not taking on Fanny's care for his own advantage and does not aim at any advantage that he does gain from his

act. That Sir Thomas acts for Fanny's own benefit and not for the sake of any gain on his part is supported by the fact that he anticipates possible hardship and trouble on the part of himself and his own family. In acting in a way that may be contrary to his own interest, his only motive can be to help. Sir Thomas goes some way toward meeting another requirement of a benevolent act: Although it is not clear that he has the correct idea of how to benefit Fanny, he is intentionally trying to bring about what he believes are benefits for Fanny. He might turn out to be wrong about how to bring them about or he might be wrong about their being benefits, but he does understand a connection between what he is doing and the ends he seeks for Fanny. The last requirement of a benevolent act—that it be done freely—seems also to have been met by Sir Thomas's action since despite some interference, he acted without coercion.

With respect to his intentionally trying to bring about benefit, it is clear that Sir Thomas has a plan for helping Fanny. Sir Thomas's foremost concern is that in taking on Fanny, he is taking on the responsibility for settling her well in the world. If he is to raise her among gentleman's children and accustom her to fine manners and a luxurious mode of life, he must also ensure that she make an appropriate marriage or he must continue to support her in perpetuity. Failing this, "there would be cruelty instead of kindness in taking her from her family" (*MP*, 7). Bringing Fanny to live in his home does help Fanny and this is not all mere coincidence. Sir Thomas does carefully consider what Fanny Price needs as well as how his own resources might be appropriate for fulfilling these needs. He also concerns himself with important details such as how Fanny ought to be treated vis-a-vis his own daughters so that Fanny can be at home in the family without coming to feel entitled to the same distinctions as his daughters:

"There will be some difficulty in our way, Mrs. Norris," observed Sir Thomas, "as to the distinction proper to be made between the girls [Fanny and her cousins] as they grow up; 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*. 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, and expectations, will always be different. It is a point of great delicacy,

and you must assist us in our endeavors to choose exactly the right line of conduct.” (*MP*, 41-41)

Sir Thomas attempts to show great delicacy in the treatment of Fanny so that Fanny will know her expectations without feeling unduly inferior to her cousins who will receive dowries and all the respect due to a Miss Bertram. He wants Fanny to seek and to have a good marriage, without giving her unrealistic expectations. The benefits he offers can only go so far: He cannot make her one of his daughters. The benefits of providing a home as well as a good upbringing and education are meant to assist in bringing about the primary beneficial goal of establishing Fanny in a household of her own through a good marriage. Should anything go wrong, Sir Thomas intends to provide the benefits a marriage might have brought by continuing to support her.

The fact that Sir Thomas is taking on long-term responsibility for Fanny should she fail to marry lends support to the idea that Sir Thomas is acting for Fanny’s benefit instead of for his own alone. A young man can be educated for a profession; a young woman must be educated for marriage. Sir Thomas is taking on a considerable financial obligation and it is a financial obligation that might be life-long. Given any change in his own fortune, such an obligation could take away support from his own children. Sir Thomas considers how taking Fanny into his house might affect his own family, to whom he considers himself to have his primary obligation.

There are other ways in which it may be to Sir Thomas’s disadvantage to become Fanny’s benefactor. Fanny will be brought up with his sons, one of whom might very likely form an attachment to her (*MP*, 7). This second concern about “cousins in love” may seem very understandable given our contemporary attitudes on the subject, but these were not the attitudes of Austen’s time. Rather, the marriage of cousins was perfectly allowable and happened very often. The major consideration seems to be whether it would be to the advantage of the family in which it takes place. For example, the advantage might be in consolidating the family fortune or it might even be in continuing family traditions in religion or morality. Sir Thomas worries both about the financial loss inherent in such a connection and about the dubious connection this would make for one of his sons. Not having met Fanny, he can only judge what will likely be the case with her based upon her immediate family. Given Fanny’s own mother’s impulsivity, rebelliousness, and poor judgment, Sir Thomas has some reason to be concerned. The Price family’s conditions have been so bad that there is not much likelihood that Fanny has received

much of an education and, as he points out, she may be very deficient. Overlooking the obvious financial loss such a marriage might entail, it might still bring one of his sons into a miserable marriage of inequality in virtue. In addition, the inconveniences attendant upon a love-affair carried on in such close quarters would not be small. The introduction into the household or the neighborhood of a young female relation who is distantly-related enough to be acceptable as a romantic interest for his sons could create discord or rivalry between his sons, and the possible destruction of Fanny's reputation.³² It does seem that he ought to have these concerns about his family's well-being, even if, as turns out to be the case, he lets other concerns (e.g., relieving the burden of the Price family or providing a better life for Fanny) outweigh them.³³

One other way in which helping Fanny might be to Sir Thomas's disadvantage is that any bad habits she brings with her from the Price house might be taken on by his own children. It is not surprising that Sir Thomas would see his obligation as primarily financial at first since Mrs. Norris leads him to believe until the last moment that she intends to take Fanny into her own home. It is only when it becomes clear that Fanny is to live in the same house with his children, and at Mrs. Norris's prompting, that Sir Thomas mentions any real concerns about Fanny's 'disposition.' Barring the initial concerns about financial maintenance and "cousins in love" Sir Thomas expects only what he sees as minor problems of conduct and some bad habits to be easily remedied: "Should her own disposition be really bad...we must not for our own children's sake, continue her in the family; but there is no reason to expect so great an evil" (*MP*, 11). According to Sir Thomas, any bad habits she has might be remedied partly by the example of her older female cousins: "We shall probably see much to wish altered in her, and must prepare ourselves for gross ignorance, some meanness of opinion, and very distressing vulgarity of manner; but these are not incurable faults—nor, I trust can they be dangerous for her associates"

³² See: *Sense and Sensibility* and Eliza, Colonel Brandon's former love who was a close relation forced to marry Brandon's brother despite her preference and her subsequent ruin and death.

³³ Mrs. Norris attempts skillfully to convince Sir Thomas that Fanny's being raised by Sir Thomas will be enough to ensure her a proper settlement in the world and that the more closely Fanny is raised with his sons, the less likely these sons will be to see her as anything more than a sister (*MP*, 9).

(*MP*, 11).³⁴ Being very confident that he has raised his own children well, he cannot imagine that such bad habits could infect them; he can imagine only that his daughters' good examples will improve their cousin. As he says, "Had my daughters been *younger* than herself, I should have considered the introduction of such a companion, as a matter of very serious moment; but as it is, I hope there can be nothing to fear for *them*, and every thing to hope for *her*, from the association" (*MP*, 11). Having convinced himself that the good impressions created by his own children will have a greater impact than any bad impressions Fanny might make upon them, Sir Thomas also overcomes this concern. These three concerns about disadvantage to his family give some weight to the idea that Sir Thomas expected no advantage or return, but rather probably some disadvantage from his caring for Fanny. Sir Thomas's bringing Fanny into his home to care for and educate her seems to be clearly aimed at helping Fanny, not himself.

Whether Sir Thomas's actions are freely chosen is a more difficult question. Despite the fact that every one of his concerns about possible disadvantage is overcome, it is not clear that he is not being manipulated in his decisions. In bringing Fanny to his home, Sir Thomas is urged and manipulated in his decision by Mrs. Norris from the very beginning. Every scruple on his part is overcome by flattery or some sort of misdirection on her part. She anticipates his every objection or concern, and while some of the time her responses are legitimate, often she adorns them in compliments to his own discernment and generosity. Since being foolish enough to have his head turned by flattery does not count as being forced, Sir Thomas's decision to take responsibility for Fanny seems to be freely chosen.

There is one more way in which Sir Thomas seems to be like the benefactor: He admires Fanny as the product of his benevolence. When Fanny has grown into a young woman later in the novel, Sir Thomas admires what he sees as the fruits of his benevolence: Fanny has shown good judgment in disapproving of the production of the play (*MP*, 204), she has grown into an attractive young woman (*MP*, 213), and she has attracted what Sir Thomas sees as a more than eligible suitor (*MP*, 288). Sir Thomas does admire Fanny as a product of his benefits and he

³⁴ Sir Thomas's reference to these important habits as being easily remedied points to some misunderstanding of virtue on his part. I would suggest that Sir Thomas uses pleasure and pain incorrectly in habituating his daughters. Sir Thomas has associated pain with an object and his daughters come to avoid this object, but he has made himself the object to be avoided.

does not at first *seem* to require any return. As we shall see later in this chapter, he does have some expectations about a proper return. This later expectation calls into question whether he has been a true benefactor or merely a creditor in disguise.

Another way in which Sir Thomas's status as benefactor is called into question has to do with his lack of discernment when it comes to the means to the good ends he seeks for Fanny. The primary way in which this lack of discernment or absence of good judgment reveals itself is in his dependence on Mrs. Norris for help in carrying out his plans for helping Fanny. Since Sir Thomas mistakes Mrs. Norris's character and her disposition toward Fanny, this relinquishing of control to Mrs. Norris diminishes some of the intended benefits.³⁵ However, Sir Thomas does succeed in benefitting Fanny in important ways: He gives her a safe home with proper food and clothing as well as an education. It is just not clear whether it is not the case that the benefits conveyed come merely by coincidence.

Mrs. Norris fails to be a true benefactor on all counts. Mrs. Norris acts for her own advantage in bringing Fanny Price to Mansfield Park. She expects to be able to add a person to the family in a more dependent position than her own and she herself benefits by having the ability to lord it over someone. Mrs. Norris's act is done freely but it is not aimed at helping Fanny. Whether it helps Fanny at all is not relevant to her private feelings. Interestingly, Mrs. Norris does do things that help Fanny but these things are not intended to help; rather, they help coincidentally. Therefore, Mrs. Norris does not even meet the most basic requirement for being a benefactor. Mrs. Norris does view herself as a great benefactor—she credits herself with anything others find admirable in Fanny—and believes that she ought to be rewarded with gratitude in the form of flattery.

Mrs. Norris acts for her own advantage. At best, she is unconcerned about whether any benefits accrue to Fanny. At worst, she actually seems to wish Fanny ill. It is clear that Mrs. Norris has a great antipathy for Fanny's mother, Mrs. Price. She resents what she sees as the low

³⁵ Surprisingly, Mrs. Norris's intentional neglect and unkindness create unintentional good consequences for Fanny. One example is that, unlike her female cousins who have been praised and encouraged by Mrs. Norris, Fanny avoids becoming arrogant and demanding. A more extensive discussion of this issue will come in the next chapter.

marriage Mrs. Price has made and its supposed effect of lowering the reputation of the family. This resentment does not lessen with time. When discussing young Fanny's character, she compares Fanny to her mother: "I wish there may not be a little sulkiness of temper—her poor mother had a good deal" (*MP*, 44). Mrs. Norris does what she can to harm rather than help the Price family. Mrs. Norris exacerbated the original bad feelings between the Bertrams and Prices by reporting words written in anger about Sir Thomas (*MP*, 36). Even Mrs. Norris's choice of Fanny—the eldest girl and probably the child most useful as an aid to her mother—seems to be aimed at disoblighing Mrs. Price. One other use Mrs. Price has had for Mrs. Norris is that Mrs. Price could serve as a contrast to Mrs. Norris: Mrs. Norris did not marry as well as she had hoped but she is still better off than her sister Price. Mrs. Norris is dependent on the Bertrams but she is not in as poor a position as her sister Price. In bringing Fanny to the Bertram home, Mrs. Norris has brought someone she conceives of as being in a lower and more dependent position than herself. She has also brought a proxy for her sister Price to whom she can compare herself and over whom she can flaunt her superior position. That Mrs. Norris has only acted so as to disobligh her sister and to have an inferior is proof that she has acted with no intention of benefitting Fanny. The act is also done freely but is not done for Fanny's sake.

At times, Mrs. Norris's actions do help Fanny even though Mrs. Norris intends nothing of the kind and often, rather, to do the very opposite of help. Mrs. Norris's unkindness and her sharp words keep Fanny at a distance and raise an aversion in Fanny which is advantageous to Fanny. To be treated ill by someone nasty proves a helpful way of creating an aversion to nastiness. Mrs. Norris chooses how Fanny is to be treated in the Bertram household and creates an environment for Fanny that is not always pleasant but that happens to be conducive to good habits. Fanny's comfort is not a concern for Mrs. Norris and this forces Fanny to become inured to hard work and discomfort. For example, Fanny is given the East room as a refuge but Mrs. Norris forbids that a fire be lit in the room. Fanny is also sent walking on errands for Mrs. Norris, back and forth between the house and the parsonage. These unkindness have the unintended effect of making Fanny stronger both physically and psychologically. Those Mrs. Norris does treat well, especially the Bertram sisters, are made worse by her attentions. Mrs. Norris flatters them, indulges them, and makes them self-complacent. Although some of Mrs. Norris's actions do help Fanny, these actions are certainly not intended to do so.

3. Generosity and Beneficence

Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris both fail as benefactors but for different reasons. Their failures spring from defects of character that ruin their chances of truly being able to fill the role. The benefits to Fanny which Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris purport to convey are primarily of wealth-based nature. Since this is the case, part of the benefactor-beneficiary relationship—assuming this relationship obtains—must be based on wealth. As Aristotle points out, most people see a virtue as something that benefits others as opposed to its possessor. In other words, it is what Aristotle calls “a faculty of beneficence” in the eyes of many (*R*, 1366b). Consequently, the virtues most admired by such people are the ones that “are most useful to other persons” (*R*, 1366b). Those who benefit or who have the means to benefit others are accorded honor³⁶: “Honor is the mark of a reputation for beneficence” (*R*, 1361a). One of the three virtues, along with justice and courage, most honored by those who see virtue primarily in terms of beneficence is generosity (*R*, 1366b). The actual virtue of generosity is the proper use of wealth consisting in spending and giving (*NE*, 1119b25). In order to be generous, a person must have sufficient wealth. Aristotle points out that generosity requires giving only in proportion to a person’s means: “For what is generous does not depend on the quantity of what is given, but on the state [of character] of the giver, and the generous state gives in accord with one’s means” (*NE*, 1120b10). Generosity is a virtue that provides benefit to others by means of giving, and, for this reason, the generous person is loved by those benefitted (*NE*, 1120a20).

Two vices oppose generosity. The vice of excess associated with the virtue of generosity is wastefulness. The wasteful person gives more than she can comfortably and appropriately give, and takes less than is appropriate (*NE*, 1121a10-15). The vice of deficiency associated with generosity is ungenerosity. The ungenerous person gives less than she can comfortably and appropriately give and takes more than she should (*NE*, 1121a10-15). The wasteful and the ungenerous both misjudge with respect to giving and spending. This misjudgment often prevents their benefitting others. Although it would seem that the wasteful person, who gives more than he should, might provide more benefit than the generous person, he wastes his wealth with no

³⁶ In his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Irwin describes ‘honor’ in the following way: “[Honor] reflects other people’s judgment of someone’s WORTH—of his useful or fine qualities” (*NE* Irwin’s notes, 334).

appreciable benefit to others. Instead, the wasteful person gives in a way that encourages vice and discourages virtue: “Rather, these people sometimes enrich people who ought to be poor, and would give nothing to people with sound characters, but would give much to flatterers or to those providing pleasure” (*NE*, 1121b5). The ungenerous person judges that she ought not to give as much as is actually appropriate or that she ought not to give at all. The ungenerous person may fall into error by being such as to both fail to give in the right way and to take in the right way as the miser does or she might fail to give in the right way while also taking in the wrong way as the grasping person³⁷ does (*NE*, 1122a5). Despite the fact that the wasteful person can do quite a lot of mischief, Aristotle holds that ungenerosity is more opposed to generosity than is wastefulness (*NE*, 1122a15). In other words, it is easier for the wasteful character to become generous than it is for the ungenerous character to become generous since the wasteful character is at least already in the habit of giving and is only missing the proper judgment about how to give.

Being a wealthy gentleman, Sir Thomas has the material means necessary for great generosity. The problem is that his attempts at generosity are motivated primarily by what he believes his position as a baronet requires. He does not try to act generously on account of generosity being an end in itself, but because having a reputation for generosity and acting in accord with the virtue is appropriate to his position as Sir Thomas, wealthy baronet: A wealthy gentleman, especially one with a title, ought to use his wealth to help others. One of the first things we learn about Sir Thomas is that he would have helped the Prices early on if it had been in his power: “Sir Thomas Bertram had interest, which, from principle as well as pride, from a general wish of doing right, and a desire of seeing all that were connected with him in situations of respectability, he would have been glad to exert for the advantage of Lady Bertram’s sister” (*MP*, 6). He was motivated not only by principle but by pride. Since Sir Thomas sometimes has the wrong motivation for his attempts at generosity, his attempts often fail. He ends up either

³⁷ Aristotle’s examples of this second type of ungenerous person include people “who work in degrading occupations” (1122a). He includes pimps and usurers (“who lend small amounts at high interest”) under this category. It might be easiest then to think of this type as the grasping person, since he keeps hold of whatever he can.

giving too much or too little. Surprisingly for a man who cares such a good deal about money, he errs on the side of being wasteful since he often benefits the wrong people or misjudges how much to give those who are deserving: For example, Sir Thomas gives a good deal to Mrs. Norris and very little to Fanny. Since he does spend and give even though he often wastes his resources, his vice of excess is less opposed³⁸ to generosity than would be the vice of deficiency.

Mrs. Norris falls short of generosity for other reasons. Unlike Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris is not concerned with making any attempt at acting in a way consistent with how she presents herself. Rather, she is concerned with seeming to be generous *only* when observed by others. When left unobserved, she acts without reference to any virtue. In fact, Mrs. Norris is downright vicious when unobserved as is evidenced from her often taking things that do not belong to her. Mrs. Norris knows that others believe she ought to be generous and she wants to seem generous. Seeming virtuous is to her a means to an end, and the reputation with its accompanying rewards given to her by others is the end. In fact, it seems that in her eyes there is no difference between being and seeming to be generous. She seems not even to suspect that virtue is an end in itself, but believes it to be a display made for instrumental purposes. Mrs. Norris is not as wealthy as Sir Thomas, but she has sufficient wealth to be generous. Practicing the behaviors associated with generosity is open to Mrs. Norris. Regrettably, as she is concerned only with maximizing benefits to herself, she does not act generously.

Although Mrs. Norris wants the reputation due to the generous person, she is in truth an ungenerous person. Mrs. Norris spends a good deal of time advertising a generosity that she does not possess, and making plans she does not undertake to carry out herself. It is worth quoting at length the narrator's description of Mrs. Norris's seeming generosity:

As far as walking, talking, and contriving reached, she was thoroughly benevolent, and nobody knew better how to dictate liberality to others; but her love of money was equal to her love of directing, and she knew quite well how to save her own as to spend that of her friends. Having married on a narrower income than she had been used to look

³⁸ Having a vice "less opposed to" a virtue means that a person with such a vice would find it easier to move into the moderate position of virtue than would someone with a vice "more opposed to" the virtue.

forward to, she had, from the first, fancied a very strict line of economy necessary; and what was begun as a matter of prudence, soon grew into a matter of choice, as an object of that needful solicitude, which there were no children to supply... Under this infatuating principle, counteracted by no real affection for her sister, it was impossible for her to aim at more than the credit of projecting and arranging so expensive a charity... (*MP*, 10)

It is clear that Mrs. Norris is ungenerous, but what species of ungenerosity she possesses is less clear. At first glance she seems most like the miserly kind, only deficient in giving but not excessive in taking from others for her own benefit. Closer inspection reveals that she is more like the grasping person: There are many instances in the novel in which Mrs. Norris clandestinely takes that to which she is not entitled, whether it is a plant or a cream cheese or the fine cloth left over from the production of the play. In addition, she does in a way take other people's wealth since she uses other people's money to carry out her plans. In trying to create for herself a reputation for generosity, she involves and ensnares others so that these others believe that they are obligated to carry out her seemingly benevolent plans. Of course, she fails to benefit anyone directly with her own wealth and often her plans either fail to provide benefit or provide it accidentally.

Vice affects whether Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris can be true benefactors to Fanny. Despite his desire to help, Sir Thomas's wastefulness makes his attempt at helping Fanny faulty. His lack of judgment when it comes to the right disposal of his wealth brings him too often to withhold what Fanny needs. He is unable to understand Fanny's needs because he is unable to understand her temperament or character. Rather, he allows himself to be guided by Mrs. Norris and, in effect, places Fanny's well-being in the hands of someone who clearly wishes her ill. Mrs. Norris's graspingness makes her incapable of truly helping anyone else since she is always concerned with how she can satisfy some desire of her own. Instead, all the pursuits she disguises as attempts at helping are meant to satisfy her in some way: She wants to seem generous so she forms elaborate plans which she manipulates others into carrying out. She wants to feel superior so she brings Fanny to Mansfield Park as an inferior. She wants to harm her sister so she chooses to take the best mother's helper away under the auspices of charity to the Price family.

While Sir Thomas may be entitled to gratitude for some individual kind acts, neither Sir Thomas nor Mrs. Norris can be entitled to gratitude for the outcome of the overall plans for benefitting Fanny. Recall that the overall plan was to bring about these benefits: (1) a home, (2) a good upbringing, including an education fit for a gentleman's daughter, and (3) a permanent establishment either through marriage or, if there is no marriage, through a provision for her life-long support (*MP*, 38). Their plans did not bring about these benefits despite the fact that often luck or Edmund intervened to bring about the benefits. Mrs. Norris refused to give Fanny a home when it was her turn to help (*MP*, 58). Fanny was housed by Sir Thomas but Sir Thomas abdicated how she was treated in the home. The upbringing and what education Fanny received were due neither to Mrs. Norris nor Sir Thomas but to accident and the good will of Sir Thomas's youngest son Edmund (see the next chapter). Mrs. Norris made no attempt to introduce Fanny to society so as to make a marriage. Sir Thomas urges Fanny to marry a person whom she cannot like and, unbeknownst to Sir Thomas yet ascertainable with little effort, who has already done harm to the peace of one of his own daughters. All the good that is done intentionally for Fanny comes through Edmund. However, this does not change the fact that both Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris believe that they have been great benefactors and that they are now entitled to gratitude.

4. Gratitude and Flattery

Sir Thomas's wastefulness and Mrs. Norris's graspingness influence how each believes gratitude ought to be shown. The way in which each believes gratitude ought to be shown is displayed in their relationship with one another. Mrs. Norris is in an inferior position to Sir Thomas Bertram and is, to some extent, his dependent. Although her husband holds a modest clerical living, her husband holds this living because it was given to him by Sir Thomas. When Mr. Norris dies, Mrs. Norris has sufficient resources to live on but could never provide for herself the sort of luxuries Sir Thomas provides for her. Sir Thomas is the superior and, as he believes befits a superior, he attempts to be a benefactor to Mrs. Norris. It is certain that he gives and she takes a great deal from him, but their relationship is not beneficial to either in the long run (see the following chapter for one way in which the relationship is highly detrimental to Sir Thomas).

In the course of the discussion of friendship in the prior chapter, I explained what Aristotle meant by “friendships of inequality” in which one friend has more to offer than the other.³⁹ As mentioned earlier, the superior friend in a friendship or pseudo-friendship of inequality is able to provide more of some good to his friend than his friend can return. This type of friendship involves a benefactor-beneficiary relationship. The superior friend provides benefit while the inferior receives it. When such unequal relationships are maintained on the grounds of virtue in each friend—the superior attempting to benefit the inferior by doing things that will help increase his virtue—these relationships are still complete friendships even if there is inequality in virtue due to differences in age or ability. When such unequal relationships are maintained solely on the grounds of utility or pleasure, these relationships cannot be called complete friendships nor can these relationships be true benefactor-beneficiary relationships.

In the ‘friendship of unequals’, whether it is a complete or a pseudo-friendship, it is fitting for the friend who has not enough to make an equal return to ‘love’ the superior friend more than that friend ‘loves’ him. In one sense this is trivial, for if love is the sort of need-based love earlier described by Aristotle, this can hardly be helped. The one most in need will be the neediest. This beneficiary friend surely ‘loves’ the superior benefactor friend in the sense that he loves the friend’s superior capacity for providing him with what he needs and he will wish this friend to continue in possession of the good things he can provide. At the same time, some attempt at a return of gift-based love is fitting. Although the inferior friend cannot make a return in quantity, he can make a return in quality in the sense that he can give the best of what little he has to his benefactor friend. He can also seek to develop and augment what little he has so as to be able to make a return later. Hence, the superior benefactor friend recognizes the great worth of what little the inferior beneficiary friend has. If the difference between inferior and superior is too great, the inferior may have only the goodwill of gratitude to return.

As the only complete friendship is that between virtuous people, the most successful kind of ‘friendship between unequals’ must be the kind between those who are more or less virtuous. Of the unequal friendship for virtue, Aristotle writes that “no one objects if the other loves and

³⁹ It is possible to be generous to and to be a benefactor to someone without that person’s knowledge, but Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris’s relationships to Fanny appear more to be failed “friendships of inequality”.

benefits him; if he is gracious, he retaliates by benefitting the other” (*NE*, 1162b10). The superior in virtue seeks to improve his inferior; the benefit he means to provide is the virtue of the beneficiary. It is in becoming more virtuous that the inferior as a beneficiary makes his return and, ultimately, becomes an equal friend. The inferior friend in virtue who makes a right return—the person we might call ‘truly grateful’—makes what little return he can when he can by becoming better. Nonetheless, it seems to be the stronger need in the inferior that is an integral part of what we call ‘gratitude.’

In contrast to the relationship between benefactor and beneficiary that takes the highest benefit—virtue—as its aim, there exists another inferior kind of relationship that only superficially resembles the benefactor and beneficiary relationship between friends of inequality. This “benefits” sought and bestowed are the inferior goods of pleasure and mere utility without any reference to virtue. The exchange of such “benefits” often leads to a new sort of relationship based on mock-gratitude. This is the relationship of flattered and flatterer. Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris fit perfectly the roles of flattered and the flatterer. First of all, their friendship is one of inequality and it is a friendship of dissimilar aims. Second, it is not a friendship for virtue since Sir Thomas is deceived as to Mrs. Norris’s true character and Mrs. Norris is seeking only utility from her relationship with Sir Thomas. It is easy to see how such a friendship could devolve into a relationship of flattered and flatterer.

Flattery is the dark side of providing and receiving benefit that can arise from the inequality between prospective benefactor and beneficiary. In his discussion of generosity, Aristotle claims that “it is more proper to virtue to do good than to receive good” (*NE*, 1120a15). Further, he claims that “doing good is proper to the superior person, but receiving is proper to the inferior” (*NE*, 1124b10). With respect to receiving benefit, Aristotle writes that “[the right sort of] taking implies receiving well and not doing something shameful” (*NE*, 1120a15). To be in a position to need or to accept good from another is to be in a position of inferiority. To accept being in such an inferior position without wishing the benefactor did not exist is challenging. The relationship between benefactor and beneficiary can easily sour into the sort of relationship that exists between creditor and debtor with resentment on the part of the person benefitted and a sense of entitlement on the part of the one conferring the benefit. Friendship is also challenged when the inequality between friends never lessens. When a better-off friend helps his not-so-well-off friend with money or an older, wiser virtuous friend seeks to improve the virtue of a

younger, inexperienced friend, the hope is that the friends will eventually come to be on a more equal footing with respect to the benefit conferred. If this lessening of the need for help never occurs, both benefactor and beneficiary will become frustrated: The benefactor will feel as though his work is never done and that his inferior friend is never really made better-off by the benefits while the beneficiary will feel as though his inferiority is always being emphasized by his benefactor. The person benefitted may even come to see the benefits as an insensitive assertion of superiority on the part of his friend. When the friendship sours or when the relationship was never one of complete friendship, it may even be that the person conferring benefit's only remaining goal is this assertion of superiority. When the goal of conferring benefit is to make the person benefitted feel small and needy or when the person being benefitted resents being benefitted, the friendship is over and the relationship has become a version of the creditor-debtor relationship. As Aristotle points out, "We should consider at the beginning who is doing us a good turn, and on what conditions, so that we can put up with it on these conditions, or else decline it" (*NE*, 1163a15). Gratitude is unnecessary and inappropriate in the creditor-debtor relationship since the aim of the creditor is merely to be paid back.

Aristotle discusses flattery in the context of the vicious person's desire for honor. While the inferior in a relationship remains inferior, he is acutely aware of the "benefit" being conferred upon him and this seems to be the element common to friendships between unequals that aim at virtue and pseudo-friendships between unequals that aim at pleasure or utility. Recognition of need and benefit is an element of gratitude. As far as the aim of the friendship is not virtue, this recognition may be distorted into something that only superficially resembles gratitude. This leaves the superior open to manipulation by 'flatterers'. Aristotle writes:

Because the many love honor they seem to prefer being loved to loving. That is why they love flatterers. For the flatterer is a friend in an inferior position, or [rather] pretends to be one, and pretends to love more than he is loved; and being loved seems close to being honored, which the many certainly pursue. (*NE*, 1150a15)

The flatterer fulfills a need of the flattered superior by making it seem that the superior is loved more than he loves. The flatterer presents the flattered with a pleasantly distorted view of the flattered in which the flattered seems to be a great benefactor worthy of honor and the flatterer an

abject recipient who can make no adequate return. In truth, the flatterer does make a return to his supposed superior by giving him this pleasure. At the same time, the flatterer who receives benefit can make himself master of his superior and thereby lessen his sense of inferiority by duping the one who benefits him. Flattery, then, takes the place of gratitude in the relationship.

From the first, we see Mrs. Norris in her role as flatterer of Sir Thomas and we see Sir Thomas as both deceived and manipulated by her handling of him. Mrs. Norris's use of Sir Thomas begins with her choice of his friend as a husband. Since she knows that she can receive benefit in the form of wealth and respect from a stronger association with Sir Thomas, she strengthens it with this marriage (*MP*, 35). In recommending that Sir Thomas take on the care of Fanny, Mrs. Norris is careful to praise "the generosity and delicacy of [Sir Thomas's] notions" (*MP*, 37), tells him that he is "everything that is generous and considerate" (*MP*, 38), and makes what she thinks are pleasing compliments about the superiority of Sir Thomas's children (*MP*, 41). Her conduct is not only aimed at flattering Sir Thomas directly by admiring his own good qualities and judgment but also indirectly by admiring his children and flattering their vanity. By this means Mrs. Norris is often able to get Sir Thomas to agree to do or to give what his own judgment had initially forbade. In her praise of Sir Thomas and the way in which he runs his household, Mrs. Norris seems to be in agreement with Sir Thomas's judgment and to be acting in obedience to his will. At its root, this flattery is flattery of Sir Thomas's judgment, and good judgment is the very thing Sir Thomas fails to exercise. In exchange for this flattery, Sir Thomas gives Mrs. Norris a good deal in the way of material well-being as well as influence and control in his own household.

5. Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris in the Stance of Creditors

Both Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris wrongly seek flattery as the external manifestation of gratitude. Both feel that they are "owed" something from Fanny. Sir Thomas expects from the same reassurance regarding his judgment that he receives from everyone else: He wants to be obeyed. Sir Thomas has for years been under the sway of Mrs. Norris's flattery as well as being humored by his children and clung to by his wife. His desire for obedience and agreement with his judgment leaves him susceptible to manipulation. Aside from Mrs. Norris's straightforward flattery, Sir Thomas receives flattery in the form of complete dependence of judgment from his

wife and an anxious show of respect for his judgment from his children. Lady Bertram is said to be completely dependent on her husband's judgment. So much so, in fact, that she wishes to put off making any decisions at all in his absence (*MP*, 36). Aside from Edmund who does truly respect his judgment, Sir Thomas's children all pretend to obey him while doing exactly what they want. His eldest son behaves as though he is affected by his father's anger at his wastefulness while thinking to himself that "his father had made a most tiresome piece of work of it" (*MP*, 24). Sir Thomas's daughters seem to obey and respect him while feeling free to act against his wishes in his absence (*MP*, 32). Having been treated with this false show of respect for his judgment by the rest of his family, it is not surprising that Sir Thomas feels even more entitled to a show of obedience from Fanny to whom he believes that he has been a great and selfless benefactor.

When Mrs. Norris exhorts Fanny to be grateful, what she is truly exhorting Fanny to do is to flatter. What Mrs. Norris expects is an acknowledgment of Fanny's inferiority in the form of abject obedience. Fanny is expected to be self-abasing and to obey her superiors. Mrs. Norris sees herself as one of those superiors. Until Fanny arrives, Mrs. Norris is at the bottom of the heap when it comes to dependent status. She has had to flatter others and abase herself in order to achieve her goals. Now, she believes that it is someone else's turn to be at the bottom of the heap. An example of Mrs. Norris's exhortation to gratitude comes when Fanny refuses to take a part in the play: "I am not going to urge her,"—replied Mrs. Norris sharply, 'but I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her aunt and cousins wish her—very ungrateful indeed, considering who and what she is'" (*MP*, 147). With this short speech, Mrs. Norris has encapsulated her view of gratitude: Gratitude is complete obedience owed to superiors for the sake of promoting one's own advantage.

With Sir Thomas, Fanny is expected to obey his superior judgment; whereas with Mrs. Norris, Fanny is expected to bow to her in all things. From what has been shown, Fanny has no obligation to be grateful to Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris for the large-scale plans and their projected benefits since Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris have failed to be true benefactors. Sir Thomas behaves as though he is a creditor expecting a return. Since he has at least put some effort and money into an attempt at benefitting Fanny, he believes that he is entitled to a return. Mrs. Norris's expectation of a return is more unreasonable than Sir Thomas's since, rather than

making any attempt to contribute to Fanny's well-being, she has only attempted to detract from it or ignore it.

CHAPTER FOUR

EDUCATION

1. Introduction

Those who are in the power of evil habits, must conquer them as they can, and conquered they must be, or neither wisdom nor happiness can be attained; but those who are not yet subject to their influence, may, by timely caution, preserve their freedom, they may effectually resolve to escape the tyrant, whom they will very vainly resolve to conquer. (Johnson, Idler 27)

Mansfield Park is a novel of education in which it is primarily the development of Fanny's character that is traced. Education in this context is much broader than we tend to think of it now. The sort of education depicted in *Mansfield Park* includes not only the development of the intellect we emphasize in contemporary education, but also the development of moral character. A large part of education is the development of habits conducive to future virtue. Indeed, it is the moral education that is emphasized in *Mansfield Park*. The moral aspect of education is given emphasis in tracing the development of Fanny as well as the other young people in the novel. Education is of special significance since success and happiness, especially in the realm of marriage, are largely determined by the young person's education.

2. Habituation through Mentoring and Imitation

In the previous chapter, I discussed the failure of Sir Thomas Bertram and Mrs. Norris to be true benefactors to Fanny Price. Neither Sir Thomas nor Mrs. Norris takes responsibility for Fanny's education. Fanny Price's true benefactor turns out to be Sir Thomas's younger son. Edmund benefits Fanny Price by guiding both her intellectual and ethical formation. Aside from what Fanny has learned in the Price home and some formal teaching of traditional subjects provided by the Bertram sisters' governess, Fanny's deliberate education is largely the result of Edmund's efforts. Although Edmund's own flaws prevent him from being an infallible guide and

these flaws eventually force Fanny to act without his guidance, Edmund provides Fanny with an excellent foundation for virtue.

Just as with every other skill, virtue requires teachers. Children are not born with full virtue nor does a person choose one day to subscribe to a moral system and the next become virtuous. Since “a state of character results from the repetition of similar activities” (*NE*, 1103b), it is important what sort of activities a person does repeatedly. From this, Aristotle concludes that “It is not unimportant, then, to acquire one sort of habit or another, right from our youth. On the contrary, it is very important, indeed all-important” (*NE*, 1103b25). Long before a person reaches an age at which she can reflect on her habits and choose them for themselves, she is living and developing habits. By the time she reaches the age where she can have developed practical wisdom, she has been acting on certain habits for years. If these early habits are bad ones, her progress in developing virtue will be hampered. This makes it very important that she have a good guide who is himself practically wise to some degree—a virtuous guide—from whom to learn good habits before she has the practical wisdom to choose her actions.

Aristotle’s notion of “steering by pleasure and pain” in forming habits based on a child’s natural disposition is helpful here. According to Aristotle, “when we educate children, we steer them by pleasure and pain” (*NE*, 1172a25). A child’s early experiences of being pleased and pained teach her to seek out some things and avoid others. Aristotle considers these learned attractions and aversions as essential to the development of virtue since, as he says, “enjoying and hating the right things seems to be most important for virtue of character” (*NE*, 1172a25). According to Aristotle although pleasure is not the highest good, it is a good and part of its goodness lies in its usefulness in forming the childhood habits necessary for future virtue. Since a child is not yet in full possession of the ability to reason, the person who guides the child to virtue must rely on the child’s rudimentary ability to seek pleasure and avoid pain in forming a child’s habits. By the time the child has begun to reason well, certain habits important to whether she can acquire virtue have already been established. Without the right early habits acquired in childhood, an adult will find it nearly impossible to become virtuous.

The relationship between the person who guides the child and the child is not necessarily one where the guide remains superior in virtue throughout his life. The student can surpass the teacher and then the relationship is no longer usefully described as a teacher-student relationship since the former teacher could now be learning from the former student. This is what we see

happen in *Mansfield Park* as the teacher-student relationship shifts between Fanny and Edmund. It is more useful to think of this initial teacher or guide as a mentor.⁴⁰ In what follows, I will refer to Edmund as Fanny's mentor.

Some further discussion of the mentor will prove useful. A mentor habituates his protégée to virtue with the aim of her eventually developing the practical reasoning necessary to be virtuous. The aim is for the protégée to one day be capable of understanding the virtue inherent in the habits and in committing herself to them on account of this understanding. The mentor must not only serve as teacher to his student in virtue, he must be closer to achieving expert status in virtue than is his novice protégée. In order to be effective as a mentor, the mentor must be a good deal farther along in acquiring the habits and practical wisdom associated with virtue. He must, in a sense be an expert relative to his protégée who will best be seen as a novice or beginner in virtue.⁴¹ To be able to do any of this, the mentor must also be able to engage the child's respect and affection. Without this, there is little motive for the child to be receptive to the mentor's advice.⁴²

As a teacher, the mentor is responsible for habituating his protégée to the good. In the way of habituation, this mentor must condition his protégée to be pleased and pained by the proper things, respectively. To this end, the mentor offers his protégée examples of virtuous and vicious characters and actions, attempting to create a sort of second nature response to each kind of example. For example, he will condition the child to be pained by dishonesty or injustice by presenting her with concrete instances of either vice in action. Once he has created an incipient love of virtue in his protégée, this mentor presents his protégée with many examples of virtuous characters and the virtuous actions such characters perform in order that the protégée might imitate such characters and actions as well as slowly begin to discern what is common to and what differs in each case. Through this training, the student will eventually begin to develop the type of reasoning necessary for identifying how she ought to act in particular situation.

⁴⁰ See also Aristotle on a certain kind of friendship between unequals.

⁴¹ We can see where this sort of relationship might go wrong when we look at Emma and Harriet's mentor-protégée relationship in *Emma*.

⁴² This might be why Sir Thomas is not effective with his own daughters.

Fanny's natural temperament and her early habits are formed while she is still with her mother. In a way, Fanny Price's early habituation in the Price household is unguided; she has no real teacher. When she lived with her parents, she was explicitly taught a few basic skills—to “read, work [sew], and write” (*MP*, 18)—that would make her useful in the household. Her other habits were probably developed by necessity and not by any special plan for her education, moral or otherwise. These haphazard-habits depended heavily on what I will call one of her natural virtues, her tendency to love (charity). Fanny's mother relied on her to take care of the younger children. Yet, this reliability could not have arisen had Fanny not felt a sort of natural concern for the well-being of others. Fanny is a naturally affectionate child. In being responsible for the care of her younger brothers and sisters, Fanny developed the habit of sacrificing her pleasures for the good of others. As the children were dependent on her, she could not ignore their needs and her sacrifices were well-rewarded with the love and affection of her siblings. This reciprocal love was so much a part of her early habituation that she never is quite able to stop expecting love in return for her own love and suffers a good deal as a result. Fanny's basic disposition is to be loving and affectionate, but this disposition has not yet been made much use of except in aiding her mother with child-rearing duties.

In order to do his work as a mentor well, Edmund must know Fanny's natural inclinations and basic existing habits. He ascertains these quickly after spending some time comforting her. A short time after her arrival at Mansfield Park, he finds Fanny crying alone on the stairs. He at first attributes her tears to general homesickness, but soon learns that the cause of her misery is more complicated. Fanny is troubled by the fact that her older brother William, her best friend and advocate, who did not like her leaving home had agreed to write to her provided that she write to him first (*MP*, 16). The problem is that Fanny has no paper and no idea who or whether she is entitled to ask for help. When Edmund undertakes to help her, Fanny is demonstrably grateful and Edmund through his kindness immediately begins to engage her affection. Fanny had agreed to write to her brother first and she wants to meet this obligation, but more than that she does not want to hurt someone she loves by seeming neglectful. From this experience, Edmund comes to discover some basic truths about Fanny's character; Edmund becomes “convinced of her having an affectionate heart, and a strong desire of doing right” (*MP*, 17). He also recognizes the delicate nature of her situation at Mansfield Park: She is timid and has not

been given any clear idea of her role in the house or of her privileges.⁴³ Upon making these discoveries about his cousin's character, he immediately begins to guide her in a gentle way appropriate to her character and temperament.⁴⁴

Despite the rest of the household's evaluation of Fanny as "stupid," Edmund quickly apprehends that Fanny is clever and quick-witted. Her early lack of education is mistaken for a lack of ability by everyone but Edmund. Because he recognizes her intelligence, Edmund is able to take advantage of it in his role as mentor:

He knew her to be clever, to have a quick apprehension as well as good sense, and a fondness for reading, which properly directed, must be an education in itself. Miss Lee taught her French and heard her read the daily portion of History, but he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attraction by judicious praise. (*MP*, 22)

Edmund carefully chooses Fanny's reading, first, based on his own judgment as it has been developed by his own education and, second, based on what he has learned of her disposition. Edmund's judgment is good according to the approval which Austen's narrator gives to his choices. These readings must contain ideas and characters Edmund believes worthy of consideration, most likely containing some very vivid examples of virtuous and vicious characters and actions in a way that would aid in Fanny's habituation. By discussing her reading with her, Edmund can help to correct any misunderstandings and to confirm her in her correct judgments by his "judicious praise."⁴⁵

Although we are not given the names of any of the books Edmund prescribes during the first two chapters of the novel, we learn the names and genres of some of her reading later. During a discussion of "improving" the Rushworth estate, Fanny objects to the plan of cutting down an old avenue of trees. Her quiet but passionate objection makes use of the poet Cowper:

⁴³ Mrs. Norris has convinced Fanny that she has no rights, but many obligations.

⁴⁴ See: Kerr Tarpley on Leisure as used for improvement (Kerr Tarpley, 92).

⁴⁵ Contrast this with Mrs. Norris's injudicious praise (i.e., flattery) of Maria and Julia Bertram.

“Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does not it make you think of Cowper? ‘Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited’” (*MP*, 56). Late in the novel while she is banished to Portsmouth and contemplating her homesickness for Mansfield Park, she makes reference to Cowper’s “Tirocinium,” applying to herself what Cowper writes about a homesick boy who has been sent away to school: “‘With what intense desire she wants her home,’ was continually on her tongue, as the truest description of a yearning which she could not suppose any school-boy’s bosom to feel more keenly” (*MP*, 431). One source describes Cowper as a poet “who celebrates with a new simplicity and affectionate fidelity to intimate detail the life of retirement in the country” (18thC, 882). His health as well as his preference confined him to life in the country. Cowper was also a deeply religious man who had converted to Methodism although he remained within the established church (18thC, 882). It is possible that, as communicated through his poetry, Cowper’s own love of life in the country, nature, religion, and all the associations of home and family helped to shape and now reflects Fanny’s own habits of thought about what is valuable at Mansfield Park. Fanny not only shared many of Cowper’s views, but also the delicate health that made country-life necessary for him.

Fanny’s having read Sir Walter Scott becomes evident during the subsequent visit to Sotherton. While touring the family chapel, Fanny remarks to Edmund that the chapel at Sotherton “is not [her] idea of a chapel” (*MP*, 85). Her idea has come from reading Scott’s “The Lay of the Last Minstrel,” a narrative poem telling the story of a feud between two noble families and the romance between the children of these two noble families. Another reference to this work is made much later in the novel when Sir Thomas holds a ball to introduce Fanny to society. When Fanny takes one last look at the ball before retiring to bed, this work is again referenced, though it is not clear whether these are Fanny’s thoughts or the narrator’s: “...stopping at the entrance door, like the lady of Braxholm hall ‘one moment and no more,’ to view the happy scene...” (*MP*, 280-281). Scott’s interest in history and his father’s strict religious views gave a decidedly traditional bent to his thinking and work. Scott himself had been ill as a child and was, consequently, lame for the rest of his life. Nevertheless he became one of the most popular writers of the century, his reputation even surpassing Austen’s herself for many years.

We are introduced to several more books in Fanny’s library a little later. After a conversation that has been particularly vexing for Fanny, Edmund takes notice of a few of the

books and papers Fanny has laid out on her table. He knows her to be reading and quite absorbed with the journal of Lord Macartney on the subject of his embassy to China and his observations on the culture of that country, including its social systems (*MP*, 156). He remarks also on her copy of George Crabbe's "Tales," or *Tales in Verse*⁴⁶ in the preface of which "He asserted the poet's right to deal with 'those painful realities, those every-day concerns, and those perpetually occurring vexations,' of the life about us (18th C, 969). Crabbe the man corresponded in some biographical details to both Fanny and Edmund: Crabbe had been born poor in the sea-side town of Aldeburgh in Suffolk, the environment and inhabitants of which greatly resemble Fanny's later description of her native Portsmouth. Crabbe also became a committed clergyman later in his life as Edmund hoped to be himself.

The last volume Edmund notices on Fanny's table is Samuel Johnson's *The Idler*, a collection essays written under the same name for a newspaper between 1758 and 1760. The tendency of Johnson's essays is to address serious subjects with both humor and great discernment, gently ridiculing the willfully foolish who often fall into vice and error gradually and with eyes wide open. The following long passage from the "Idler" is particularly relevant to what Fanny will experience later with respect to her own and her mentor's abilities:

It has been the endeavor of all those whom the world has revered for superior wisdom, to persuade man to be acquainted with himself, to learn his own powers and his own weakness, to observe by what evils he is most dangerously beset, and by what temptations most easily overcome.

This counsel has been often given with serious dignity, and often received with appearance of conviction; but, as very few can search deep into their own minds without meeting what they wish to hide from themselves, scarce any man persists in cultivating such disagreeable acquaintance, but draws the veil again between his eyes and his heart, leaves his passions and appetites as he found them, and advises others to look to themselves. (Johnson, *Idler* 27)

⁴⁶ This must be his *Tales in Verse* since Austen herself was dead before the 1819 publication of *Tales of the Hall*.

Fanny could look to Johnson also for advice about that resignation that was often incumbent upon her (e.g., Johnson’s “The Vanity of Human Wishes”). With Johnson, we find another genuinely pious man who came from humble beginnings and who, though often plagued by physical illness, and periods of extreme poverty, ultimately found recognition and success in the literary world (18th C., 678).

Finally, while Fanny is a Portsmouth longing for the many books at Mansfield Park, she subscribes to “a circulating library” from which she gets Goldsmith for her sister to read. This could have been any of his novels, poetry, or plays so it is not a terribly helpful bit of information insofar as indicating the specific content of the work. Fanny might have sent for *The Vicar of Wakefield*—a novel involving misunderstood and persecuted innocence as well as virtue in rags—or this might be another case in which Fanny tends toward an interest in the historical—Goldsmith wrote a *History of England*. Since we know that Fanny enjoyed poetry, the book may well have been a collection of poems. For the tenor of his poetry, these lines from “The Traveller, or a Prospect of Society” will suffice:

From Art more various are the blessings sent;
 Wealth, commerce, honour, liberty, content.
 Yet these each other’s power so strong contest,
 That either seems destructive of the rest. 90
 Where wealth and freedom reign contentment fails,
 And honour sinks where commerce long prevails.
 Hence every state, to one lov’d blessing prone,
 Conforms and models life to that alone.
 Each to the favourite happiness attends, 95
 And spurns the plan that aims at other ends;
 Till, carried to excess in each domain,
 This favourite good begets peculiar pain.
 (Goldsmith)

If Fanny were familiar with this poem, she might have found some parallel between the state distorted by love of honour and the problems of Mansfield Park household. Much of Goldsmith’s

work was said to be inspired by his own experiences (18th C., 798; Norton Vol. I, 2857-58). Goldsmith himself was small of stature, marked with smallpox, and thought prodigiously stupid during his time at school (Norton Vol. I, 2857). Yet, he overcame these early prejudices and limitations to become a respected writer of his time.

Fanny is said to have “a taste for the biography and poetry” (*MP*, 398). This small selection of books indicates an interest in realistic depictions and meditations on people’s daily struggles both externally in the material conditions of life and internally with questions of morality and conduct. Morals and manners formed the objects of her study. More importantly, it points to Fanny’s habit of consulting those who care about these subjects. Fanny’s taste for such books generally indicates Fanny’s habit of concerning herself with such questions and with authors whose attempts at answers manage to aim at virtue. The origins and character of the authors themselves would have been instructive for Fanny, as well. Most of the writers came from poor backgrounds, suffered from delicate health in one way or another, and were once thought stupid or incapable. All grew up to be deeply sympathetic to other human beings, observant of human nature, religiously pious, humble, and in the end their merit was recognized by others. In sum, these authors all exemplified the kind of person Fanny might aspire to become given her early abilities and characteristics, and the prejudices against her. Having assessed Fanny’s early characteristics, Edmund chose authors who could engage Fanny’s sympathy and from whom Fanny could learn by example. In addition, these books would also have provided excellent matter for discussion with her cousin Edmund, giving him an opportunity to shape and correct her understanding of what she had read.

In addition to the content of the reading, Edmund himself functions as an example of virtue for Fanny. All of this kindness and attention is itself an aid to his mission as her mentor since this attaches her to him and she comes “to lov[e] him better than any body in the world except [her brother] William” (*MP*, 22). His kindness makes her receptive of the habits he seeks to inculcate; she wants to please him as one whom she loves, and a sign that he is pleased is his praise.

3. The Character of the Mentor

The character of the mentor has a great influence on how the child turns out. While Edmund mentors Fanny, Mrs. Norris attempts to mentor the Bertram girls. Though Edmund is not perfect, he is successful as a mentor to Fanny. Edmund has been brought up destined for the church. He is resigned to the fact that he is not destined for the greatness of the baronetcy as is his brother. He has known from his youth that if he wants to do well, he must work hard himself. To do well in the church and to be a good clergyman, he must be a man of good character and principle. Edmund holds that it will be part of his role as a member of the clergy to set a good example for those around him. Edmund is thoughtful and concerned with the well-being of others. As a young man, Edmund has followed the good habits instilled in him by his father, the church, and his education. So far as these habits are good, he can successfully habituate one younger than himself. Edmund's one flaw, as will be discussed at length in a later section, arises from his never having had to wrestle with a strong appetite of his own. As we shall see, this flaw is the cause of his ceasing to be helpful as a mentor. Mrs. Norris's character has already been discussed extensively: Mrs. Norris is a grasping and resentful sycophant whose bad habits have long been confirmed by age and experience. Given the difference between these two mentors, it is not surprising that their protégées turn out very differently.

The differences between Fanny and the Bertram sisters are striking. Early in her life, Fanny learned to care for and attend to the needs of others. In contrast, her cousins, Maria and Julia, have been taught that their own needs were those most worth considering. They have been brought up with a governess and private tutors. They have also had the misfortune of having Mrs. Norris as the guide of their education. Whereas Fanny has been rewarded with affection for kindness and consideration of others, the Bertram sisters have been rewarded with praise solely for their own cleverness and accomplishments. Both Fanny and the Bertram girls care about others but while Fanny cares about the well-being of others, the Bertram girls care mostly about how others respond to them. Maria and Julia have not been raised to be affectionate but to require affection in the form of admiration, praise, and flattery. Their father has remained distant and their mother calmly indifferent. Their education has not been in the hands of affectionate parents but has been left to the superintendence of Mrs. Norris. Being brought up by a flatterer, the pleasures that most affect Maria and Julia are the pleasures of praise and admiration.

Where Fanny is diffident, the Bertram sisters are confident. At the same time, their confidence is just as unjustified as Fanny's diffidence. By the time Maria and Julia meet Fanny, they have become so used to the admiration of others that upon noticing Fanny's lack of confidence they conclude that she is not used to admiration and, therefore, inferior. Hence, they feel comfortable staring brazenly at their poor relation (*MP*, 12-13). They also have their own ideas about what entitles people to respect: "They could not but hold [Fanny] cheap on finding that she had only two sashes, and had never learnt French" (*MP*, 14). The Bertram sisters do not accord respect to those without the accoutrements of wealth and an expensive education. Fanny's inferiority might still entitle her to some attention as someone whom they can impress and overawe. But when they discover further that Fanny does not admire *them* excessively, they lose interest in her. The Bertram sisters' confidence comes from being praised with no criticism or correction. Seizing on Sir Thomas's concern that some distinction ought to be made between his own daughters and Fanny, Mrs. Norris takes every opportunity to exaggerate Fanny's flaws and the Bertram sisters' merits. The Bertram sisters and Fanny are conscious of Mrs. Norris's views since she makes these judgments public. Mrs. Norris shields the Bertram sisters from any awareness of their weaknesses or faults, and convinces them that they are in need of no improvement. In doing this, Mrs. Norris has also prevented them from acquiring any sort of self-awareness or shame. Mrs. Norris has made Maria and Julia Bertram vain.

Maria and Julia Bertram's uncomprehending attitude with regard to Fanny's intelligence is a prime example of their lack of self-awareness. Upon arriving at Mansfield Park, Fanny has had a rudimentary education which included only reading, writing, and sewing. Unaware of what must have been the difference between the Price and Bertram household, Maria and Julia assume Fanny has had the same educational privileges that they have had. Mrs. Norris does nothing to correct this assumption. From this, the sisters conclude that the educational deficiencies of others—particularly in the realm of facts that can be memorized—are due to a general lack of cleverness and intelligence. This typical sample of their reasoning shows how eager they are to applaud themselves for their own cleverness while at the same time unknowingly displaying their own lack of imagination and understanding. When the Bertram sisters discover that Fanny has never learned French or geography, they are shocked at her ignorance and proud of themselves. The sisters take the opportunity to catalog their own educational achievements, such as memorizing "the chronological order of the kings of England," "the Roman emperors,"

classical mythology, metals, and philosophers (*MP*, 19). Clearly, they have memorized a good deal and can recite at will, but it is not so clear that they have understood anything that they have learned. One sister's comment that the two of them have a great deal to learn just "until they are seventeen" indicates that they have no intrinsic interest in what they have learned or learning itself but rather see it as a chore they will outgrow (*MP*, 19).

Mrs. Norris's response to the Bertram sisters' shock at Fanny's ignorance just confirms them in their mistaken views of education and their own superiority. Aunt Norris tells the Bertram sisters that "There is a vast deal of differences in memories, as well as in every thing else, and therefore you must make allowance for your cousin, and pity her deficiency" (*MP*, 19) and to their complaints about Fanny's ignorance, responds "'My dear,' [...] 'it is very bad, but you must not expect every body to be as forward and quick at learning as yourself'" (*MP*, 18). Mrs. Norris makes the accomplishments due only to their birth and money seem to the Bertram sisters to be the products of an innate superiority of mind and body that comes with their nobility (*MP*, 19). Their Aunt Norris creates and reinforces a sense of superiority in her preferred nieces that far outstrips what their father had hoped to instill in them. Sir Thomas wanted his daughters and his niece to be aware of the difference between them, but he particularly did not want to "authorize in [his daughters] the smallest degree of arrogance towards their relation" (*MP*, 11). Mrs. Norris is supposed to help strike the correct balance, but errs on the side of flattering the Bertrams and denigrating Fanny. As a consequence, Maria and Julia are "entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity and humility" (*MP*, 19). Aristotle describes those in the Bertram sisters' state in the following way: "For without virtue it is hard to bear the results of good fortune suitably, and when these people cannot do it, but suppose they are superior to other people, they think less of everyone else, and do whatever they please" (*NE*, 1124a30-1125b5). In constantly praising and flattering them, Mrs. Norris has failed to instill in the Bertram sisters the good habits of self-examination that would lead to awareness of their having advantages that have nothing to do with merit.

When the Bertram sisters reach marriageable age they have learned to appear all that they should be according to conventional standards but with the motive of vanity and desire for praise: "Their vanity was in such good order, that they seemed to be quite free from it, and gave themselves no airs; while praises attending such behavior, secured, and brought round by their aunt, served to strengthen them in believing that they had not faults" (*MP*, 35). Unfortunately,

they have no inner sense of what ends are worthy of pursuit, but rather are completely dependent on outward prompting and praise in determining what to pursue and how to behave. Flattery has made them as dependent on the flatterer as the flatterer is on them. Mrs. Norris's flattery has not only had a deleterious effect on Sir Thomas's character, but has spoiled the characters of his daughters. Fortunately for Fanny, Mrs. Norris's flattery forms no part of her youth or education.

4. Self-Education through Observation and Reflection

Aside from Edmund, no one at Mansfield Park acts on concerns about Fanny's moral development. Sir Thomas wants the best for Fanny, but believes that he is providing the best by raising Fanny with his own daughters and putting her under the care of Mrs. Norris. Fanny is never quarrelsome or naughty; she is an obedient child, even if she is unattractively fearful. Consequently, her behavior rarely draws the attention of others. Despite neglect, she somehow turns out well. She is not resentful or sneaky. She sincerely desires to be good. Given that Edmund is not around to be Fanny's constant teacher, Fanny is responsible for a great deal of her own moral education. Much of this education consists in quiet observation and reflection. Her neglected position provides her with excellent opportunities to observe others and reflect on their behaviors and characters.

The disadvantages of being ignored, unheeded, and treated as insignificant are obvious: Fanny's convenience and opinions are rarely consulted and, along with the discomfort of being physically exhausted by the selfish demands of others, she suffers from loneliness. But when a person is perceived as having no power in a household, the other members of that household and their guests cease to censor their speech and no longer bother to conceal their true natures from this person. Fanny's insignificance allows her to observe people behaving more or less as they please and as their characters dictate. She is able to see what the people around her *are really like* and can then view the effects these people have on others. This unobscured view of the characters of others, the way such character affects behavior, and the consequences of this behavior give her the full view necessary for acquiring practical wisdom and deciding what character traits to cultivate in herself. She is able to observe and reflect on the moral development of others as well; she can witness the transition from one character state to another, especially in the younger people. Since the younger people are still in the process of developing

the stable character traits that are necessary for virtue or for vice, they are particularly informative to watch. For example, Fanny can see her cousin Maria's transition from merely being susceptible to flattery to being vain—vanity being a more specific manifestation of the vice of improper pride—as Maria's pride is first actively manipulated and nourished by Mrs. Norris, then increased by the prospects of wealth and social standing associated with her engagement to Rushworth, and finally brought to its final perfection in vice by the attentions of Henry Crawford. As will be shown in a later discussion of Fanny's observations during the visit to Sotherton and the preparations for the play, Maria takes little trouble to hide her true thoughts and desires from Fanny because Maria does not see Fanny as a source of power or authority. Fanny is “just Fanny.” Fanny is able to take warning and to learn from examples like the one above and to reflect on the best ways to avoid the thoughts, desires, and actions that lead to such character traits.

Of course, Fanny does not occupy herself entirely with observing and reflecting on the characters of others; she also observes and reflects on her own thoughts, desires, motives, and actions. Through this, she is able to bring her actions into accord with her values. In other words, she is able to move from the childhood habit of acting in accord with virtue to acting from virtue. Rather than acting virtuously only because she has been trained to perform certain actions, she rationally comes to understand why she ought to choose to act virtuously. The habit of acting according to the good moral judgment of others can be replaced by the habit of acting from her own moral judgment.

Fanny often reflects on her own feelings and when she finds them inappropriate, she seeks to overcome them and modify them. Examples abound, but an early example is her reaction to the departure of Sir Thomas for Antigua. Her cousins Julia and Maria are relieved by his departure and seemingly completely unaware that their relief—being a symptom of their dislike of and ingratitude toward their father—might be something shameful (*MP*, 33). Fanny is also relieved, but she is distressed by her feelings: “Fanny's relief, and her consciousness of it, were quite equal to her cousins', but a more tender nature suggested that her feelings were ungrateful, and she really grieved because she could not grieve” (*MP*, 33). She is aware that although he is stern and she is frightened of him, Sir Thomas has been charitable to her and wishes her well. Austen gives us a sample of Fanny's internal struggle with what Fanny considers an inappropriate response to Sir Thomas's departure: ““Sir Thomas, who had done so

much for her and her brothers, and who had gone perhaps never to return!—it was a shameful insensibility” (*MP*, 33). She wishes to feel sadness because she believes that sadness is what ought to be felt—i.e., what a virtuous person would feel in such a situation—and she is upset by how she falls short of her moral ideal in this situation. Consequently, she makes an effort to feel as she ought.

Through observation and reflection in combination with the good habituation she has received from Edmund and her reading, Fanny has come to have some degree of what some call “situational appreciation”. In her Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Virtue Ethics, Hursthouse describes situational appreciation as “the capacity to recognize, in any particular situation, those features of it that are morally salient” (*SEP* Virtue Ethics, 5). Fanny is able to size up the situation and see what her morally appropriate response ought to be in the case of her uncle’s departure. She recognizes how she ought to respond—with sadness at his departure—but she has not yet reached the stage at which the response follows naturally. Fanny is not yet virtuous nor is she vicious. She is at that stage during which she will truly become one or the other. Fanny is at the stage of life during which a person acquires practical wisdom. Until she acquires practical wisdom, she cannot be called virtuous.

5. Developing Practical Wisdom

One of the most important aims of education is the development of practical wisdom. It is not until a person has reached an age where she can be expected to have developed practical wisdom that she can be called virtuous or vicious. Aristotle emphasizes the fact that young people of a certain age cannot yet be said to be either virtuous or vicious. Instead, young people are still in a transitional state. Chance or their elders have habituated the young but the young have not yet learned to think for themselves: “[Young people] have no independent standard of good conduct, but only the conventional standards in which they were reared” (*R*, 2.12, 1389a). The young have not yet acquired or are still in the process of acquiring practical wisdom. Although Aristotle gives some instruction as to how an adult can bring a child to have the right habits and spends some time describing what practical wisdom is, he spends no time describing the process by which a young person comes to have practical wisdom. This leaves the stage of life during which the young person comes to be justifiably called virtuous or vicious—that age

between childhood and full adulthood—unaccounted for. This important stage of life is the very stage of life at the tail end of which we find the young people at *Mansfield Park*. Although Sir Thomas sees only the fact that his daughters have reached a marriageable age as a reason for interest in their doings, he should be anxious at leaving his daughters “to the direction of others at their present most interesting time of life” (*MP*, 32) because it is the virtue or vice of his daughters which will partially determine their choice in marriage and their future happiness. It is not only the time of life at which young people marry, but the time at which they come to have their true moral characters.

According to Aristotle, possession of the virtue of the mind called practical wisdom is necessary for the possession of any of the virtues of character (*NE*, 1144b15). At the same time, in order to possess practical wisdom a person must also possess virtue of character. Practical wisdom and moral virtue are interdependent (*NE*, 1144b15; Ross, 226). Aristotle describes practical wisdom in broad outline as “a state grasping the truth, involving reason, and concerned with action about human goods” (*NE*, 1140b20). Practical wisdom is not just about being effective at achieving one’s ends, it is also about having the correct ends in view in the first place. Aristotle distinguishes between what we might think of as good reasoning skills about how to bring about an end and the ability to recognize what ends are themselves worthy of pursuing : “There is a capacity, called cleverness, which is such as to be able to do the actions that tend to promote whatever goal is assumed and to attain them. If, then, the goal is fine, cleverness is praiseworthy, and if the goal is base, cleverness is unscrupulousness” (*NE*, 1144a25). The goal itself must be fine in addition to the chosen means to reaching the goal being effective. In other words, the goal itself must be good and the person must recognize good goals in order to have practical wisdom. What is needed for practical wisdom in addition to mere cleverness is, then, understanding as a type of perception: “The essential thing about perception is that it is an apprehension of individual fact, and in this wide sense, practical wisdom of the direct, unreasoned type [i.e., the part recognizing good] is a kind of perception; good is for well-brought up people a kind of common sensible, as shape is for all men” (Ross, 225). So, practical wisdom requires (a) good reasoning skills and (b) ability to recognize what is good, and this ability to recognize what is good needs both perception and ability to understand what is perceived (*NE*, 1143b9-10).

There are two obvious ways and one less obvious way in which a person might fall short of practical wisdom. In the first obvious way, she might fail to be clever by being poor at means-end reasoning. For example, she might think to herself that being rude is wrong. She might also have some idea of what would be rude in this particular situation. But she may have no idea how to behave in a way that will not end up being rude in one of the ways she hoped to avoid. In the second obvious way, she might fail to have the right idea about the universal. For example, she might think to herself that marrying for wealth is right. She may see that marrying the elder brother regardless of his character in this situation would be an instance of marrying for wealth. She may also know exactly how to do this in the situation in which she finds herself. The third way in which a person's reasoning might fall short of practical wisdom is by failing to understand what it is that she perceives. Aristotle uses the following example to illustrate: "For someone who knows that light meats are digestible and [hence] healthy, but not which sorts of meats are light, will not produce health; the one who knows that bird meats are light and healthy will be better at producing both" (*NE*, 1141b20). Sometimes a person chooses the wrong action because she is ignorant not of universals but of particulars. She may have been taught that light meats are healthy but mistakenly believe that meat in front of her is not light. Likewise, a person might have been taught that being rude is wrong but mistakenly believe that in this situation the sort of thing she intends to say is not rude.

Even with correct habituation or natural virtue, a person falls short of virtue without practical wisdom. Experience is necessary in acquiring both parts of practical wisdom. This is why, on Aristotle's view, young people cannot be said to have practical wisdom (*NE*, 1142a15). However, young people must be developing (or failing to develop) practical wisdom at some stage between the age of reason and the age of accountability. This is the very stage of life Fanny and the other young people are in for the bulk of the novel. Edmund has just finished at the university and is about to take orders. Maria has become engaged to be married. At this same time during which the Mansfield Park circle expands beyond family with the arrival of the Grants and, soon after, the Crawford siblings, Fanny has just turned eighteen years old (*MP*, 40). Fanny and her cousins are at the stage of life where virtuous action must become the product of the agent's choice rather than the product of blind habits instilled during childhood. While her cousins have had a chance at gaining some experience of the wider world, Fanny has never left Mansfield Park. Fanny has some degree of wisdom in dealing with the limited range of

personalities present at the park. The experiences from which she can draw in developing her practical wisdom have been limited to the park and to what she could learn from her carefully chosen reading. They are also the experiences of childhood: Fanny has yet to experience the challenges of deciding for herself on important subjects such as courtship and marriage or the challenges of differing in opinion from her moral guide, Edmund.

6. Edmund's Flaw

Edmund has been a good mentor to Fanny, but there is a flaw in his own development of practical wisdom that eventually sets his views at odds with Fanny's. The main action of *Mansfield Park* begins with the permanent exit of Mr. Norris and the temporary exit Sir Thomas from the scene and the appearance of a new family in the neighborhood. The arrival of Mary and Henry Crawford is the source of many challenges for Fanny, but one of the greatest and most pervasive challenges it brings is Fanny's realization that her Edmund is fallible, that she can no longer depend on her mentor for guidance but must now depend on herself, and that she may even have to help correct *Edmund's* judgment in some situations. Fanny is no longer the protégée of Edmund but must now take on a more equal role as his friend. Fanny is placed in the role of Edmund's confidante regarding his love and courtship of Mary Crawford. Fanny owes a great deal to Edmund since he has been her most, if not only, faithful friend in the Mansfield Park household. She has been used to agreeing with him in most things until they begin sharing their opinions of the Crawfords. In order to maintain the friendship she has with Edmund Fanny must be very careful in her handling of the situation. Edmund is accustomed to be Fanny's guide and does not realize that his judgment has been distorted. Fanny could easily alienate and offend her best friend if she is too blunt. The situation calls for a good deal of tact and this itself requires some degree of practical wisdom. This already complicated situation is made more complicated by her eventual recognition of a more-than-sisterly love for Edmund that she worries may create a distortion in her own judgment. A further complication comes from her developing something of a friendship with Mary and the sense that she now owes something to Mary as well.

Given Fanny's loving disposition, she could not help but develop a strong affection and attachment for the cousin who has been her companion and guide. This affection makes her want the best for Edmund. When Edmund first begins to confide in Fanny about his interest in Mary,

Fanny is uncomfortable and alarmed. But she does not know why. As Mary's character gradually unfolds itself to Fanny, she becomes more alarmed by Edmund's then growing attachment to Mary. At the same time, Fanny is slowly becoming aware that her own feelings for Edmund are stronger than and of a different kind from her feelings for her own brother; she becomes aware that she loves him in the same way he seems to be coming to love Mary. But Fanny is careful to keep her feelings for Edmund and what these feelings incline her to desire regarding the outcome of Edmund's courtship of Mary from influencing her judgment of Mary. When Fanny discovers the true nature of her feelings for Edmund, she provisionally sets them aside and excludes them from her judgment as Edmund's confidante. If Mary turns out to be worthy of Edmund and the two marry, Fanny is determined to change her own feelings for Edmund.

Matters become more complicated by Mary's own kind treatment of Fanny and what Fanny believes she owes Mary in the way of friendship. Fanny has received little consideration from anyone but Edmund, but now Mary has noticed her and begun to treat her well. Yet it is hard to tell whether this kind treatment is the result of a genuine recognition of Fanny's value or, as seems evident as the novel progresses, the product first of Mary's ignorance of Fanny's place in the house and then of her recognition that treating Fanny well is pleasing to Edmund. All of this is not readily apparent to Fanny and she must wait to discover whether she owes a debt of friendship to Mary and whether Mary is a morally worthy person.

Although the novel makes no detailed mention of Edmund's first impression of Mary Crawford, it is clear that he and the rest of his siblings are initially very attracted to Mary and to her brother Henry: "The young people were pleased with each other from the first. On each side there was much to attract, and their acquaintance soon promised as early an intimacy as good manners would warrant" (*MP*, 44). Mary is further described as possessing a "lively dark eye, clear brown complexion, and general prettiness" (*MP*, 44). Mary's preference is initially for the elder brother, Tom, since he is the heir. However, against her own wishes she comes to prefer Edmund.

Fanny's role as Edmund's confidante begins almost immediately after Edmund meets Mary Crawford. Edmund begins being "most disposed to admire [Mary]" but after a conversation during which Mary displays a skewed moral outlook, Edmund begins to have his doubts about Mary. Mary abuses her absent uncle—the man who took her into his house when her parents died—for having once inconvenienced the household by renovating the grounds

(MP, 57). Mary next mentions her attempt to hire a cart during harvest in order to bring her harp to the parsonage and reveals that she thoughtlessly assumed that “every thing can be got with money” (MP, 58). Mary also comments on her brother’s reluctance to write long letters to her and hastily generalizes her complaint to all brothers and to all men (MP, 59). Later, in discussing Fanny’s brother’s naval profession, Mary first displays her snobbery by claiming of her family, “we know little of the inferior ranks” and then has the bad taste to make a pun about her uncle’s circle of admiral friends, “Of *Rears*, and *Vices*, I saw enough”(MP, 60). While others cringe on her behalf, Mary makes it clear that she is unaware of there being any impropriety in what she has said and rather applauds herself for her own cleverness. Mary almost immediately shows that she values the wrong things. She chooses to berate her uncle in front of strangers. She shows that she values her own convenience over that of others as well as her belief that everything can be bought. She sacrifices truth in one case—using hasty generalization—and decency in another in order to be entertaining and thought clever.

Edmund begins his first conversation with Fanny on the subject of Mary by asking, “Well Fanny, and how do you like Miss Crawford *now*?” (MP, 63). Fanny does like Mary “very well” at first. Fanny and Edmund agree that Mary is both attractive and clever. At the same time, Edmund wonders, “But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you Fanny, as not quite right?” (MP, 63). Fanny recognizes and mentions the impropriety of Mary’s speaking ill of her uncle; The subject of an uncle about whom one cannot have the proper feelings of affection and gratitude is a subject upon which Fanny has spent much time meditating. But Edmund attempts to dismiss the ingratitude and censures only the public display of it, calling her speech “indecorous” rather than ungrateful (MP, 63). Edmund argues that it is natural for Mary to take sides against her uncle when this uncle is said to have mistreated the aunt who raised Mary. He takes this distortion of Mary’s judgment as a reflection of her love for her aunt. Fanny responds that Mary’s readiness to abuse her uncle must have been the result of this very aunt’s teaching. Again, Edmund dismisses these signs of Mary’s character by claiming that the disadvantages she has been under might now be removed by her new surroundings (MP, 63). Finally, Fanny mentions Mary’s remarks about brothers and men in general being unwilling to write long letters. This is not meant to be a strong criticism, only a minor one. Still, Edmund is unwilling to blame Mary for even this minor bit of exaggeration. Edmund attributes this gross generalization to Mary’s “lively mind” and claims that such humor is “perfectly allowable” (MP,

64). Edmund goes on to say of Mary, “She is perfectly feminine, except in the instances we have been speaking of. *There* she cannot be justified. I am glad you saw it all as I did” (*MP*, 64). This makes explicit what has been suggested by the conversation thus far: Edmund is looking for a way to excuse and overlook certain nasty things he has discovered about Mary. He does not even let Fanny express her own opinion of Mary but provides it for her lest the opinion turn out to be an unfavorable one.

Edmund is able to dismiss these observations of Mary by reflecting that Mary will likely change after having been in the better society of her sister and Mansfield Park, but Fanny is not convinced. If anything, this conversation must put Fanny on her guard making her more skeptical about Mary. Despite the fact that Edmund has “formed her mind and gained her affections” (*MP*, 64), Fanny does not have the further attribute necessary for overlooking and excusing Mary’s faults; she is not developing a strong sexual attraction to Mary. On the subject of Mary, Fanny is able to judge more accurately than Edmund and this is true even later when Fanny begins to understand her own true feelings for Edmund.

Edmund is what Aristotle would call incontinent on account of his feelings for Mary. As discussed in the earlier section on marriage, the continent man can be compared with the virtuous man by reference to the three requirements for acting virtuously: A person acting virtuously will (1) “know (that he is doing virtuous actions),” (2) “decide on them, and decide on them for themselves”, and (3) “do them from a firm and unchanging state” (*NE*, 1105a30). The continent man knows what he ought to do and forces himself to do it, but he does not do this from a firm and unchanging state. He still has what Aristotle calls “strong and base appetites” which he has to suppress or overcome (*NE*, 1146a10). The incontinent man shares the continent man’s knowledge in a sense and also his appetites, but he cannot suppress or overcome these appetites.

Aristotle describes the contrast between the incontinent and continent man in the following way: “The incontinent person knows that his actions are base, but does them because of his feelings, whereas the continent person knows his appetites are base, but because of reason does not follow them” (*NE*, 1145b10). The incontinent person cannot be practically wise since the practically wise person knows the right ends as well as how to bring them about and he acts on his deliberations. The incontinent man has knowledge that what he desires is base, but it is not a full and robust sort of knowledge. In the incontinent person, knowledge is inactive or ignored:

But we speak of knowledge in two ways; we ascribe it both to someone who has it without using it and to someone who is using it. Hence it will matter whether someone has the knowledge that his action is wrong, without attending to his knowledge, or he both has it and attends to it. For this second case seems extraordinary, but wrong action when he does not attend to his knowledge does not seem extraordinary. (*NE*, 1146b35)

Aristotle uses the following example to illustrate how knowledge being inactive or ignored results in incontinence: (1) Nothing [sweet] should be tasted. (2) Everything sweet is pleasant. (3) This particular is sweet. At the same time as holding these beliefs, the person has an appetite for the pleasant. Mysteriously, this appetite causes the person to ignore knowledge or somehow make it inactive such that the first premise, “Nothing [sweet] should be tasted”, plays no role in what the person decides to do (*NE*, 1147a30-1147b15).⁴⁷ Imagine Persephone in Hades, she “knows” that she ought not to taste anything in Hades lest she must remain there forever. She knows premises (2) and (3). The particular in (3) is a lovely pomegranate and Persephone has not eaten for days. Appetite for the pomegranate somehow inactivates her knowledge of the first premise and she eats. The first premise is somehow pushed into the background and although she could rehearse the words of the first premise, the words have no force with her: “Saying the words that come from knowledge is no sign [of fully having it]” (*NE*, 1147a 20). Likewise, Edmund rehearses all of the charges against Mary and then refuses to give them their proper weight in his judgment of her. In so doing, he “say[s] the words in the way that actors do” (*NE*, 1147a 20).

Insofar as Edmund is incontinent, he falls short of practical wisdom. Edmund is not doomed to retain his distorted view of Mary. Since he is incontinent with respect to his feelings for Mary, he might still be persuaded to follow what he knows is right. He need only activate the knowledge of what is right. Unlike in the Persephone case above, Edmund’s incontinence is ongoing in the sense that he continues to act on an appetite that he retains. Were he to lose the appetite or activate his knowledge, he could cease being incontinent with respect to Mary.

⁴⁷ My reading of this may be unusual. I would rather take it that the “universal belief hindering tasting” is against tasting anything, but I leave room for what seems to be the usual interpretation. See also: Ross, 229; *NE*, 260-261.

Edmund's feelings cause him to "abandon himself against correct reason" but these feelings do not go "so far as to make him the sort of person to be persuaded that it is right to pursue such pleasures without restraint" (*NE*, 1151a25). The conversations that Edmund has with Fanny about Mary are part of the way in which the struggle between feeling and knowledge play themselves out. When Edmund prompts Fanny to join in his criticism of Mary, he is following the dictates of knowledge but when he then seeks to neutralize the criticisms, he is following the dictates of feeling. Cleverness plays a role in both, but the incorrect end is dictated by his feelings for Mary. Until Edmund is able to grasp knowledge of the correct end, he will be missing an integral part of practical wisdom.

These intermittent Mary-centered discussions between Fanny and Edmund take place until the end of the novel. Edmund often uses them as ways to overcome his own scruples. Edmund relies on Fanny's kindness and sensitivity regarding his own feelings to "win" his arguments with Fanny and to convince himself that Mary's faults are not serious. But Fanny must eventually give her actual judgment on the matter and disregard Edmund's too-partial feelings and desires about the subject of Mary. Most of the other challenges Fanny faces force her into the position of having these conversations and provide her with the added challenge of speaking painful truths to Edmund. At the same time, observing and reflecting on how Edmund's scruples are overcome by his attraction to Mary helps her to guard herself from similar dangers. Edmund's weakness plays some role in every challenge Fanny faces after the arrival of the Crawfords. There is more to say about Edmund's weakness, but this will be interspersed with discussion of the other events presenting moral difficulties for Fanny to overcome.

The rest of Fanny's moral development occurs as she is faced with a variety of new and complicated situations in which she must decide how to act well and from which she can learn through observation and reflection. These situations both challenge her ability reason well about how to act and provide her with the experience necessary for knowing how to act well. The following sections take the events of *Mansfield Park* chronologically for the most part and will take up the various ethical themes as they become relevant.

CHAPTER FIVE

COURTSHIP: THE TRIP TO SOTHERTON

1. Introduction

The remainder and, in fact, the bulk of the novel details the emerging courtships between the young people. Through these courtships we have a chance to examine the effect habit and experience has had upon the characters of the young people at Mansfield Park. We can trace the development of character along with the development of the courtships through a series of episodes that take place in the novel: The Trip to Sotherton, The Play, Henry's Courtship, and Fanny's Home Visit. Beginning with the trip to Sotherton, we are able to see what effects the young people's habituations have had upon them as well as how the young people affect one another's characters. We are also able to see clearly how the young people's characters lead them to make certain kinds of marriages.

Although Edmund gives all the appearance early on of possessing it and Fanny seems to possess it to a greater degree than most others, the practical wisdom discussed prior to this chapter has not fully developed in any of the young people. Despite the fact that many of the young people are quite clever at achieving their ends, they are not reliable when it comes to seeking the right ends. In some cases, this is attributable to a mere lack of experience in how to pursue what is good. In others, it is due to a flawed habituation that led them to value the wrong things. Aside from Fanny, the young people of Mansfield Park are still guided primarily by their feelings and in being so are very similar to the fully vicious. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle gives advice about the character of the young. According to him the young are such that "They are shifting and unsteady in their desires, which are vehement for a time, but soon relinquished; for the longings of youth are keen rather than deep—are like sick people's fits of hunger and thirst" (*R*, 1389a). The young are prone to enthusiasm and led by their feelings which are ever-changing. In being led by their feelings, they are very similar to the vicious person who "conceives himself as nothing more than a sequence of appetites and satisfactions" and who "exercises his practical reason by finding measures that seem to secure his future satisfaction" (Irwin, 194). The problem for the vicious person and the young person is that even his appetites cannot be depended on to remain the same. Consequently, he cannot plan well for his future. He

is unsteady and inconstant. The young person has the hope of developing the habits necessary to virtue whereas the vicious person has already failed to develop these habits. The young people at Mansfield Park are at the very stage where prior habituation will either allow them to bring their desires into alignment with virtue or will confirm them in the policy of following their strongest desires.

Edmund and Fanny are the steadiest of the young people, but each has a weak point. Fanny's weakness comes from having been dependent on the support of this very mentor who will now become so weak himself. Without Edmund, Fanny must depend on her own judgment and cease to look to another for reassurance. Fanny and Edmund's problems are not insurmountable since each at least has the proper basic values. The worst risk for either of them is incontinence that each may be able to overcome.

Excepting Fanny, the other young people have all been brought up in such a way as make them vain. This vice is the result of being habituated to value the wrong things so that one's self-worth seems to depend on the possession of these things. Unlike the magnanimous person who has a proper pride based upon his knowledge of his own virtue and does not depend on the admiration of others, the vain person is often doubly deluded: Although he need only do one to be vain, the vain person can both overestimate his own worth and look to others indiscriminately for admiration to confirm this view of himself (*NE*, 1123b 5; 1124a10). Other people are mere means to his self-satisfaction as well as to his self-delusion.

Maria and Julia Bertram are subject to the most commonly recognized vanity. Their vanity is based on a value of beauty and desirability to the opposite sex. They rely on the opinions expressed by others to guide their judgment with regard to whether they have these valuable characteristics. The Bertram sisters have spent most of their youth flattered and petted by their aunt as well as by those around them at her prompting. They have been taught that their worth is dependent on their acquiring the accomplishments and characteristics that would make them attractive to rich suitors. Their entire neighborhood regards them as polished beauties who are highly desirable as wives. Having been told that they are both beautiful and deserving of every good thing they desire, the Bertram sisters seek and expect the admiration of their new neighbor, Henry Crawford, and come into conflict with one another. Maria and Julia are both dependent on others in forming estimates of themselves but had never been in competition with

one another. When Henry appears to flatter them both, each sister seems to estimate her worth based upon his preference and the intensity of his flattery.

Henry Crawford and his sister Mary Crawford have also been taught vanity. Rather than being based on their marriage-marketability, their vanity comes in the form of a sense of superiority to others. They have been taught to believe that they are cleverer and more penetrating than others. With this penetration, they believe that they have seen through society, morality, and politeness down to the true human motivation for everything: advantage. Whereas others might act on principle, the Crawfords see principle as a ruse that takes in the innocent and that is best used for personal advantage. Advantage is for the two of them mere desire satisfaction. Marriage to a wealthy gentleman whom she can control will satisfy Mary Crawford's desires. Mary has witnessed the progression of a marriage made for advantage in which the wife could not control the husband despite best efforts. Her aunt married her uncle for the sake of wealth and position but cannot avoid the embarrassment of his philandering and general coarseness. Having seen this, Mary believes that she has seen through marriage and that in marriage "[e]very body is taken in at last" and that "it is a maneuvering business" (*MP*, 46). She does not intend to be taken in but will take in her husband if necessary for her ends. Mary will not allow a man to rule her but will use her superior cleverness to rule him.

Henry has had a similarly negative experience with marriage since he has seen things from his uncle's perspective. He has seen a loveless marriage in which his aunt has attempted to manipulate and cajole his uncle. He has also seen his uncle rebel and do as he pleases with mistresses. Marriage is for Henry an unattractive estate. Taking a general lesson from his uncle's particular circumstances, he is not interested in marriage but only in women. Henry Crawford has no need to marry as he is wealthy and free to do as he pleases so he is at leisure to amuse himself by gaining the admiration of women. His vanity is flattered by being chased by women and by his sense that none of the women who chase him is worthy of him. Henry believes that he has seen through them all and will teach them a lesson.

Tom Bertram's vanity is of a different kind from the vanity of these others. His vanity does not depend on the admiration of others. Rather, it depends upon a mistaken sense of his innate value. He cares very little what others think of him because he assumes that his future position will secure him respect. His position will compel respectful behavior even if it cannot control the private opinions of others. Unlike his sisters and the Crawfords, Tom thinks highly of

himself and takes no trouble to be dignified or impress others: He is just as happy to play the fool since others thinking him a fool cannot rob him of his wealth and future inheritance. Rather, he just straightforwardly seeks to satisfy whatever desires he finds within himself at the moment.

Surprisingly, even Edmund falls prey to vanity. Edmund has not yet found himself under the sway of a strong desire. As the youngest son, Edmund has not had his vanity flattered in the way that his other siblings have done. Mrs. Norris has not taught him to think himself flawless as she has his sisters. The idea that he is entitled to the respect, wealth, and position merely by being born does not affect him the way it does his brother. He has not been the target of lovely fortune-seekers as his siblings have been since he will not be rich. Rather, he has been at school, preparing to become a clergyman. This has insulated him from certain temptations, but not from others. Edmund's vanity arises from his vocation as a clergyman. He has lofty ideas of virtue, ideas that are not inaccurate but which are untested and, for him, still theoretical. Edmund is used to being treated as the moral expert in the Bertram household. Even where his advice is ignored by others in their pursuit of stronger desires, he is still treated as though he has superior moral judgment. For much of his life, he has been able to be the guide of others with no thought that he might be challenged. His role as guide and, in the case of Fanny, as mentor has given him too much faith in the infallibility of his own judgment. When faced with the challenge of a charming young woman, Edmund's judgment becomes distorted. His desires are not as much under his control as he had always assumed that they were and he finds himself twisting his principles to fit his new desires.

Fanny stands alone in her lack of vanity. If anything, she sometimes seems to drift toward the other extreme of pusillanimity. According to Aristotle, the pusillanimous person "thinks he is worthy of less than he is worthy of [...] whether he is worthy of great or of moderate things, or of little and thinks himself worthy of still less" (*NE*, 1123b10). Since she has been at Mansfield Park, Fanny has been made to feel that she was considered the "lowest and last" (*MP*, 221). When she is portrayed as someone who does not mind slights because she "thought too lowly of her own claims to feel injured by it" (*MP*, 20) or that thinks to herself that "she alone was sad and insignificant" (*MP*, 159), she appears to be pusillanimous. Yet, in spite of these thoughts she does not subordinate herself to others when doing so would require her to act in a way contrary to what she has learned is valuable. Unlike the vain person, she considers what others think of her only when they might have real cause for criticism or when what they think of her might

cause them distress. For example, to appear ungrateful to another person—whether it be Sir Thomas or Henry Crawford—when he believes he is entitled to her gratitude disturbs her because it distresses him. Yet, this does not convince her to do what this person believes would constitute gratitude if doing such a thing would require acting against her conscience. Fanny sometimes appears of pusillanimous only because she is less guided by her fleeting desires than are others and so is less likely to insist on her own will when there is nothing of moral importance at stake. Whereas the others do as they please, Fanny does as she ought.

2. Maria's Engagement

The first major episode in the novel is trip to Sotherton. As a prelude we learn of Maria Bertram's engagement and about what she has been taught to value. The eldest Bertram daughter, Maria, had just recently become engaged to Mr. Rushworth. Mr. Rushworth will take possession of the nearby Sotherton estate following his marriage to Maria and Maria will achieve her ambition of marrying into money and a fine estate:

Being now in her twenty-first year, Maria Bertram was beginning to think matrimony a duty; and as marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's, as well as ensure her a house in town, which was now a prime object, it became, by the same rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could. (*MP*, 38-39)

Maria's matrimonial ambitions are in alignment with what she has been taught by her family, particularly by her primary moral guide Mrs. Norris and to a lesser extent by her father. Mrs. Norris had made it her ambition to marry a rich member of the gentry as her older sister had but was forced to settle for the less affluent Mr. Norris the clergyman. Despite not getting all that she had hoped, she still married for wealth and position. This value of wealth and position was conveyed to her young charges both implicitly and explicitly. It is Mrs. Norris who introduces Mr. Rushworth as a suitable husband and it is Mrs. Norris who applauds herself for making the match. Yet it is clear that Maria has adopted Mrs. Norris's values and is acting on the principle she has been taught.

Sir Thomas approves of Maria's choice as it is in accord with his own views on marriage: It is a marriage between a baronet's daughter and a wealthy landowner that will preserve the estate as well as cement the position and increase the prestige of each family. Maria receives confirmation that her choice is a good one from her father who, having been informed by Mrs. Norris by letter, believed "It was a connection of exactly the right sort; in the same country, and the same interest; and his most hearty concurrence was conveyed as soon as possible" (*MP*, 40). The proposed marriage shares many characteristics with Sir Thomas's own marriage. Of some of these characteristics he is aware, while of others he is only dimly aware in his own marriage. Rushworth like Sir Thomas is acquiring a bride who seems well-suited to her new position as she is both beautiful and educated for such a marriage. Maria like Lady Bertram is acquiring a husband with wealth and land. Just as Sir Thomas's marriage is a mismatch in terms of intelligence, Maria's marriage is a mismatch. Just as Sir Thomas has married a fool with no judgment or opinions of her own, his poor daughter is marrying such a fool.

Mr. Rushworth has little to recommend him aside from his wealth and position so it is not surprising that Maria might find herself drawn to someone else just as long as this someone else has sufficient wealth. Mr. Rushworth is not an interesting or intelligent man but he is heir to a large estate (*MP*, 38-39). Maria Bertram has agreed to marry Rushworth despite his seeming stupidity and shallowness—even Edmund thinks to himself jokingly that "If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow" (*MP*, 40)—but she is beginning to be attracted to the charming and clever Henry Crawford. Despite finding him "absolutely plain" on first introduction, both Bertram sisters are "delighted" with Henry by their third meeting and find him to be "the most agreeable man" they have ever known (*MP*, 44). His flattery charms both the sisters. Julia, being unengaged, considers Henry's attentions to be her right, while Maria decides that she can afford a flirtation with him since she is safely engaged.

Henry cares little for either sister, even though he finds Maria the more attractive of the two. He just wants to entertain himself with a short flirtation during his stay in the area. Henry considers himself as especially safe in flirting with Maria since she is already engaged: "An engaged woman is always more agreeable than a disengaged. She is satisfied with herself. Her cares are over, and she feels that she may exert all her powers of pleasing without suspicion. All is safe with a lady engaged; no harm can be done" (*MP*, 45). With Julia, Henry might be expected to be a real suitor and after an extended flirtation to propose marriage. With Maria,

Henry can flirt and be flirted with as much as he likes since she has already secured for herself a desirable husband. Maria and Henry can both satisfy their vanity by their mutual recognition of attraction without risk to their hearts or hands.

As the rest of the novel shows, both Henry and Maria grossly underestimate the risk of an idle flirtation. Maria allows and encourages Henry's attentions even in front of her fiancé and Henry's vanity is deeply flattered by Maria's neglect of her fiancé and attention to him. Maria enjoys the pleasure of being preferred to her younger unattached sister. Given that Henry and Maria share the character flaw of vanity, these attentions can only end in trouble either with the scandal of the termination of an engagement or of a marriage. The unfortunate collision of character flaws really begins during the trip to Sotherton. At dinner one evening, Mr. Rushworth raises the subject of improving the grounds at Sotherton. Henry Crawford, having had some experience planning renovation to the grounds of old houses, has volunteered to help Rushworth "improve" Sotherton and it is proposed that the Bertrams, the Crawfords, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Norris, and in spite of Mrs. Norris's protests, Fanny Price, pay a visit to Sotherton and the Rushworth family. During this visit not only are the character flaws of Maria and Henry made clear, we also have the chance to see the development of the moral character of each young person through courtship.

3. The Ride to Sotherton

When the day of the visit arrives, there is already some friction between the Bertram sisters over who will ride with Henry Crawford. Maria's younger sister, Julia, considers Henry her right since Maria is engaged. Julia is vindicated when it is decided by Henry's older sister, Mrs. Grant that Julia ought to sit beside Henry on the barouche box (*MP*, 80). As Maria sits behind her sister and Henry, she is filled with "gloom and mortification" (*MP*, 80). Henry has been flattering and flirting with both sisters and Maria had considered herself the favored sister. Seeing Julia and Henry enjoying themselves makes her very unhappy until the party gets close to Sotherton:

When they came within the influence of Sotherton associations, it was better for Miss Bertram, who might be said to have two strings to her bow. She had Rushworth-feelings

and Crawford-feelings, and in the vicinity of Sotherton, the former had considerable effect. Mr. Rushworth's consequence was hers. (*MP*, 81)

Maria is attracted both by Henry's flattery and charm and by Mr. Rushworth's money and prestige. Her desire to escape her father's house and rules while maintaining her consequence and increasing her wealth inclines her toward Rushworth, even though she has no attraction toward Rushworth himself. Attraction draws her to Henry's person despite his lesser wealth and the fact that he has made no declarations of devotion to her. Maria has no inner guide as to what is worthy, but rather she follows her fluctuating desires from moment to moment.

Upon the group's arrival at Sotherton, the attractions of Rushworth's estate appear stronger than the attractions of Henry himself. Having been deprived of Henry's attention during the ride, the appearance of the Sotherton estate on the horizon has a strong and restorative effect on her vanity and "her spirits were in as happy a flutter as pride and vanity could furnish, when they drove up to the spacious stone steps before the principal entrance" (*MP*, 83): All of that will be hers when she marries Rushworth.

4. The Chapel

Once the party arrives at Sotherton, a good deal more is revealed about their characters. At the house, the group is given a tour of the house and is finally led into the family chapel. The idle talk that goes on between the young people reveals truths not only about Henry and Maria but also about Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford. It is in the chapel where Fanny and Edmund are given the opportunity of greater insight into Mary Crawford's character. Mary has found herself drawn to Edmund the younger Bertram even though he will not have the wealth and estate of an older brother, but she does not as yet have any idea what his future profession is to be. Rushworth's mother explains that the chapel is no longer used since her husband ended the tradition of daily prayers (*MP*, 86). Thinking herself terribly clever, Mary Crawford makes an aside to Edmund: "every generation has its improvements" (*MP*, 86). Mary does not like to be encumbered with timetables nor does she see the value in doing what she does not enjoy when not forced to do so by convention or utility. To escape the tedium of prayer and preaching with the sanction of the head of family is very desirable in Mary's eyes. Fanny does not share Mary's

opinion. Fanny holds that, “There is something about a chapel and chaplain so much in character with a great house, with one’s ideas of what such a household should be! A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer is fine!” (*MP*, 86). For Fanny, this is not merely an expression of an aesthetic or conventional ideal; she is comparing Sotherton with the moral ideal of what a great household should be. Fanny believes that it is important that a family of wealth and influence be virtuous, and religious observance is a part of this virtue. There is a responsibility that comes with wealth and influence. A failure to live up to this responsibility does something to lessen the justice of such a great possession. It is instructive to see how Mary interprets Fanny’s statement. Mary assumes that Fanny is paying tribute to something merely conventional—not morally admirable—and mostly hypocritical.

Mary’s assumption is that no one in the house would want to attend daily prayers and that the family would invent excuses for their own non-attendance while forcing their servants to attend (*MP*, 86-87). Attending daily prayers is something that no person likes but that society has enforced. Since people do not like it and probably rather resent it, she believes that the convention would be better abandoned: She argues that people will be more authentic and sincere in their devotions if they are left to choose how and when to perform them. Mary concludes that “it is safer to leave people to their own devices on such subjects [prayer]” (*MP*, 87). She continues “Every body likes to go their own way—to chuse their own time and manner of devotion. The obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, the length of time—altogether it is a formidable thing and what no body likes” (*MP*, 87). She imagines that if the past inhabitants of the house could have imagined a future in which people would not have to attend chapel, they would have been very glad and envied these future inhabitants (*MP*, 87). Mary closes her clever little speech with a cutting remark about the clergy, “I fancy parsons were very inferior even to what they are now” (*MP*, 87). In a short speech, Mary has advocated for a lack of restraint and self-discipline, voiced a preference not to attend religious services herself, represented all Rushworth’s ancestors and the inhabitants of great houses in general as hypocrites, and, finally, expressed the view that parsons are not very good now though they were even worse in the past. Without realizing it, she has said everything she could to offend her listeners.

Fanny is so angry she is unable to speak, but Edmund makes an attempt to reinterpret Mary’s speech and get her to retract some of her stronger statements. He admits that people

might have some difficulty concentrating during religious services, but suggest that such people would have even more trouble directing their thoughts when alone in their rooms. Without any external direction, such people would be even less likely to make devotions at all. Here it is clear that Fanny takes what Mary says at face value as representing Mary's real opinions on the matter, while the infatuated Edmund struggles to attribute Mary's speech to a desire to be clever and entertaining. Mary is either the type of person who sincerely believes what she is saying and is completely unaware of its wrongness or she is fully aware of the wrongness but is subject to a weakness that brings her to verbally endorse what she thinks is wrong. Either she is making an honest though amusing argument or she is only trying to be clever and raise a laugh. The two options are clear: Mary is either intemperate or incontinent. Neither option leaves her virtuous, but the second allows for improvement or redemption. Therefore, it is not surprising that Edmund prefers to interpret Mary as being merely incontinent.

Mary soon discovers her miscalculation in the realm of humor at least. At the same time that this conversation is taking place, Julia jokingly suggests that, standing there in front of the altar, Rushworth and Maria look just as though they are about to be married (*MP*, 88). In a fit of pique at being ignored during the ride, Maria has been ignoring Henry. Henry notices and takes this as an opportunity to win back Maria's attention by quietly saying to Maria, "I do not like to see Miss Bertram so near the altar" (*MP*, 88). Maria responds by asking whether Henry would be willing to "give her away" and Henry claims that he "would do it very awkwardly," implying his reluctance to see her married to someone else (*MP*, 88). In that short exchange, Henry has regained Maria's attention and used it to gratify his own vanity. Henry has also made the flirtation a good deal more dangerous for both of them since he has at least implied that he would prefer Maria were marrying him. Julia, not having heard this exchange, continues her raillery by declaring her wish that Edmund had already taken orders so that he might perform the marriage ceremony right there and then. It is now that Mary first discovers that Edmund intends to be a clergyman himself.

Fanny notices Mary's change of facial expression as Mary comprehends the truth and Fanny feels sorry for her. Fanny assumes that Mary will be ashamed of all she has just said to Edmund about the church and clergy (*MP*, 89). But Mary's response to this new information is instructive: Rather than being really embarrassed or retracting what she has said, she says, "If I had known this before, I would have spoken of the cloth with more respect" (*MP*, 89). This is not

a retraction at all. With this short speech, Mary is calculatedly reconfirming her view that the church and clergy are a nuisance and that we are all required by convention to speak respectfully and hypocritically of what we all know we cannot like. Edmund is blind to this interpretation since he is determined to view Mary as being merely intent of being clever. We are not told what Fanny's thoughts are upon hearing this, but even if she had no immediate judgment regarding the speech, it is now part of her set of observational data to be reflected upon in private when trying to understand Mary Crawford.

5. The Walk in the Wilderness

The more dangerous action at Sotherton occurs when the young people survey the grounds. Soon after leaving the chapel, the visitors and their hosts find themselves outside and Mary Crawford's suggestions that "it is safer to leave people to their own devices" and "Every body likes to go their own way" (*MP*, 87) are tested as principles for living. Smaller groups form naturally: Henry, Maria, and Rushworth form one group; Mary, Edmund, and Fanny form another; while Mrs. Norris, Julia, and Mrs. Rushworth are left to form the last group by default. Julia's being left behind with the older women gives us another chance to contrast the moral state of a Bertram sister with that of Fanny:

The politeness which she [Julia] had been brought up to practise as a duty made it impossible for her to escape, while want of that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of her own heart, that principle of right which had not formed any essential part of her education, made her miserable under it. (*MP*, 91)

Julia is able to control her behavior, but not her feelings. She is able to behave as she ought, but has no idea that she should try to bring her feelings into accord with her actions. She does not like what she is being forced to do and she sees no reason to try to like it. Whereas we find Fanny constantly trying to make her feelings what they ought to be, Julia does not even recognize that her feelings ought to be other than what they are: Julia does not like being left

with the older women and being abandoned by Henry, and she can see no reason why she ought to like it. She sees only that society prescribes that she pretend to be content.

Mary leads Edmund and Fanny into a part of the grounds called by Mrs. Rushworth the “wilderness”—a sort of planned wild and wooded area, carefully arranged and planted to look natural (notes in Penguin Edition of *MP*, 490-491)—and Mary revisits the topic of Edmund’s future profession as a clergyman. She expresses her surprise and, through a sally of wit, betrays her wishful thinking that he should be destined rather to inherit some relation’s fortune (*MP*, 92). Mary finds it unbelievable that Edmund would choose the church while he has any other option open. She cannot see the sense in it since she believes that “Men love to distinguish themselves” and “A clergy man is nothing” (*MP*, 92). A dispute about the role of clergyman ensues. To put it simply, he believes that the clergyman has the very important role of forming the morality of his parishioners not only through the doctrine he preaches but by the example of his life (*MP*, 92-93).

According to Edmund, the role of a clergyman is to teach and to guide. In fact, this role mirrors to some extent what he has tried to do as a mentor to Fanny. The clergy has the “charge of all that has the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally,—which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence” (*MP*, 92). He goes on to explain: “The manners I speak of, might rather be called conduct, perhaps, the result of good principles; the effect, in short of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend” (*MP*, 93). In Edmund’s view, the clergy are largely responsible for the degree of goodness and decency in society: The example set and the doctrines taught by the clergy determine the moral character of the nation (*MP*, 93). As Edmund sincerely believes that he will have a great responsibility for others both in this life and the one to come, he acts accordingly. He has a duty not only to act well, but to sincerely believe in what he does. Whereas Mary sees the clergyman as at best a hypocrite, Edmund sees the clergyman as at best a truly virtuous man.

Fanny cannot help agreeing with Edmund, but Mary declares that she cannot be convinced: “I am just as much surprised now as I was at first, that you should intend to take orders. You really are fit for something better” (*MP*, 93). With this statement, Mary has dismisses the importance of religion and morality in favor of wealth and social consequence. Mary also dismisses Edmund’s role as guide. If Edmund believes that Mary might be improved

by the influence of Fanny or himself, he should be disabused of this notion by Mary's outright rejection of this sort of influence. None of the considerations that weigh with Edmund and Fanny have any weight with Mary. Whereas Fanny has been Edmund's willing pupil, Mary is not willing to be educated by Edmund nor is she willing to allow that a clergyman has any moral authority. This is more food for thought in future reflections on Mary's character.

It is not long before Mary's aforementioned principles are expressed in her behavior. Fanny is tired and Edmund offers her his arm. He offers the other arm to Mary and the three walk along together. Mary declares that although she is not yet tired, she believes she should be since they "have walked at least a mile in this wood" (*MP*, 94). Edmund knows that they have not walked anywhere close to that far since they have only walked for around fifteen minutes, but despite this clear argument against her declaration Mary prefers to deny the authority of the watch in favor of her own sense of time and distance (*MP*, 94). She will "go [her] own way" and not be subject to any laws, moral or natural. Mary does not subscribe to conventions like watches or units of measurement.

The three of them soon reach a bench on which to rest, but the restless Mary is soon up again and Edmund follows. Mary wants go further down the path from which they diverged for rest and look through the iron gates⁴⁸ at its end. Edmund again tries to reason with her about the shortness of the distance they have just travelled, but she will not be convinced:

[Edmund] still reasoned with her, but in vain. She would not calculate, she would not compare. She would only smile and assert. The greatest degree of rational consistency could not have been more engaging, and they talked with mutual satisfaction. At last it was agreed, that they should endeavor to determine the dimensions of the wood by walking a little more about it. (*MP*, 96)

Being charmed by her attractions (and perhaps consciously manipulated by them), Edmund follows Mary off into the wood leaving Fanny behind, convincing himself that he is proving his

⁴⁸ Historically, the Iron Gate has a very interesting symbolic meaning. Thinking back to Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," passing through the Iron Gates (or Grates) symbolized something to do with transgressing the mores associated with marriage and sex.

case to Mary in making the experimental walk, when he is really proving the efficacy of irrational attraction. Mary has smiled and charmed Edmund into submission. Mary's refusal to abide by rule and reason is effective in bringing about what she desires. It is also effective in bringing Edmund to act inconsiderately to Fanny by leaving her behind again.

This Iron Gate to which Mary Crawford is attracted but does not pass through plays an important role in intensifying the danger of Maria and Henry's flirtation. Fanny is left alone to ponder what she has witnessed. Of course, she expects Mary and Edmund to return shortly, but finds herself waiting longer than expected. As she is sitting all alone, she hears the voices of a different trio: Henry, Maria, and Rushworth have arrived from the path. The group condoles with her over being left alone and then resumes their status as trio. Fanny is left to observe them as the three sit down together, Maria in the middle of the two men. The three continue to discuss plans for improvement to Sotherton, Henry being responsible for the planning, Maria for the approval of the plans, and Rushworth for listening and agreeing (*MP*, 97). During the conversation, Maria notices the same iron gates pointed out by Mary earlier. Maria expresses a wish to pass through the gate in order to get a better view of the prospect. Henry agrees with Maria and points out an area on the other side of the gate from which they might get a better view. It is agreed that it is essential that they get a view of the house from that particular spot on the other side of the gate. The problem is that the gate is locked and Rushworth has not brought the key. Maria so desires to get through the gate that Rushworth volunteers to get the key immediately and rushes back to the house.

The iron gate has a very interesting symbolic meaning. The gate symbolizes a barrier that should be crossed only under the proper circumstances lest the transgressor face serious danger. On the other side of the barrier is the freedom from restraint that Maria seeks and means to obtain through her marriage to Rushworth. The gate requires a key to open it so that it can be passed through without risk of falling into the ha-ha; the barrier requires marriage to avoid moral and social risks. The liberty represented as being on the other side of the gate symbolizes the liberty Maria will have from her father's house and rules as well as from the restraints of modesty placed upon unmarried young women. It is important that the different couples approach the gate in different ways. Mary is interested in the gate, and while she and Edmund wander off in its direction they do not approach it directly or pass through it illicitly. Maria, as we will see soon, is strongly inclined toward passing through the gate. While Rushworth is also

eager to pass through the gate, he wants to do it in the proper and lawful way, by procuring the key. Henry and Maria ignore the key and pass through the gate illicitly without Rushworth. The gate as a symbol must also be apparent to the characters in the novel, and not merely to the author and reader. The characters use discussion of the Iron Gate to subtly convey meaning. The two trios were moving down the path toward the gate and then each group leaves behind its third member and approaches the gate in a distinct way: Mary and Edmund flirt with the idea of the gate by wandering in its vicinity, while Henry and Maria sneak past the gate as soon as possible.

When Rushworth goes to fetch the key, Maria and Henry are left behind and they seem to forget that they are not alone. With Fanny as a reluctant and unacknowledged audience, the two discuss the gate, waiting for Rushworth and his key, and the state of Sotherton at present. Discussion of these seemingly innocent topics is used to convey a great deal more about another topic much more interesting. After Rushworth sets off in quest of the key that will liberate Maria, Henry says of the plan to get the key, "It is undoubtedly the best thing we can do now, as we are so far from the house already" to which Maria replies, "Yes, there is nothing else to be done now" (*MP*, 98). It is clear that they are talking not just about keys, gates, and waiting for Rushworth. Rather, what has been communicated is that plans have gone too far for Maria to break off her engagement with Rushworth. The two continue and Maria asks, "But now, sincerely, do not you find the place altogether worse than expected?" to which Henry replies, "No, indeed, far otherwise" (*MP*, 98). Again, this is a thinly disguised discussion of marriage. Maria is asking whether the estate of marriage is as bad as bad as Henry had once believed and he concedes that the estate is more attractive to him than he had expected. Henry goes on to say, "I do not think *I* shall ever see Sotherton again with so much pleasure as I do now. Another summer will hardly improve it to me" (*MP*, 98). Sotherton now has a double meaning: Sotherton as an estate and as the estate of marriage. By next year, Maria will be mistress of Sotherton and the sight of Sotherton will only remind Henry that Maria is a married woman. Of Sotherton as a symbol of marriage, Henry admits that he will not be able to think of it again in the same way. He will like marriage rather less once it has taken Maria away from him. An embarrassed Maria ascertains clearly Henry's meaning and she suggests that by the standards of most people, "Sotherton" will be "improved" (*MP*, 98). Henry claims that he will not agree that it has been improved. He claims that he will not be able to forget it as it is at present: "My feelings are not quite so evanescent, nor my memory of the past under such easy dominion as one finds to be the

case with men of the world” (*MP*, 98). With this, Henry has implied that the feelings he has for Maria will be strong and lasting. The problem is that all of what he has conveyed can be denied since the explicit meaning was only that he likes the Sotherton estate and will not necessarily be pleased by its changing. This makes it dangerous for Maria to presume upon anything she thinks was just said.

Following what seems like a declaration of love on Henry’s part, Maria looks for confirmation of this love by requiring an explanation of Henry’s apparent interest in Julia. Henry dismisses the fun he seemed to be having with Julia by claiming that Julia is easily amused. Maria is more serious as of late because of her impending marriage. Henry tells Maria, “Your prospects, however, are too fair to justify want of spirits. You have a very smiling scene before you,” implying that Maria’s future prospects appear good (*MP*, 99). But Maria is not as sanguine about her future. She asks, “Do you mean literally or figuratively? Literally I conclude” (*MP*, 98). Still speaking figuratively herself, she says, “Yes, certainly the sun shines and the park looks very cheerful. But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. I cannot get out, as the starling said,” and she goes on to say, “Mr. Rushworth is so long fetching this key!” (*MP*, 98). Despite the prospects of wealth and consequence it offers, Maria’s engagement makes her feel trapped and the marriage is taking so long to come about that she is starting to think of escape. Henry takes this declaration of discontent as an opportunity to suggest that she pass around the edge of the still-locked gate, “I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited” (*MP*, 98). Here Henry’s meaning is more ambiguous. To Maria, it probably sounds as though he is asking her to break her engagement with Rushworth for the purpose of becoming engaged to Henry or at least allowing Henry to court her. But it is also possible that all Henry is asking for is that Maria disregard certain conventions and moral considerations in order to run away with him or merely flirt more intensely, not necessarily with the promise of marriage. Foolishly, Maria disregards this possible interpretation and claims that she can certainly get out of the gate—meaning that she need not wait for the permission of Rushworth to do as she pleases—and that once she and Henry have passed through the gate, Fanny can be left to explain where they have gone.

Having heard the entire conversation, Fanny is alarmed for Maria’s moral and physical safety. The double-meaning of all that was said is apparent even to Fanny. She warns Maria, “You will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes—you will tear your gown—you will be in

danger of slipping into the ha-ha” (*MP*, 99-100). But Maria pays Fanny no heed and is past the gate before Fanny finishes her speech, “Thank you, my dear Fanny, but I and my gown are alive and well, and so good-bye” (*MP*, 100). Maria has chosen to respond as though she has interpreted Fanny literally only and Fanny has been prevented by present company from being direct. She has meant to communicate to Maria that flirtation with Henry is dangerous, inappropriate, and will likely hurt Maria and her reputation. Maria has either not understood Fanny or wants Fanny to know that she can do without her amateur advice. Despite being clever, Maria cannot see that all Henry has said means nothing when it comes to the point. Whereas her marriage would ensure her reputation and all the good things she desires, Henry’s words commit him to nothing.

Fanny is surprised and angry at all she has observed. Edmund and Mary, Maria and Henry have all behaved very badly in abandoning their companions. Fanny has been left alone in the wood until Julia, chasing after the others—Henry in particular—arrives. Looking angrily about her, Julia sees that she has missed Henry and Maria, and in order to show that she is “equal to Maria” decides to go through the same iron gate without using the key (*MP*, 100). She will chase after Henry. Before she passes through the gate, Julia directs some angry words at Fanny, claiming that while she has had to spend a boring morning with Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Rushworth, Fanny has somehow managed to escape trouble: “it might have been as well, perhaps, if you had been in my place, but you always contrive to keep out of these scrapes” (*MP*, 100). Julia echoes the sort of speech Mrs. Norris often makes to Fanny. In fact, the bitterness and envy Julia is beginning to feel toward her sister are what Mrs. Norris most certainly feels toward Lady Bertram. Fanny silently excuses this comment since she is aware of Julia’s growing feelings for Henry and asks about Rushworth. Julia has seen him rushing to get the key, but decides that she will not wait for him to return. He may have gone to great trouble, but it is not her concern: “*That* is Miss Maria’s concern. I am not obliged to punish myself for *her* sins” (*MP*, 101). With this, Julia passes through the fence to liberty and Fanny is again left alone.

Fanny reflects on how the host, Mr. Rushworth, has been treated. She does not look forward to making an explanation of the others’ absences on his return. A short time after Julia is gone, Rushworth returns and Fanny is forced to tell the story, putting it gently and in the best light possible. But Rushworth is evidently hurt, frustrated, and humiliated. He does not seem to know whether to follow the wanderers or to stay put to wait. He believes that even if he follows,

he will not find them. Fanny feels great compassion for the wounded Rushworth. Rushworth is obviously feeling that Henry has displaced him in Maria's affections. Fanny tells Rushworth: "Nothing could be more obliging than your manner, I am sure, and I dare say you walked as fast as you could, but still it is some distance, you know, from this spot to the house, quite into the house; when people are waiting, they are bad judges of time, and every half minute seems like five" (*MP*, 102). After this encouragement from Fanny, Rushworth is convinced to go after Henry and Maria. Fanny is left alone to wonder where Mary and Edmund have gone.

After waiting so long, Fanny goes in search of the pair herself. Within a short time, she hears the two and is reunited with them. It turns out that they had found another way into the part of the grounds that had interested Fanny the most. They had decided not to go back for her since she was so tired. Edmund claims to have wished very much for Fanny's presence, but despite the wish he convinced himself during his walk that he had no reason to return for her (*MP*, 103). Edmund's incontinence has caused him to ignore his duty to Fanny while being perfectly aware of the duty. Fanny has been neglected if not forgotten and it is hard to decide what is more hurtful: To be remembered, but not considered, or to be forgotten entirely. The attractions of Mary have been so intoxicating to Edmund that his judgment has been distorted yet again.

The day at Sotherton has given the reader and Fanny many new observations on which to reflect. Aside from the way in which Mary's presence makes Edmund forgetful of Fanny and the general thoughtlessness and selfishness of her young friends, Fanny has more particularly been able to make observations of Henry Crawford's character. What Fanny witnessed between Maria and Henry makes an impression:

...since the day at Sotherton, she could never see Mr. Crawford with either sister without observation, and seldom without wonder or censure; and had her confidence in her own judgment been equal to her exercise of it in every respect, had she been sure she was seeing clearly, and judging candidly, she would probably have made some important communications to her usual confidant. (*MP*, 115)

She notices Henry's behavior to her cousins, Maria and Julia: He stays right on the edge of making a preference for one or the other noticeable to casual observers; he avoids making any outright declarations; yet, he continues to be pleasing and attentive to each of the sisters, leading

each to believe she is his favorite. Fanny notices all of these things, but does not have enough confidence in her own judgment to feel comfortable communicating her concerns. Fanny has not been alone in her judgments until now. She has usually had confirmation from her mentor Edmund. She hopes that she can obtain confirmation of her judgment now from Edmund. To Edmund, she merely expresses surprise at Henry's lingering about Mansfield Park so long, when he usually enjoys travelling. Edmund does not get the hint. Fanny subtly suggests that perhaps Henry is interested in Maria more than he is in Julia. But Edmund is dismissive of the idea. He attributes it to a sort of masculine coyness and, because Edmund is eager to see the Crawford siblings in a good light, interprets Henry's remaining at the park while Maria is obviously engaged as a sign that Henry could not be interested in Maria (*MP*, 116). Edmund still considers himself Fanny's guide and fails to see that his judgment is more subject to distortion since he has an interest in seeing the Crawfords in a good light. Edmund's rationalizing of the evidence is enough to discourage Fanny from having any confidence in her judgment and she attempts to modify her judgment. Still, from the day at Sotherton onward, she is on her guard concerning Henry.

During the trip to Sotherton, aspects of the moral characters of Henry, Maria, Julia, Mary, Edmund, and Fanny have revealed themselves further. Henry is vain and careless, concerned only with his own pleasure and gratifying his vanity. Maria and Julia are both vain as well. The same vanity that causes Maria to value wealth and position leaves her vulnerable to having her judgment affected by flattery of her person. Henry's gratification of her vanity leads Maria to act against what she has until now considered her best interests. Julia was petted and flattered by Mrs. Norris and those around her just as Maria was, but now she is not receiving the sort of gratification she expects. While circumstances favor the indulgence of Maria's personal vanity, circumstances serve to develop in Julia a sense of resentment, anger, and envy. Mary has shown herself to be not merely incapable of self-restraint but entirely unaware that there is any legitimate reason for self-restraint outside of yielding to the pressures of societal convention for the sake of her own advantage. She is intemperate. Just as an unruly child, she submits only under threat of punishment. Edmund has further demonstrated his incontinence. He has shown himself to be blinded by desire in failing to see Mary's flaws. He has also shown that it takes very little to lead him astray from what he knows to be right. Finally, Fanny has shown herself to have sound judgment while lacking the confidence and ability to do anything to correct the

judgment of others. She can only sit as a silent observer and see the courses being taken without being able to do anything to save her companions from themselves.

CHAPTER SIX

COURTSHIP: THE PLAY

1. Introduction

The trip to Sotherton is not the only case in which the moral characters of the young people are revealed. The Play gives the young people the chance to act according to their true characters without commitment: The young people are able to act as they please while pretending only to play a part in someone else's drama. There is danger in this play-acting since it allows them to give vent to feelings and indulge in activities that further intensify the desires they already have while helping to form and cement the characters they are developing. It should be no surprise that the young people settle on a play that allows them to, in some cases, continue the intimacies they have already been forming as well as to act in ways forbidden by normal circumstances and societal convention. In the end, Fanny is the only one to refuse and, when pressed hard by the others, to fortunately⁴⁹ escape playing a part in the play that is in the long run so destructive to the characters and well-being of all the rest of the young people.

2. Settling on a Play

Shortly after the trip to Sotherton, eldest son Tom Bertram returns home from London bringing with him his love of pleasure and entertainment. Tom also brings with him his new friend Mr. Yates who has just come from another house where a play had been chosen and rehearsed, but canceled on the eve of presentation due to the inconvenient death of a family member of the house's inhabitants (*MP*, 121). Yates's enthusiasm for a play is transferred to the party at the park, especially to Tom (*MP*, 122). Immediately, the young people begin to make their plans for the production. They begin angling for plays and for roles that will allow them to do as they please under the false pretense of its being mere acting.

⁴⁹ Sir Thomas arrives home right as the group presses her with the greatest force and it seems likely that she will give in.

Initially, Edmund sees the danger of putting on a play. When the group of young people begins to sound serious in their planning to present a play, Edmund is alarmed and tries to discourage them first by appealing to their vanity—their efforts at acting will be “raw” and unpolished (*MP*, 125)—and then by appeal to their sense of propriety:

I think it would very wrong. In a general light, private theatricals are open to some objections, but as we are circumstanced, I must think it would be highly injudicious, and more than injudicious, to attempt anything of the kind. It would show a great want of feeling on my father’s account, absent as he is, and in some degree of constant danger; and it would be imprudent, I think, with regard to Maria, whose situation is a very delicate one, considering every thing, extremely delicate. (*MP*, 125)

Whatever the general objections might be, Edmund has presented some decisive objections to presenting a play in their particular circumstances. First of all, it shows a want of feeling and respect for their absent father who may well be injured or killed when he is away from home. That Sir Thomas’s family does not miss him or feel very much concern on his account is already disgraceful, but to make this lack of feeling public by putting on a play compounds this evil. Whether the play is presented to anyone outside the house is irrelevant since word that the play is being produced is still bound to get out and become the subject of talk in the neighborhood. The enjoyment and entertainment of amusing themselves with producing a play has a celebratory aspect to it that is highly inappropriate when, at any moment, they could receive bad news about their father. Second of all, Maria is in awkward circumstances with respect to her engagement. Sir Thomas has not been home to meet her fiancé and has not been able to give his formal approval of the match. So, although she is informally engaged and thought to be engaged by her friends and neighbors—since Mrs. Norris could not help spreading this information in order to brag about her own success as a matchmaker—Maria’s engagement could be broken off by her father at any time. At the same time, a great intimacy and an understanding has developed between Maria, Rushworth, and Rushworth’s mother making it so that Maria could not break off her own engagement without damage to her reputation. Maria is engaged but not married and, therefore, it is not clear what behavior it is appropriate for her to engage in.

Tom meets this argument dishonestly. He claims that the play will be a minor affair about which no one outside the house will know and the play chosen will be completely inoffensive. Tom claims that his father's absence is a reason counting in favor of the play since it will amuse and distract their mother from her anxiety about Sir Thomas's safety and return (*MP*, 126). This last claim is the one most easily proven false since always-sedate Lady Bertram has shown no signs of feeling anxious about Sir Thomas or anything else, for that matter. The first two claims are soon shown to be false as the appropriateness of the play eventually chosen turns out to be highly questionable and the enthusiasm of the young people prompts them to want to share their play with half the neighborhood. Tom makes the broader claim, "...we shall be doing no harm" (*MP*, 126), but even that proves to be questionable given the long-term consequences of the play.

Seeing that the reasons he offered against the play have had no effect on Tom's decision, Edmund argues that the play should not be pursued because Sir Thomas would not approve it (*MP*, 118). Tom argues to the contrary that their father has always promoted his children's acting. In fact, according to Tom, Sir Thomas "always encouraged" Edmund and Tom to act when they were young boys: Sir Thomas even had them reciting Julius Caesar and Hamlet (*MP*, 126). Edmund points out that the amateur theatrics were for a different purpose when they were boys; Sir Thomas wanted his sons to learn to speak well, but he never intended for his adult daughters to be acting in plays. This would be an offense against decorum in Sir Thomas's eyes (*MP*, 127). It is clear that Tom sees the force of Edmund's argument, but chooses to ignore it. Tom's impatience with being defied by a younger brother becomes evident in his speech and he makes sure to include some reference to his place as older brother and heir to the estate in all of his future arguments: "I know my Father as well as you do, and I'll take care his daughters do nothing to distress him. Manage your own concerns, Edmund, and I'll take care of the rest of the family" (*MP*, 127).

Edmund makes another attempt at swaying his brother. He expresses the hope that if a play is to be performed, Tom will not have a theatre of any kind built. Edmund worries that building a theatre in the house "would be taking liberties with [his] Father's house in his absence which could not be justified" (*MP*, 127). Again, Tom's response makes mention of his own role as heir: "for every thing of that nature, I will be answerable [...] [h]is house shall not be hurt. I have quite as great an interest in being careful of his house as you can have" (*MP*, 127). Edmund grants Tom's point for the sake of argument, but claims that any expense incurred cannot be

justified. This should be a decisive reason against building a theatre since the very purpose of Sir Thomas's being away from home is to recoup serious financial losses the family has incurred. Of course, Tom dismisses this claim as well; he downplays the expense of his project. When Edmund sees that he cannot persuade his brother, he tells Tom that he at least will not act. Tom does not care about this final point at all.

Fanny has been witness to the entire argument and has agreed with Edmund's reasoning on all points. She suggests that Edmund apply to their Aunt Norris, assuming that Mrs. Norris would be against the play (*MP*, 128). But, as Edmund points out, Mrs. Norris has no sway with Tom or the Bertram sisters. Edmund's last chance is to convince his sisters, but he concedes that if he cannot convince them, it would be better to let the thing proceed in order to avoid "family squabbling" (*MP*, 128). As the reader might expect, Edmund's attempts to reason with his sisters are unsuccessful. The sisters urge that as their mother does not object, their father would surely not object; many other "respectable families" have engaged in such amateur theatricals, including some of society's most prominent ladies; and no one outside their tiny circle would ever know of their play anyway. Each sister does urge caution regarding the other's taking part: Julia grants that Maria's "situation" might preclude her from taking part, while Maria claims that her "situation" makes her safer from censure than her not-yet-engaged sister (*MP*, 128-129). The final support offered in favor of the play is that Edmund's beloved Mary Crawford approves of the play; if this is so, then Edmund should have reason to believe there can be nothing to object to (*MP*, 129). Soon it is revealed that even Mrs. Norris would not have stood with Edmund against the play; rather, she was happy to pander to her influential, eldest nephew and niece. In doing so, she is able to transplant herself into their house to oversee the preparations (*MP*, 129).

Giving in to the play proves not to be successful in preventing family squabbling. In trying to comfort Edmund, Fanny had earlier suggested that there might be trouble about choosing a play to perform. She turns out to be right. Fanny observes the squabbles. Each participant wants a play that will showcase his or her special talents. That is, each participant wants a play that will allow them to indulge him or herself. Factions form: On one side, Julia, Maria, Henry, and Mr. Yates favor a tragic subject; on the other side, Tom Bertram and Mary favor a comic subject (*MP*, 130-131). All require that there be few characters in the play, but that all the characters must be good ones and there must be three main female characters. All of the maneuvering about which play will be chosen is not lost on Fanny: "Fanny looked on and

listened, not unamused to observe the selfishness which, more or less disguised, seemed to govern them all, and wondering how it would end” (*MP*, 131). As an outside observer, not consulted for her opinion and having no expectation of taking part in the play, Fanny has no personal interest in which play is chosen and is able to look on somewhat disinterestedly, seeing through the polite speeches and attempts of the others to manipulate one another. She herself has mixed feelings about their putting on a play. Fanny is inclined to see a play because she has never seen a play, but she is more inclined against the play for all of the reasons offered against it before. As usual, Fanny is able to judge which reasons should be decisive in the case and finds that her own pleasure and curiosity is outweighed by other considerations. It is interesting to see the quick way in which she recognized that her own “gratification” should be dismissed in favor of other considerations while her cousins seem to have no such scruples. Whereas Fanny is concerned about whether her inclination lines up with her overall duty in the circumstances, her cousins are concerned only with finding commonplaces and employing fallacies in support of the inclination they begin with and have no intention of changing.⁵⁰

3. The Casting

While Edmund is out, the players finally settle on the play Mr. Yates had been on the verge of performing elsewhere: “Lovers’ Vows” (*MP*, 132). The casting of the play happens

⁵⁰ I am sure that this all sounds very Kantian, but it does seem that moral development in an Aristotelian sense still calls for a person to bring her feelings or inclinations into alignment with what a virtue person would do, what virtue requires, or duty. It is the parent’s job to make us take pleasure and pain in the right things when we are pre-rational children; this is to make us inclined toward virtue. Once we are rational adults and if we have not been habituated perfectly but have been taught to reason well enough, it becomes our job to make ourselves take pleasure in and pain in the right things. This involves doubting the ability of our feelings and inclinations to reliably track the good and direct us toward virtue. We must always check ourselves. That the Bertram sisters, Tom, Mary, and Henry seem never to doubt their own motives and inclinations is a sign of a poor upbringing—neither their intellects nor their habits of character have been cultivated properly when they were children. Where are their consciences?

quickly, some of the actors taking on their roles without fuss, while others haggle over which part is their right. Who wishes for and who is cast in each role turns out to be significant. Mr. Yates is allowed his wish of playing the part he was to play at the other house. Yates is given the part of the ranting Baron Wildenhaim who is the character around whom all the action of the play revolves. Henry Crawford is cast as Frederick, the baron's illegitimate son. The casting of Agatha proves less easy. The Bertram sisters both desire the part of Agatha—the woman ruined and abandoned by Baron Wildenhaim, and also the mother of Frederick—since there are many sentimental scenes between Agatha and Frederick: “Each sister looked anxious; for each felt the best claim on Agatha, and was hoping to have it pressed on her by the rest” (*MP*, 133). In their enthusiasm for having the chance to be close to Henry, they ignore the fact that they are vying to play the part of a ruined woman.

All of Julia's acting and marital hopes are destroyed when Henry urges her not to take the part. With a seeming compliment to Julia and a reference to an earlier private conversation with Maria, Henry seeks to gain his will that Maria play the part while not offending the other sister. He claims that the part is too grave for Julia; she must not go against her own nature and play something so serious. Unfortunately, his calculations are off. It becomes clear to Julia that her sister is preferred: “Pleasantly, courteously was it spoken; but the manner was lost in the matter to Julia's feelings. She saw a glance at Maria which confirmed injury to herself; it was a scheme—a trick; she was slighted, Maria was preferred; the smile of triumph which Maria was trying to suppress shewed how well it was understood” (*MP*, 133). With this short dispute over a part in a play, Julia is brought to see that Henry has no serious interest in her but would rather flirt with her engaged sister. The two sisters who had always gotten along well before have become bitter enemies over a man and Maria has been triumphant.

The oblivious Tom suggests that Julia take the minor role of cottager's wife to which Mr. Yates objects. In an attempt to fix his blunder and win back her favor, Henry suggests that the part of Amelia, originally assigned to Mary, should go to Julia, but Julia refuses to take part in the play at all (*MP*, 136). She has seen through Henry and will not be trifled with anymore. Fanny witnesses all of this and feels great compassion for Julia. While to the others present, excepting of course Maria, Henry, and Julia herself, this was a simple casting with no further significance, it was the end of Julia's hopes that Henry cared for her and might marry her.

Most of the remainder of the casting takes place after the others have been consulted or joined the group. Tom, who claims to have taken on his father's dignified role in the house, is now very willing to take on the minor part of the buffoonish cottager, the butler, and any other minor part he can take. Mary is cast as Amelia, the legitimate daughter of the Baron who has a passion for her clergyman tutor and exerts all of her powers to court him. Rushworth chooses the part of Count Cassel, the foppish and vicious suitor of Amelia, on account of the ornate costumes he will have to wear: "Mr. Rushworth liked the idea of his finery very well, though affecting to despise it, and was too much engaged with what his appearance would be, to think of others, or draw any of those conclusions, or feel any of that displeasure, which Maria had been half prepared for" (*MP*, 138). The foolish Rushworth is more concerned with the clothes his character will wear than with the fact that he is playing a bad sort of man who is also an unsuccessful suitor. Rushworth's excitement regarding the costumes also prevents him from coming to the same conclusion Julia had and he does not notice his bride-to-be's decided preference for Henry. This leaves the part of Anhalt open with no one to fill it. Anhalt is a poor clergyman who was once the tutor of Amelia, beloved by her, and who with much prompting and pushing from Amelia admits his love for her and becomes her suitor. Just as they are wondering who should fill this part, the future clergyman Edmund returns home. Having been out all morning, he has not an idea even of the play that has been chosen and, when he hears, he is shocked.

It is Rushworth, still excited about his fancy dress, who gives Edmund the news of which play has been chosen. We get some idea of Fanny's own thoughts as she sympathizes with Edmund upon hearing the news. It can only be assumed that Fanny herself had some concerns about the appropriateness of the play: "Fanny's eyes followed Edmund, and her heart beat for him as she heard this speech, and saw his look, and felt what his sensations must be" (*MP*, 139). Edmund asks what to him is the obvious question, "But what do you do for women?" (*MP*, 139). Edmund is well aware of the types of character in the play. One of the female characters, Agatha, is a ruined woman who has given herself up to a man who abandons her while she is pregnant with his illegitimate child. Besides that, whoever plays Agatha must embrace whoever plays Frederick multiple times during the play. The other character, Amelia, is less bad but still has some very intimate moments in the play where she brazenly declares her love to her former tutor, Anhalt, and the actress must make some very questionable speeches to the man who plays

Anhalt. Generally, the play will put its actresses in some very intimate, physical contact with certain of the actors.

Edmund addresses his question about the women in the play to his sister Maria. Maria's fiancé is oblivious to any problems associated with the play; he is too distracted with his "two and forty speeches" (*MP*, 139). When the others leave the room, Edmund approaches Maria directly: "—but I must now, my dear Maria, tell *you*, that I think ["Lovers' Vows"] exceedingly unfit for private representation, and that I hope you *will* give it up.—I cannot but suppose you will when you have read it carefully over" (*MP*, 139-140). Edmund believes that once Maria reads the play, she will see the impropriety of the roles for women and not need to think of what her father's opinion would be on the subject. Edmund does not understand that it is the very inappropriateness that attracts Maria to the play. Maria has read the play and sees "nothing objectionable in it" (*MP*, 140). She resorts to mentioning that Mary Crawford finds nothing wrong with the play, attempting to force Edmund to choose between censuring both Maria and Mary, and censuring neither. Edmund ignores this attempt and points out that it is Maria's responsibility as the foremost young lady to guide the conduct of the others: "But in this matter it is you who are to lead. *You* must set the example.—If others have blunder'd, it is your place to set them right, and shew them what true delicacy is.—In all points of decorum, *your* conduct must be the law of the rest of the party" (*MP*, 140). Approaching the argument in this way, allows Edmund more influence since he is able to appeal to his sister's vanity. This placates Maria slightly, but the appeal of vanity is greater on the side of the play which will allow her to continue to admire and be admired by Henry in a more intimate style.

Maria still insists that it would be more improper for her to criticize the conduct of the others; in her eyes, it is more indecorous to rightly point out impropriety than to let it pass (*MP*, 140). An observer of this conversation might think that the fact that Maria assumes a general harangue would be required speaks to her lack of delicacy. Edmund overlooks this and points out that, far from making a "harangue" on the subject, all Maria need do is politely excuse herself from the play. She could claim that after having looked over the part, she realized she could not play it (*MP*, 140). Edmund believes that for the discerning, this will be enough to alert them to the impropriety of the play. The suggestion that Maria willingly give up the part is enough to turn the tide against Edmund's argument. Maria's primary concern is that if she were to give up the part, her sister Julia would surely step in to take the part (*MP*, 141). This is enough to

convince her she cannot “retract [her] consent” to play Agatha (*MP*, 141). Maria wants her chance of mock-intimacy with Henry.

Maria offers a false dilemma by claiming that, “If we are so very nice, we shall never act anything” (*MP*, 141). Mrs. Norris has been listening to the argument and adds her own brand of support for the play: “If every play is to be objected to, you will act nothing—and the preparations will be all so much money thrown away—and I am sure that would be a discredit to us all” (*MP*, 141). Maria and Mrs. Norris manage to address an argument that has not been made in this case: Rather than addressing Edmund’s argument against the impropriety of the particular play, they point out the problems with not having a play at all. Though Edmund would prefer that there be no play at all, he would have settled for a play that was less indecent. The defense of the play has become that there will be problems with every play and then they will act nothing. In that case, they will have wasted the family’s money spent on preparations and that would be an even worse offense, according to Mrs. Norris. Mrs. Norris claims that she will take personal responsibility for overseeing the play: “There should always be one steady head to superintend so many young ones” (*MP*, 141). What she sees as important is not the moral conduct of the “young ones,” but the expense of the project. This expense she may oversee admirably, but the conduct of her charges is another story. Edmund is forced to give up his attempts after it becomes clear that he has no support even from Mrs. Norris.

The Crawfords arrive later in the evening. Aware that Edmund does not approve of the play, Mary Crawford seeks to be conciliating. She jokes that those not taking part in the play must be even more relieved by the fact that the players have settled on a play than the players are themselves. This is the beginning of Mary’s attempt to bring Edmund into the scheme to play Anhalt, the poor clergyman. She asks the assembled players, “Who is to be Anhalt? What gentleman among you, am I to have the pleasure of making love to?” (*MP*, 143). The players must confess that there is no one cast as Anhalt yet. Mary asks Edmund advice on who should be cast in the part and she even jokes that perhaps he should take the part as it is the part of a clergyman. This joke does not have its intended effect: “*That* circumstance would by no means tempt me [...] for I should be sorry to make the character ridiculous by bad acting. It must be difficult to keep Anhalt from appearing a formal, solemn lecturer, and the man who chuses the profession itself, is, perhaps, one of the last who would wish to represent it on the stage” (*MP*, 145). And “with some feelings of resentment and mortification” Mary is forced to abandon her

attempt, knowing that her attempt at manipulation has been seen through and she personally rebuked (*MP*, 145).

4. Role Changes for Fanny and Edmund

Fanny, who has all the while silently witnessed the haggling over the play with no idea of being anything more than an observer, is commanded to play a part. Tom still needs to cast the Cottager's wife. Fanny tries to excuse herself politely in the way that Edmund advised Maria to do, "Indeed you must excuse me. I could not act any thing if you were to give me the world. No, indeed, I cannot act" (*MP*, 145). Tom will not accept "no" for an answer; he insists that the part is small and that Fanny will do it well enough. Tom attributes Fanny's reluctance to a fear of memorizing the speeches. Fanny declares that this is not her objection. Fanny tries repeatedly to politely decline, but Tom will not hear her properly. He hears her excuses as manifestations of her shyness and lack of confidence, and while she is shy and does lack confidence, in this case she is only trying to politely escape something to which she objects. Fanny looks to Edmund for support, but he provides little in this situation since he does not wish to frustrate his brother. All of the players pressure Fanny and finally, Mrs. Norris joins them. Mrs. Norris's attack is enough to bring Edmund to her defense. Edmund supports Fanny against Mrs. Norris, asking Mrs. Norris not to pressure Fanny: "—Her judgment may be quite as safely trusted.—Do not urge her anymore" (*MP*, 147). Mrs. Norris accuses Fanny of ingratitude if she will not do as her cousins ask: "I am not going to urge her[...]but I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her Aunt, and Cousins wish her—very ungrateful indeed, considering who and what she is" (*MP*, 147). Mrs. Norris has resorted to publicly humiliating Fanny by referencing her status as a dependent. Although it is Mrs. Norris who says this explicitly, it is Fanny's status as dependent that has likely made the others so willing to urge things on her without attention to her own preferences.

Even Mary is able to see the injustice in this attack and immediately moves her seat nearer to Fanny in order to shield and comfort her. Whether Mary comforts Fanny in order to restore herself into Edmund's good graces or because she really feels compassion for Fanny, the gesture prompts Fanny's gratitude. Mary seeks to please Fanny by complimenting her sewing and questioning her about her brother William. Fanny realizes that Mary's behavior is probably

prompted by self-interested motives, but she finds herself partly seduced by it: “She could not help admitting it to be very agreeable flattery, or help listening, answering with more animation than she had intended” (*MP*, 147-148). Fanny’s neglected state leaves her sensible of acts of kindness from others, even when Fanny suspects these acts to be motivated by something other than caring for her. Fanny knows that she ought not to allow herself to be pleased by Mary’s attentions, but cannot help being a little pleased when someone takes the trouble to try to please her.

Mary’s defense of Fanny has had the dual effect of softening Edmund’s feelings toward Mary and of making Fanny feel obliged to her. Soon after her kindness to Fanny, the other players begin to make plans for casting Anhalt. When a young man known very slightly by the company is suggested and Mary agrees to it, Edmund remains silent. It is left to Mary to apply to Fanny for help. She says in an aside to Fanny that the play “will be very disagreeable, and by no means what [she] expected” (*MP*, 149). Aware that Fanny is very close with Edmund, Mary hopes to enlist Fanny’s help in bringing Edmund into the play. Mary is well-aware of the intimacy that will be required between Amelia and Anhalt. She is also aware that Edmund is concerned about the propriety of such intimacy. If Edmund sees such intimacy as inappropriate when the pool of players is limited to the group of friends at the house, he will be much more alarmed by the idea of any outsider taking the part of Anhalt. This later plays a decisive role in Edmund’s rationalization of taking part in the play. After the tumult of the night, Fanny reflects on the events in her room:

To be called into notice in such a manner, to hear that it was a prelude to some thing so infinitely worse, to be told that she must do what was so impossible as to act; and then to have the charge of obstinacy and ingratitude, follow it, enforced with such a hint at the dependence of her situation, had been too distressing at the time, to make the remembrance when she was alone less so,—especially with the superadded dread of what the morrow might produce in continuation of the subject. (*MP*, 150)

Without Mary to shield her, Fanny is certain that the next day will bring an even more intense attack from her family and that she will inevitably be forced to play the part. The next morning,

she goes to the schoolroom which has been abandoned by all but her since school lessons ended (*MP*, 150). Here she tries to compose her thoughts and seek a solution to her problem.

The schoolroom is exclusively Fanny's since no one else wants it, and though it is never allowed to have a fire burning in its fireplace according to the order of Mrs. Norris, it is a place of familiarity and comfort for Fanny. She keeps books, her writing desk, her plants, and her crafts there. Much of Fanny's reflection goes on in this familiar place. Fanny tries to screw up her courage in order to oppose the plan for her being cast in the play, but begins to have doubts about whether she should resist: "...she had begun to feel undecided as to what she ought to do" (*MP*, 152-153). The inclinations of the others were so much in favor of her playing the part: "Was she right in refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for?" (*MP*, 153). Fanny wonders whether she has an obligation to increase the pleasure of the group. She begins even to wonder whether it is only her fear of display that is making her believe the acting scheme to be wrong: "Was it not ill-nature—selfishness—and a fear of exposing herself?" (*MP*, 153). Her inclination is against playing, but she worries that this inclination does not line up with her duty. She is concerned that in doing what she wants, she might merely be acting to avoid being pained by what should not pain a virtuous person; she might be acting from cowardice. She begins to wonder whether the fact that Sir Thomas would disapprove is even enough to justify her refusal: "It would be so horrible to her to act, that she was inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples" (*MP*, 153). During this small moral crisis, Fanny has begun to philosophize about the connection between inclination and duty as well as whether an action is right because it is approved of by Sir Thomas or approved of by Sir Thomas because it is right.

Edmund interrupts Fanny's reflections with concerns of his own. Again, we find Edmund coming to Fanny hoping for confirmation after he has already decided to act against his better judgment on a matter. Again, he will use Fanny to rationalize what his own reason cannot approve on its own. Edmund claims to have come to consult Fanny's opinion on whether he ought to take the part of Anhalt in the play. In contrast to Fanny's concerns about her inclinations, it is instructive to see how little attention Edmund pays to the biasing nature of his own inclinations. Edmund lays out his argument in favor of his joining the theatricals: An inappropriate play has already been chosen and now it has been suggested that they bring in an outsider to play the part of Anhalt. If an outsider is brought in, the players and play will be less private and more likely to gain public notice. Also, the young man brought in to play Anhalt will

be in a very intimate position with Mary. This intimacy would be very inappropriate. If such an intimacy can be prevented, it must. Since the play will not be cancelled, the only option left is for Edmund to play the part of Anhalt (*MP*, 153-154).

Fanny is shocked by this about-face on Edmund's part. The most obvious solution to the problem would be that Mary would recognize the danger of this inappropriate intimacy and withdraw from the play. But this possibility is not mentioned or admitted. Edmund is concerned about appearing inconsistent. It is against his inclination to appear in that way (*MP*, 154). Yet it is not against his inclination to spend time rehearsing closely with Mary. He tries to present his participation in the play as a great sacrifice. Edmund claims that he sees no alternative but to play. When Fanny protests, Edmund seeks to strengthen his argument. He asks Fanny to imagine herself in Mary's place (*MP*, 155). Edmund ignores the fact that Fanny would not as readily allow herself to be in such a position. Fanny must admit that it would surely be unpleasant to be in Mary's situation with respect to an almost stranger. Fanny would not like such intimacy with a stranger. Acting with a stranger is probably not what Mary expected when she agreed to play the part. Now, Edmund believes that it is his obligation to protect Mary from the unforeseen consequences of her agreeing to play the part. Again, no reference is made to the fact that Mary could see all of this for herself and withdraw. Edmund still fails to see Mary accurately.

Edmund has asked Fanny to imagine herself in Mary's position, but it is unclear how this is possible. Fanny would not have agreed to participate in the play in the first place. Given this fact, the values and motivations of Fanny and Mary must be very different. Mary remains in the play willingly; if Fanny had been forced to be in the play, the situation might have been different and Edmund might have been right to mitigate the unpleasantness she would face as a consequence. Fanny is partially bound by her dependent status; Mary is free. Since Mary could withdraw at any time, she could effectively protect herself. The fact that she does not so withdraw says something about her character. In a sense, she is holding herself hostage in the situation in order to oblige Edmund to act against his conscious to rescue her.

Fanny sensitively does not mention the obvious point that Mary could withdraw from the play. Instead, she is concerned about Edmund's being "drawn in to do what [he] has resolved against" (*MP*, 155). This is an important point. As Edmund has always seen the clergyman's conduct as a model for that of others and has argued at length that not all clergymen are hypocrites, Edmund's willingness to sacrifice his scruples here is a much greater sacrifice than

sacrificing his own convenience. He is essentially granting all the negative things that have been suggested about morality—that it is merely conventional and that its greatest proponents are hypocrites who would do what they preach against if only they could get away with it.

Edmund attempts to overcome this objection by pointing out that, as it is, he has no influence with the players. But if he compromises and participates in the play, he might be able to prevent the worst possible consequences from occurring: “[...]if I can be the means of restraining the publicity of the business, of limiting the exhibition, of concentrating our folly, I shall be well repaid” (*MP*, 155). If he can gain the trust of the players, he might be able to limit the performance of the play to the Grants and Rushworths as an audience. He must make concessions to worldliness. Fanny admits that limiting publicity would be a great gain, but she cannot admit that it would be worth sacrificing Edmund’s integrity. Edmund asks whether Fanny can think of any alternative action he might choose which would bring about as much or equal good (*MP*, 155). Fanny can think of no such action, but that is because Fanny is not thinking in the same sort of utilitarian terms that Edmund has fixed on. That others have chosen to do what is wrong and put themselves in compromising positions, in her eyes, is no reason for Edmund to choose to do the same. His acting to mitigate the bad consequences does nothing to mitigate the badness of their choices.

It is not merely the acceptability of his participating in the play that Edmund seems to be admitting. He seems to be admitting the much larger point that he cannot have any influence without compromising what he believes. He is opening the way for a future in which he seeks to be a worldlier clergyman, talking part in things of which he does not approve in order to be in the good graces of society. He is even admitting the possibility that the role of the clergyman is not as important or influential as he described, that he might do more good if he had more worldly influence. In short, he is allowing for the chance that he might diverge from his chosen path in life in order to please and protect Mary Crawford.

Facing Fanny’s continued disapproval, Edmund says, “If you are against me, I ought to distrust myself—and yet” (*MP*, 155). He knows that he has been the chief influence on Fanny’s moral development. Consequently, their views are usually similar. This should fully alert him to his danger. Nonetheless, Edmund is still fixated on protecting Mary from what he supposes will be an unwelcome intimacy with a stranger. His feelings for Mary cloud his ability to see Mary or the situation accurately. At the root of all his reasoning are the strong feelings he has for Mary

and it is not only his protectiveness of her feelings that motivates him, it is also his own jealousy. Edmund is acting incontinently. Coming too close to recognizing this causes him to deflect. He attacks Fanny for not caring enough about Mary's feelings in the situation, especially in light of how kind Mary has been to her the night before (*MP*, 155). Fanny admits that Mary was very kind to her and that she would be glad to have Mary "spared" from any unpleasantness, but she cannot bring herself to say more: "her conscience stopt her in the middle, but Edmund was satisfied" (*MP*, 156). Edmund's thoughts seem disordered. His conscience has told him what to do, but he has seized on all sorts of spurious reasons to act in a way contrary to what his conscience dictates. He knows the right thing to do and yet does not do it.

This moral disagreement with Edmund shakes Fanny's faith in his judgment. For the first time, Fanny is forced to acknowledge a division with her friend and teacher, and to consult her own judgment. She knows that Edmund has been inconsistent but wonders how her moral exemplar could act against what she knows to be right:

To be acting! After all his objections—objections so just and so public! After all that she heard him say and seen him look, and known him to be feeling. Could it be possible? Edmund so inconsistent. Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas! it was all Miss Crawford's doing. She had seen her influence in every speech, and was miserable. (*MP*, 156)

It is Mary's style of reasoning that Edmund has adopted. Fanny is left alone in her opposition to the play and to her participation in it. Her discussion with Edmund has made her even more firmly opposed. She now trusts her judgment after seeing how distorted Edmund's had become through his rationalizations. She decides that she will resist, but could not be tempted or hurt by anything her cousins might say. If somehow she is forced to be in the play, her feelings will be the same: "Her cousins might attack, but could hardly tease her. She was beyond their reach; and if at last obliged to yield—no matter—it was all misery now" (*MP*, 157). No incentive of kindness or cruelty can tempt Fanny either way now. Being in the play might embarrass her and make her miserable, but she is already miserable because she is alone in her judgment against the play and has seen her teacher fall.

Edmund's compromise brings with it the evil predicted: His brother and sister set him down as a hypocrite and their witnessing his moral descent is a great comfort to them (*MP*, 158). The lesson they take from Edmund's compromise is that human weakness is too strong even for the most morally upright to overcome. If Edmund cannot hold to his principles, Maria and Tom are all the more justified in their own behavior. Edmund and his moral and religious principles now appear no more than a bunch of conventional humbug. Edmund's "example" is a very bad one, rather than being the elevated one he defended as being the role of the clergyman. It is worth quoting Austen's description of Maria and Tom's view of the matter:

It was, indeed, a triumphant day to Mr. Bertram and Maria. Such a victory over Edmund's discretion had been beyond their hopes, and most delightful. There was no longer anything to disturb them in their darling project, and they congratulated each other in private on the jealous weakness to which they attributed the change, with all the glee of feelings gratified in every way. Edmund might still look grave, and say he did not like the scheme in general, and must disapprove the play in particular, their point was gained; he was to act, and he was driven to it by the force of selfish inclinations only. Edmund had descended from that moral elevation which he had maintained before, and they were both as much the better as the happier for the descent. (*MP*, 158)

Once their point is gained, Tom and Maria are very polite to Edmund and do not make known to him their opinions of his conduct. But, privately, their view of him as a hypocrite is confirmed.⁵¹

Tom miscalculates when he suggests that Fanny might be more willing to act in the play since Edmund has set the example. Edmund does defend Fanny against this new attack, telling Tom that Fanny "will certainly not act" (*MP*, 159). It may be that this defense of Fanny indicates a consciousness of guilt on Edmund's part. He cannot save himself, but he will protect Fanny from doing what neither of them truly believes to be proper. When Tom suggests that Fanny take

⁵¹ This is an indication of what sort of compromising and people-pleasing clergyman Edmund might become under the influence of Mary Crawford. Such a clergyman may think that he is popular but is probably the object of derision. Still, he will always be invited since he can give a veneer of legitimacy to any activity in which he is involved.

part, Fanny is no longer as indifferent to the outcome of these attempts as she was the night before. The depression and isolation caused by Edmund's fall are beginning to be overcome by Fanny's fear of acting and inclination against doing wrong.

All the players are very happy with Edmund's joining them. Mary's happiness, in particular, Edmund allows to convince him that he was right in protecting her from the unwanted intimacy with a stranger. Edmund thinks to himself that, "He was certainly right in respecting such feelings; he was glad he had determined upon it" (*MP*, 159). All evidence in the case, he interprets as confirming that he has made the right choice: "and the morning wore away in satisfactions very sweet, if not very sound" (*MP*, 159).

Seeking to ingratiate herself further with Edmund, Mary Crawford convinces Mrs. Grant to take the part that Tom intended for Fanny. Although Fanny is saved from the importunity of more requests, she is not content with being obliged to Mary or with Edmund's condition. Fanny is anxious about what has occurred; she is conscious of no wrongdoing on her own part, but she is not comfortable with Edmund's change:

Her mind had been never farther from peace. She could not feel that she had done wrong herself, but she was disquieted in every other way. Her heart and her judgment were equally against Edmund's decision; she could not acquit his unsteadiness; and his happiness under it made her wretched. (*MP*, 159)

Whereas Mary glories in turning Edmund aside from his scruples, Fanny seriously mourns his unsteadiness. Fanny's pain at Edmund's unsteadiness is only increased by the knowledge that Mary Crawford has such a strong influence on Edmund's mind and affections that she can make him change his most settled views. At the same time, all of Fanny and Edmund's history together has little sway over his decisions.

Edmund's defection is also especially disheartening since Fanny has always seen him as her moral superior. Fanny had always looked to Edmund for guidance when she was younger and, more recently, for support and confirmation in her moral judgments. Abruptly, she has found herself entirely alone in her judgment; there is no one in the house who shares her view and she must look to herself for her own support. Fanny is also "full of jealousy and agitation" (*MP*, 159). Still, there is more than jealousy of Edmund's happiness with Mary. Fanny sees

everyone happily in harmony in their views and aims. While she, because of her principles, is left as an outsider again. She is safe from being forced to act against her conscience, but she is also acutely aware of how little anyone notices: “She alone was sad and insignificant; she had no share in any thing; she might go or stay, she might be in the midst of their noise, or retreat from it to the solitude of the east room, without being seen or missed” (*MP*, 159). Fanny is morally isolated and abandoned even by her moral mentor.

When she sees how Mrs. Grant is treated, Fanny is tempted to regret not taking the part (*MP*, 160). Upon reflection, Fanny overcomes this temptation. Fanny entertains the thought that Mrs. Grant must be entitled to a level of respect and consideration to which Fanny could never presume. The others do not see Mrs. Grant as a dependent to be commanded. Fanny also makes the just reflection that even had she been included and respected, she could never be happy while she was conscious of doing wrong (*MP*, 160). Her conviction that Sir Thomas would disapprove combined with her deep sense of loyalty and desire to show proper respect toward Sir Thomas is enough to convince her she should not take part (*MP*, 160).

Fanny becomes aware that Julia is also very unhappy. Julia has willingly excluded herself from the play, not from any moral objection, but because of wounded feelings (*MP*, 160). Julia was conscious of the fact that Henry was flirting with both her and her sister. This ought to have been enough to make her adopt an attitude of indifference to Henry. Instead of being disgusted with Henry’s behavior, she entered into a competition for Henry’s attention. Triumph over her sister became just as much a matter of pride and vanity as it was a matter of a sincere feeling for Henry himself. Julia wanted to show her superiority to Maria by becoming Henry’s acknowledged favorite. When Henry accidentally betrays what seems to be his “preference for Maria,” Julia’s resentment leads her to ignore any dangers this preference might present for her sister and to nurse her own grievance instead of overcoming it (*MP*, 160). Julia ignored the early signs of Henry’s bad character and allowed herself to love him. After her disappointment, the same passionate nature that led her to love Henry too quickly and blindly leads her to an angry desire for vengeance on her sister and Henry: “[...] Julia was not superior to the hope of some distressing end to the attentions which were still carrying on there, some punishment to Maria for conduct so shameful towards herself, as well as towards Mr. Rushworth” (*MP*, 162). Fanny wishes for catastrophe to be avoided, while Julia wishes for a final catastrophe in revenge for her

pain. Though Fanny recognizes Julia's unhappiness, she does not seek Julia's confidence: "They were two solitary sufferers, or connected only by Fanny's consciousness" (*MP*, 163).

Neither Julia's brothers nor her aunt notice Julia's misery and although Mary is aware and makes Mrs. Grant aware of it, no one seeks to alleviate Julia's pain (*MP*, 161-162). All are occupied with their own concerns. Tom is distracted with the construction of his theatre; Edmund is engrossed by his struggle—"Edmund between his theatrical and his real part, between Miss Crawford's claims and his own conduct, between love and consistency, was equally unobservant" (*MP*, 163)—between his feelings for Mary and what he knows to be his duty; Mrs. Norris, whom Sir Thomas explicitly left in charge of the conduct of his daughters, is too busy economizing on the expenses of the theatrical production (*MP*, 163).

5. The Rehearsals

The casting finished, rehearsals finally begin. Fanny attends the rehearsals as an observer and finds herself the repository of the actors' complaints and concerns. Again, Fanny's role as outsider affords her a greater knowledge of the opinions and, consequently, the characters of those around her. She learns the actors' opinions of one another's skill and she is also left to observe that Maria neglects and avoids Rushworth. Rushworth notices only that people will seldom rehearse with him, but Fanny comes to fear Rushworth will come to her with more serious complaints eventually (*MP*, 164-165). From her unique position, Fanny finds that no one is content:

So far from being all satisfied and all enjoying, she found every body requiring something they had not, and giving discontent to the others.—Every body had a part either too long or too short;—nobody would attend as they ought, nobody would remember on which side they were to come in—nobody but the complainer would observe any directions. (*MP*, 165)

Through observing rehearsals and listening to complaints, Fanny finds that even those whom she almost envied because they were in seeming-harmony are dissatisfied and secretly at odds with one another.

When she is able to forget the actors and their real-life situations, Fanny enjoys the play very much. Henry and Maria act their parts well, but Fanny is unable to forget that Maria's acting is coming from real feeling for Henry. Fanny admires Henry's talent for acting even if she cannot admire him as a person:

As far as she could judge, Mr. Crawford was considerably the best actor of all; he had more confidence than Edmund, more judgment than Tom, more talent and taste than Mr. Yates—She did not like him as a man, but she must admit him to be the best actor, and on this point there were not many who differed from her. (*MP*, 165)

Fanny refrains from coming to the obvious conclusion that Henry is such a good actor because acting is what he is always doing, even in his actual life.

Rushworth notices the same fine acting between Henry and Maria, but he has inklings regarding the origin of Maria's talent. From the moment that Rushworth turns to Fanny in order to disparage Henry's acting and looks—"and between ourselves, to see such an undersized, little, mean-looking man, set up for a fine actor, is very ridiculous in my opinion" (*MP*, 165)—it becomes apparent that his former jealousy has returned regarding his fiancée and Henry. This time Fanny is able to see that Maria takes little trouble to placate Rushworth. After Henry seemed to declare his preference for her, Maria has been becoming more secure that Henry will propose and that she can break her engagement with Rushworth. Once Maria abandons Rushworth, everyone else seems to neglect him as well. No one expects him to do well with his part and no one but Fanny will help him learn it: "Fanny, in her pity and kind-heartedness, was at great pains to teach him how to learn, giving him all the helps and directions in her power, trying to make an artificial memory for him, and learning every word of his part herself, but without his being much the forwarder" (*MP*, 166). Without the prospect of having Rushworth as a husband and his wealth as her possession, all the potential Maria imagined seeing in Rushworth disappears for her and it becomes clear that her side of the engagement was motivated only by a love of Rushworth's wealth and social position. Without Maria's promptings, no one else sees any use in the man either.

Fanny's initial fear of having been abandoned and ignored turn out to be unfounded as everyone needs her for one thing or another. Fanny is to assist in each person's plans and

projects. She must help people rehearse; she must sew; she must act as confidante regarding people's minor discontent with one another. She is still disturbed that the play has been gone through with despite what everyone knows would be Sir Thomas's view of the matter, but she is not as unhappy as she expected to be:

Many uncomfortable, anxious, apprehensive feelings she certainly had; but with all these, and other claims on her time and attention, she was far from finding herself without employment or utility amongst them, as without a companion in uneasiness; quite as far from having no demand on her leisure as on her compassion. The gloom of her first anticipations was proved to have been unfounded. She was occasionally useful to all; she was perhaps as much at peace as any. (*MP*, 166)

Fanny is busy and her labor valued. This is a source of pleasure to her. She also finds that each of the cast members suffer from some private disquiet over one thing or another. The suffering and enjoyment from the play is mixed for all, though perhaps not all are innocent in their suffering or in their enjoyment.

During all of this, Mrs. Norris continues to try to undermine Fanny's confidence in herself and to remind her of her place as last. Mrs. Norris behaves as though she believes that Fanny is having just as much fun as the rest of those involved with play, but implies that Fanny is a little too much at leisure. Despite all of the work Fanny does, Mrs. Norris still finds reason for dissatisfaction. Mrs. Norris does her best to depress Fanny's spirits and take away Fanny's sense of her own usefulness. She tells Fanny, "*You* are best off, I can tell you, but if nobody did more than *you*, we should not get on very fast" (*MP*, 166). It is not clear that Mrs. Norris's attempt is successful. Fanny does not try to defend herself against Mrs. Norris's accusations. Though Mrs. Norris might take this as a tacit acknowledgment of the justice of her accusation, it may be that Fanny has finally recognized the injustice of Mrs. Norris's complaints and decided to remain silent in order to avoid more of them.

A full rehearsal of the play is scheduled for the next evening and Fanny is anxious. She will finally see the scene between Amelia and Anhalt during which Anhalt describes what love and marriage ought to be and Amelia declares her love for Anhalt (*MP*, 167). Given the relationship between Mary and Edmund, the scene will have special significance both for the

players and for the audience: “[Fanny] had read, and read the scene again with many painful, many wondering emotions, and looked forward to their representation of it as a circumstance almost too interesting. She did not *believe* they had yet rehearsed it even in private” (*MP*, 167). The similarities between the players and their parts are so strong that the playing of the part must also tend to be a means of communication concerning the players’ feelings for one another. It will also be a chance for onlookers to discern what the player’s true feelings are for one another.

During the day leading up to the rehearsal, Fanny works hard for her Aunt Norris but cannot keep herself from pondering the play. Fanny escapes to her room as soon as possible so that she might consider and prepare for the night’s rehearsal (*MP*, 168). She is also trying to escape from another unnecessary preparatory rehearsal of the first act in which there is so much physical intimacy between Henry and Maria. As she leaves, she sees Mrs. Grant and Mary coming towards the house and this forms another reason for escape. She is able to begin to think and compose herself for only about a half-hour when there is a knock on her door. It is Mary Crawford.

Anticipating that Edmund will seek Fanny’s council as well, Mary has come to ask Fanny to help her rehearse her part (*MP*, 168). Mary’s visit is to serve several of her own purposes: It gives her a chance to force upon Fanny the knowledge that there is some special relationship between Mary and Edmund; it allows her to connect herself more intimately with Fanny by asking Fanny a favor and seeming to share a confidence with her; it gives Mary the chance to examine Fanny’s feelings for Edmund; and it places her in a good position to demonstrate to Edmund—either through report from Fanny or by his own observation if he happens upon them—her caring for Fanny as their mutual friend. Originally Fanny was to be able to observe Edmund and Mary’s feelings unobserved but now Mary will be just as able to examine Fanny’s feelings. Fanny is quite disturbed by the idea of being asked to play Edmund’s role in a private rehearsal. This will make Fanny even more conscious of the intimacy and import of Edmund’s role. Mary points out to Fanny just how difficult the part will be:

“Have you ever happened to look at the part I mean?” continued Miss Crawford, opening her book. “Here it is. I did not think much of it at first—but, upon my word—. There, look at that speech, and that, and that. How am I ever to look him in the face and say such things? Could you do it? But then he is your cousin, which makes all the difference. You

must rehearse it with me, that I may fancy you him, and get on by degrees. You have a look of his sometimes.” (*MP*, 168-169)

In this short speech, Mary has conveyed quite a lot. Perhaps even more than Fanny understands immediately. Besides assuming a façade of maidenly decency for Fanny’s benefit, Mary is making sure that Fanny knows what the scene involves. She is also trying to determine whether Fanny has been interested enough to examine the part herself. She wants to know whether Fanny would feel comfortable making such love-speeches to Edmund, but she also wants to make Fanny aware that between Fanny and Edmund such speeches could only be acting because as Fanny is Edmund’s cousin such a love between Fanny and Edmund would be inappropriate.

Fanny reluctantly agrees to rehearse with Mary. Mary has made any outward show of reluctance or a refusal impossible. Fanny agrees only to read the part without trying to act and makes the mistake of giving away the fact that she “can say very little of [the part]” as an excuse (*MP*, 169). Mary seizes on this and gently rebukes Fanny for the interest she has accidentally revealed: “None of it, I suppose” (*MP*, 169). Mary goes on to mention things that can only increase Fanny’s discomfort. Looking about the old schoolroom, Mary speculates about what Sir Thomas would say if he could see them rehearsing there and all over his house (*MP*, 169). She goes on to mention the other uncomfortable situation Fanny had fled from—Mary describes the rehearsal going on downstairs between Maria and Henry—and says the following:

“If they are not perfect, I shall be surprised. By the bye, I looked in upon them five minutes ago, and it happened to be exactly at one of the times when they were trying not to embrace, and Mr. Rushworth was with me. I thought he began to look a little queer, so I turned it off as well as I could, by whispering to him, ‘We shall have an excellent Agatha, there is something so maternal in her manner, so completely maternal in her voice and countenance.’ Was not that well done of me? He brightened up directly. Now for my soliloquy.” (*MP*, 169)

Mary has made it known to Fanny that she sees very clearly what is going on between Henry and Maria, and that she finds it amusing rather than dangerous. She also displays callousness towards

Rushworth that it is certain the kind-hearted Fanny must find abhorrent. In this short and careless speech, Mary has revealed even more of her bad character to Fanny.

As Fanny and Mary progress in their rehearsal of the scene, there is another knock at the door and Edmund enters. It seems that he too was concerned about preparing for their first rehearsal (*MP*, 169). Edmund and Mary are pleased by the coincidence that similar intentions brought them together and spend some time praising Fanny's helpfulness. Fanny cannot share their excitement about the coincidence: "She could not equal them in their warmth. Her spirits sank under the glow of theirs, and she felt herself becoming too nearly nothing to both, to have any comfort in being sought by either" (*MP*, 170). The primary thing that she has been trying to prepare herself for viewing has made its way to her early; Fanny is forced to look on as Mary and Edmund rehearse together and "Fanny was wanted only to prompt and observe them" (*MP*, 170). Fanny is asked to exercise her judgment and criticize their acting. Yet, she cannot bring herself to do it (*MP*, 170).

Fanny cannot feel comfortable as critic since she believes herself to be incapable of disinterested observation in this case: "[H]ad she been otherwise qualified for criticism, her conscience must have restrained her from venturing at disapprobation. She believed herself to feel too much of it in the aggregate for honesty or safety in particulars" (*MP*, 170). Fanny has found herself in the position of disapproving so much of the entire situation, not merely the play but the intimacy with the Crawfords and all the consequences following from it, that she cannot feel comfortable venturing an opinion on this small part of the whole. She is forced to watch and feign good humor as Edmund displays a passion in his acting that is the result of his true feelings rather than any acting talent. Mary and Edmund take her distraction as a sign of fatigue and regret making her tired: "[...]she was thanked and pitied; but she deserved their pity, more than she hoped they would ever surmise" (*MP*, 170).

Fanny's fear about the performance and the effect it would have on her is confirmed. As a result of the actors' real passion for each other, their acting will be a success. When Fanny is finally alone and able to reflect, she admits that "their performance would, indeed, have such nature and feeling in it as must ensure their credit, and make it a very suffering exhibition to herself" (*MP*, 170). Having recognized their shared feelings, Fanny can no longer hope that Edmund and Mary are not in love. At the same time that Fanny has come to recognize her own

love for Edmund, she has also come to recognize her obligation to suppress and hide this love along with the accompanying feeling of pain in observing Mary and Edmund together.

Fanny is already unhappy and vulnerable when an absent Mrs. Grant makes it necessary to find someone to play the part of Cottager's wife in the rehearsal. Tom demands that Fanny play the part. Fanny now regrets having come to the rehearsal at all and sees this application as her proper punishment for indulging her curiosity and not remaining in her room (*MP*, 172). Because she knows the part, she is forced to agree to play it. Fortunately for Fanny and unfortunately for the rest of the players, Sir Thomas happens to arrive right as they commence the rehearsal. Julia comes to announce his arrival and, though she has been resentful toward the play and its players, her awareness of what must be her father's disapproval when he discovers what his children are doing brings her back into fellowship with her enemies (*MP*, 172). Fanny is rescued by the arrival of Sir Thomas, one of the people she fears most in the world.

Sir Thomas's absence has been the opening for much change at Mansfield Park. Mrs. Norris has orchestrated the engagement of his daughter Maria to a man with much wealth and a good family but with little sense. A new acquaintanceship has been formed between the Bertram children and their neighbors' half-siblings the Crawfords. Three of Sir Thomas's children have fallen in love—Edmund with Mary, Julia and Maria with Henry—and his niece has discovered her love for her Edmund. Hearts have been broken, dangerous flirtations have been engaged in all under the watch of Sir Thomas's surrogate Mrs. Norris. Several important things come of the play in particular. First of all, Fanny has finally proven herself valuable in having unfailingly good judgment and in being more steadfast in her judgment than anyone else in Sir Thomas's absence. Second, Maria has come to believe that Henry will certainly propose to her if she shows herself free of an obligation to Rushworth. Third, after having been disillusioned regarding Henry's intentions, Julia has begun to form an attachment to Mr. Yates. Fanny's good behavior merits attention from her guardian and she begins to receive more consideration for her feelings and her comfort than she has ever had before.

When Sir Thomas puts a stop to the play, the young people soon disperse. Henry leaves almost immediately. Maria, having believed that Henry would soon come to the point, is disappointed when Henry leaves suddenly. The end of the play marks the end of his interest in the proceedings at Mansfield Park, specifically his interest in playing with affections of the Bertram sisters. Henry would no longer be able to play his game of ambiguity while under the

watchful eye of Sir Thomas. The abandoned Maria takes up her engagement to Rushworth as though nothing had interrupted its smooth progress and, despite her father's offering to extricate her from a marriage with what he has discovered is an ignorant and inferior young man, Maria insists on marrying Rushworth. She will still have all of the wealth and consequence she had originally planned on as well as the satisfaction of having shown that she was not hurt by Henry's trifling with her.

6. The Objection to the Play

The play has been a stumbling block for many readers of *Mansfield Park*. As is often pointed out, it seems strange that Jane Austen would mean to be critical of the practice of private theatricals since her own family often took part in them. On closer examination, it is not private theatricals in general that are being condemned, but rather such theatricals under certain circumstances and undertaken for certain personal purposes.

Many people interpret the condemnation of the play in *Mansfield Park* as a general condemnation of theatricals based on the dangerous effects of imitative arts. Trilling writes that, "It is the fear that the impersonation of a bad or inferior character will have a harmful effect upon the impersonator, that, indeed, the impersonation of any other self will diminish the integrity of the real self" (Trilling, 132). This concern turns out to be too broad. Although imitation is an important tool in habituation, it is not a worry about bad habituation that makes the play an evil overall. Rather, it is that the play is being used as a means for the playing out the desires the young people already have but under the cover of being a fiction: "The impropriety lies in the fact that they are not acting, but are finding an indirect means to gratify desires which are illicit, and should have been contained" (Butler, M. 232). Henry and Maria as well as Edmund and Mary are looking for a pretext for close physical intimacy. Mr. Rushworth is looking for a chance to flatter his self-importance. Tom wants another chance to be entertaining and entertained. Mr. Yates has a desire for dramatic ranting and raving.

Some people have criticized Fanny for agreeing at the last moment to take on the role of Cottager's wife: "In the end, Fanny is saved from the moral degradation of actually taking part in the play by the arrival of Sir Thomas" (Jenkins, 354). But agreement to take on this role is not motivated by a desire to play a part by means of which she can indulge some secret desire to

interact with the others in a questionable way while under the cloak of playing a part. Rather, she is doing it at the last minute and without the benefit of the multiple rehearsals others have had for gratifying their illicit desires. Fanny gets a part by default. The play-acting of the tender embraces of Maria and Henry as Agatha and Frederick, the seduction of Edmund by Mary in the role of Amelia wooing the clergyman Anhalt, and the oblivious strutting about of Rushworth as the vain and foolish Count Cassel, both betray the true characters of the actors and play a role in bringing about the events at the conclusion of the novel.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COURTSHIP: HENRY'S COURTSHIP

1. Introduction

Until now, Fanny has been ignored and neglected. She has been used primarily as a companion for Lady Bertram and a runner of errands for Mrs. Norris. Fanny has never had the experience of being considered and attended to by anyone besides Edmund. Her diffidence as well as her being obscured by her cousins and held back by Mrs. Norris made her an unlikely friend for the gregarious Mary and an unattractive target for nourishing Henry's vanity. When the Bertram sisters depart, Fanny becomes the only young woman in the house. With this comes not only responsibility but risk since she can no longer hide. Fanny knows well how to behave in her former position. She must now develop her practical wisdom in her new context and in entirely new areas since she has become an appropriate object for both the friendship of neighboring gentlewomen as well as for courtship.

Through Henry's courtship, we learn more about his character. Henry turns out to have some attractive qualities that, were he not vain, would contribute to virtue: He is enthusiastic about and sensitive to what is beautiful. This sensitivity to beauty extends to beauty of character. These attractive qualities present a challenge to Fanny's judgment of Henry. Having seen him at his worst indulging his vanity with the Bertram sisters, she must now come to terms with the fact that a vicious person can often have attractive qualities and yet still be bad. The problem is that Henry is able to discern and appreciate virtue when he beholds it, but his habits make him incapable being virtuous himself. He is able to imitate virtue only temporarily until his habits reassert themselves. While Henry's character is indeed bad and he is corrupted by the vice of vanity, it is difficult not to see this corruption as to some extent tragic. We learn of Henry and Mary Crawford that while both have a large degree of natural virtue—both are clever and charming as well as being naturally disposed to be attracted to virtue—their upbringing is such as to have ruined them and will ultimately keep them from the society of those they admire. The Crawfords' aunt and uncle have provided them with an education that has made them unsuited for making happy marriages.

2. Henry's Evening Project

When Henry begins his courtship of Fanny, he has an uphill battle. Fanny has seen all of the mischief and discord his flirtation has caused for the Bertram sisters and she feels it a “blessing” to have him gone when the play’s rehearsals are interrupted (*MP*, 190). She has had the opportunity to observe Henry’s behavior to her cousins closely. She has witnessed how he progressed in the affections of the two sisters by depending on ambiguity in his language—the way he seems to commit himself to one meaning while benefiting from the plausibility of his meaning something else entirely—and she has seen how he used these affections for his personal amusement and entertainment, as a game to play during a short vacation. She has witnessed his talent for acting both on and off of a stage. Thus, she has reason to distrust him and be glad of his departure.

The marriage of Maria is expedited by Henry’s departure and when Maria leaves for her honeymoon travels, she takes her younger sister with her. This leaves Fanny as the principal young woman of the house. People now desire her presence for the pleasure of her company rather than to take advantage of her sewing skills or to use her as a courier. Even Mary Crawford comes to depend on Fanny’s presence since the other two young women have gone away (*MP*, 207). The two young ladies become companions and Fanny makes many visits to the parsonage. Fanny is invited to the parsonage with Edmund for dinner and the evening of the dinner reveals that Henry has returned to the parsonage (*MP*, 222-223).

Henry wants to make an evening’s project of pleasing Fanny but his behavior only serves to increase Fanny’s aversion to him. His obliviousness to her dislike demonstrates both the great extent of his vanity and his inability to imagine any woman intelligent enough to see through his charm. The Crawfords have underestimated Fanny’s intelligence based upon her quietness. They fail to see the power inherent in being ignored: Fanny has been privy to many of the tender moments between Henry and the Bertram sisters, so she has had time to reflect on and understand Henry’s bad intentions. He sees her as the most appropriate person with whom to entertain himself in her cousins’ absence. In truth, there could be no young lady less appropriate since she is armed with a full knowledge of his character.

During the dinner, Henry attempts to use his usual charm upon Fanny for a night’s amusement. He tries to engage her in pleasant conversation but her answers are quiet, short, and

made in such a way as to discourage further conversation. Immediately upon seeing Henry, Fanny thinks of her two cousins. It is clear to her that Henry is not thinking of them at all:

Her two absent cousins, especially Maria, were much in her thoughts on seeing him; but no embarrassing remembrance affected *his* spirits. Here he was again on the same ground where all had passed before, and apparently as willing to stay and be happy without the Miss Bertrams, as if he had never known Mansfield in any other state. (*MP*, 224)

Henry says little of the Bertram sisters until he turns to Mary and “With a significant smile which made Fanny quite hate him, he said, ‘So! Rushworth and his fair bride are at Brighton I understand—Happy man!’” (*MP*, 224). This short communication is enough to reveal how little he cared about the feelings of the Bertram sisters and trouble he has caused. It reveals his lack of respect for Maria and makes it clear that he never cared for either sister. All was a game for his amusement. It also makes it clear that he regarded Maria as a cold-hearted fortune-seeker and, therefore, as having been fair game for his amusements. Were Henry aware of Fanny’s true thoughts he would know that his speeches had done the very opposite of making himself pleasant to Fanny. Rather, he had only revealed further how much he is led astray by his own vanity and how little he considered the feelings of others when not feeding his vanity.

Noticing that he has failed to please Fanny, Henry tries many different tactics which all fail. Henry goes on to speak disparagingly of Rushworth, a man toward whom Fanny believes he should feel only shame and regret. Henry jokes about Maria’s marrying Rushworth for his money and her lack of affection for her husband. In an attempt to compliment Fanny and draw her into the conversation, Henry alludes to her attempts at teaching Rushworth his part in the play (*MP*, 224). This only offends Fanny more. Fanny has seen how jealous and hurt Rushworth was while Henry flirted with Maria. Seeing that he has missed the mark, Henry goes on to discuss how he regrets the end of the play. But his description of the play seems to be only a thinly veiled description of how much he enjoyed the seduction of Maria: “Always some little objection, some little doubt, some little anxiety to be got over. I never was happier” (*MP*, 225). Fanny understands his meaning well, but is disgusted with him: “With silent indignation, Fanny repeated to herself, ‘Never happier!—never happier than when doing what you must know was not justifiable!—never happier than when behaving so dishonourably and unfeelingly!—Oh!

what a corrupted mind!” (MP, 225)). He pushes things even farther when he expresses the wish that Sir Thomas had taken a few more weeks to return, implying that within a few more weeks his seduction of Maria might have been complete. Fanny can hardly contain herself and responds with anger, telling Henry that she is glad that her uncle returned when he did. This is the most she has ever spoken to him and it clearly attracts his attention. He changes his tone to try to please her and though she does not respond, she has unknowingly made herself his next target for seduction.

The next morning, Henry announces his intention to stay and work on the affections of Fanny Price. He finds that he “cannot be satisfied without making a small hole in Fanny Price’s heart” (MP, 229). Henry claims to be attracted to her beauty, but it becomes clear that he is fascinated with discovering and manipulating her character. Fanny Price is a challenge to him:

“I do not quite know what to make of Miss Fanny. I do not understand her. I could not tell what she would be at yesterday. What is her character? Is she solemn?—Is she queer?—Is she prudish? Why did she draw back and look so grave at me? I could hardly get her to speak. I never was so long in company with a girl in my life—trying to entertain her—and succeed so ill! Never met with a girl who looked so grave on me! I must get the better of this. Her looks say, ‘I will not like you, I am determined not to like,’ and I say, she shall.” (MP, 230).

From this speech, Mary recognizes the source of Henry’s attraction to Fanny: Fanny feels no attraction and, rather, a positive aversion to Henry. It is clear that Mary fully understands that Henry intends to treat Fanny just as he did her cousins. At the same time, Mary makes little attempt to protect Fanny from Henry. It is clear that Mary is no real friend to Fanny. She merely asks Henry not to hurt Fanny too much and then goes on to “[leave] Fanny to her fate” (MP, 231). Henry will find amusement in trying to seduce Fanny and Mary will be amused by observing it.

The narrator grants that despite Fanny’s increasingly good moral judgment, Henry would certainly have been successful in disturbing Fanny’s peace had it not been for the fact that Fanny happened to already be in love with her cousin Edmund. Fanny has always been susceptible to kindness and, in the past, kindness has always come to her only from those who would influence

her for the better. Whereas the Bertram sisters' vanity could be worked on for the purposes of seduction, mere kindness and attentiveness might have been enough to attach Fanny. Luckily, someone had already attached her—albeit unwittingly—by these means: her cousin Edmund. It is tempting to believe that Fanny could have resisted Henry even without her attachment to Edmund, but without that attachment the loneliness that is a constant challenge to Fanny might have been complete. Thinking back to the play, her major temptations to act against her better judgment were the need to please others and the desire not to be left all alone. It is possible that without her prior attachment, Fanny would have succumbed to Henry sooner even than her cousins did.

Jane Austen gives us this general idea when her narrator says the following of Mary's leaving Fanny to her fate:

—a fate which, had not Fanny's heart been guarded in a way unsuspected by Miss Crawford, might have been a little harder than she deserved; for although there doubtless are such unconquerable ladies of eighteen (or one should not read about them) as are never to be persuaded into love against their judgement by all that talent, manner, attention, and flattery can do, I have no inclination to believe Fanny one of them, or to think that with so much tenderness of disposition and so much taste as belonged to her, she could have escaped heart-whole from the courtship (though the courtship only of a fortnight) of such a man as Crawford, in spite of there being some previous ill-opinion of him to be overcome, had not her affection been engaged elsewhere. With all the security which love of another and disesteem of him could give to the peace of mind he was attacking, his continued attentions—continued, but not obtrusive, and adapting themselves more and more to the delicacy of her character, obliged her very soon to dislike him less than formerly. She had by no means forgotten the past, and she still thought as ill of him as ever; but she felt his powers, he was entertaining, and his manners were so improved, so polite, so seriously and blamelessly polite, that it was impossible not to be civil to him in return. (*MP*, 231-232)

His ability to discover and conform to what is pleasing to another stood him in good stead. His consideration and kindness makes Fanny feel that she must show some return of kindness. This

was said to have taken place in only the first few days of his visit. If Fanny's heart had been free, Henry's progress might have been even greater despite her prior knowledge of his character.

The surprise is that because of Fanny's friendly distance, Henry's intentions begin a transition from being completely dishonorable to being honorable. In his determination to please and attach Fanny, he comes to recognize her value and he himself becomes dependent upon her approval. In short, he falls in love with Fanny.

3. William and Henry

After the first few days of Henry's attempts at pleasing and during which he is able to gain the concession of her civility, Fanny receives a letter from her beloved sailor-brother William. The ship on which Fanny's brother William is a midshipman will soon land in England and he will come for a visit to the park. Henry had recently learned a great deal of information on the subject of William and his career at sea with the express purpose of pleasing Fanny (*MP*, 232). Henry hopes to use the news of the arrival of her brother's ship as another way of ingratiating himself with her, but she has received her brother's letter prior to Henry's attempt at delivering the news. Despite missing this opportunity, his attempt is greeted with more warmth than he is used to from Fanny since she is so happy about her brother. Kindness to William turns out to be the best means of pleasing Fanny.

Seeing Fanny with her brother impresses Henry as much as it does anyone else. The affection of these siblings for one another makes them both more loveable in the eyes of others (*MP*, 235). Henry actually comes to like William and comes to like Fanny even better after witnessing how the brother-sister pair interacts. Henry's own sister does not love him in the way that Fanny does her own brother. Though Mary treats Henry as a confederate in mischief, she does not care about him or about his well-being. As William describes his adventures at sea, Henry observes Fanny:

It was a picture which Henry Crawford had moral taste enough to value. Fanny's attractions increased—increased twofold—for the sensibility which beautified her complexion and illumined her countenance, was an attraction in itself. He was no longer in doubt of the capabilities of her heart. She had feeling, genuine feeling. It would be

something to be loved by such a girl, to excite the first ardours of her young, unsophisticated mind! She interested him more than he had foreseen. A fortnight was not enough. His stay became indefinite. (*MP*, 235-236)

Although there is still a distance in the way he views Fanny—i.e., to some extent, he views her as an interesting specimen of womanhood upon whom to make an experiment—he is beginning to recognize and honor her virtue. Henry regards this virtue primarily as aesthetically pleasing: Henry finds goodness beautiful and attractive but his enthusiasm for virtue does not extend to cultivating his own virtue. Still, Henry's fascination with Fanny has begun its transition from a selfish attempt at entertaining himself to a true courtship.

Henry takes it upon himself to entertain and help William as much as he can. Henry has come also to admire the brother. He cannot listen to William's stories of a life at sea without wishing he could *display* the same sort of unselfishness and bravery: "The glory of heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance, made his own habits of selfish indulgence appear in shameful contrast" (*MP*, 236). Of course the wish is fleeting as are most of Henry's passions. He is soon glad to have all the advantages of his wealth and leisure. Henry still attempts to please Fanny with kindnesses to her brother (*MP*, 237). When William expresses an interest in hunting, Henry is able then to offer him a horse and the opportunity to hunt with him. Although Fanny is at first alarmed by the prospect of her inexperienced brother hunting, she is grateful to Henry when it becomes clear that William will be safe and get much enjoyment from it.

Soon even Sir Thomas cannot help but notice the attention Henry is paying to his niece. While the dinner guests including Sir Thomas are amusing themselves after a long overdue dinner at the parsonage, Henry brings up the topic of Edmund's future home at Thornton Lacey; this is the house Edmund is to live in after he takes orders and takes up his post as clergyman (*MP*, 241). Henry states his desire to help Edmund improve this house before his move. Henry's mentioning this topic proves a blunder as his sister Mary alludes to the day at Sotherton during which Henry was meant to be helping improve Rushworth's home rather than disturbing it. Upon hearing mention of the day at Sotherton, Fanny cannot help remembering the bad behavior of Henry that day: "Fanny's eyes were turned for a moment with an expression more than grave, even reproachful" (*MP*, 244-245). Having seen Fanny's reaction, Henry is quick to privately acknowledge to Fanny his bad judgment that day: "I should be sorry to have my powers of

planning judged by the day at Sotherton. I see things very differently now. Do not think of me as I appeared then” (*MP*, 245).

Later, Sir Thomas notices Henry is still detailing plans for Thornton Lacey with Fanny as his only auditor. Henry wants to rent the house and improve it himself. Sir Thomas overhears Henry expressing his desire to settle in the neighborhood and “find himself continuing, improving, and perfecting that friendship and intimacy with the Mansfield Park family which was increasing in value to him every day” (*MP*, 246). Sir Thomas is pleased both by the respectful way that Henry is expressing his interest and the proper way in which Fanny is receiving it; and though Sir Thomas cannot accept Henry’s plans for Thornton Lacey, he tells Henry that he would be happy to have him as a neighbor in any other house (*MP*, 247-248).

Shortly after Sir Thomas has made the discovery of Henry’s interest in Fanny, William mentions his wish to dance with his sister and this gives Sir Thomas the chance to forward Fanny’s marriage opportunity (*MP*, 250-251). A good marriage—at least in worldly terms—was one of the chief ends aimed at in bringing Fanny to Mansfield Park. Not having been present to witness Henry’s shabby treatment of his daughters, Sir Thomas can have no idea of Henry’s questionable character. What Sir Thomas is aware of is Henry’s ample fortune and his status as a gentleman, two attributes that prove very attractive in suitor. Sir Thomas is even more convinced of Henry’s admiration for Fanny when he overhears Henry claiming to be able to give a full description of Fanny’s dancing—unknown to Sir Thomas, a description that happens to be not drawn from memory since Henry was preoccupied with another woman at the time—and his suspicions receive more confirmation. Sir Thomas decides that he will give a dance for the young people with the dual purpose of providing them with entertainment and to give Fanny her “coming out” (*MP*, 250-251).

4. The Amber Cross and the Chain

Both Fanny and Edmund find themselves in perplexities with regard to courtship and marriage. The dance should be a matter of happiness for Fanny but she is faced with yet another challenge in preparing for the dance. Mary Crawford has joined her brother fully in his attempts to woo Fanny and the Crawfords find an ingenious way to try to oblige Fanny to Henry. Despite her happiness and excitement about the ball, Fanny feels a great deal of anxiety about how she

ought to dress. One particularly worrisome problem is her amber cross. While on his travels, her brother William had sent her a beautiful amber cross and though he had intended to buy her a chain to put it on, had not been able to do so as of yet. Fanny wants to wear this beautiful cross in honor of her brother and fears that failing to wear it would be “mortifying” to her brother (*MP*, 254). The problem of finding a proper chain on which to hang this precious gift occupies Fanny’s mind. The quest for a chain provides Mary and Henry with a new means of attack.

Meanwhile, anxieties about more momentous decisions occupy Edmund’s mind. Around this same time, Edmund’s mind is on “ordination and matrimony” (*MP*, 254-255). Following the ball, Edmund is to take orders. That part of his life will be decided, but he is left in doubt as to whether the woman of his choice will choose him. Mary has warned him that the very fact that he is to be ordained figures as a reason against marrying him. She desires wealth and consequence, always assuming that she would settle on an eldest brother. Against her vitiated judgment, she has become attached to Edmund. Edmund is certain of his own preference for Mary. Now, it is left to her to overcome her preference for wealth and London society or to overcome her preference for Edmund:

The issue of all depended on one question. Did she love him enough to forego what used to be essential points—did she love him enough to make them no longer essential? And this question, which he was continually repeating to himself, though oftenest answered with a “Yes,” had sometimes its “No.” (*MP*, 255).

Mary had received a letter and an invitation from a London friend and Edmund observed her enthusiasm for this visit. This enthusiasm weighed on the side of a “No” to marriage. Later, Mary seemed saddened by her commitment to leave Mansfield, as “she began to believe neither the friends nor the pleasures she was going to were worth those she left behind” (*MP*, 256). This regret at leaving Mansfield weighed on the side of “Yes.” What will truly determine Mary’s answer is whether Mary is redeemable: Is she incontinent or intemperate? If she is incontinent, she at least knows what is right even if she is not yet capable of being brought to make her inclinations conform to virtue. This allows for hope. If she is intemperate and therefore unsuspecting that there is anything wrong with her inclinations, she will see no reason to change at all. This would make Edmund’s cause a hopeless one.

While the alleviation of Edmund's serious anxieties hangs upon the character and decision of another, Fanny must be active in seeking advice about her dress and in solving the seemingly minor problem of the amber cross. Fanny sets out to ask Mary and Mrs. Grant's advice on her dress. Mary Crawford is the first to raise the issue of the cross in their consultation (*MP*, 257). Mary presents Fanny with a small box filled with gold chains and necklaces, and requests that Fanny choose one for her amber cross. Fanny is reluctant to accept the offer as she is unused to such generosity, but Mary overcomes Fanny's concerns. Fanny searches the box for the piece of jewelry that appears the least valuable. Despite a preference for something simpler and less valuable, she ends by choosing the necklace Mary has seemed to want her to choose (*MP*, 258).

The necklace is attractive and Fanny cannot help but be "pleased" with it. Her feelings are against being obliged by Mary, but she believes this is "an unworthy feeling" given Mary's kindness to her (*MP*, 258). Mary is pleased with Fanny's choice for a special reason. Mary soon reveals that Fanny has someone else to thank for the necklace: It had been a gift to Mary from her brother Henry. Mary tells Fanny, "He gave it to me, and with the necklace I make over to you all the duty of remembering the original giver" (*MP*, 259). Fanny is shocked by the revelation that the necklace had been a gift to Mary from someone else. For her to accept the necklace given to Mary as a gift would be bad enough, but to take a brother's gift seems to Fanny very wrong (*MP*, 259). Fanny treasures the amber cross given to her as a gift by her own brother so she assumes that Mary must or at least ought to feel the same way about the necklace from Henry. When Fanny tries to give the necklace back, Mary teases her. Mary asks whether Fanny is worried that Henry will see the necklace and suspect theft, that Henry will believe that some strong sentiment is implied by her wearing the necklace, or that Mary and Henry had contrived to present Fanny with Henry's keepsake according to Henry's wishes (*MP*, 259). Mary also admits that the necklace means very little to her. Fanny is embarrassed by all of Mary's suggestions regarding her motivations. Since she can no longer protest without Mary's attributing at least one of these motives to her rejection of the necklace, Fanny is forced to accept the necklace.

Fanny thanks Mary for the gift, but she is not comfortable with Mary's allusions to Henry's attentions. There is something about the look in Mary's eyes that worries Fanny (*MP*, 260). Fanny has noticed Henry's attentions and his attempts make himself agreeable to her, "he

was something like what he had been to her cousins” (*MP*, 260). From this, Fanny has concluded that Henry seeks to trifle with her in the way he did her cousins. She is unsurprised that Henry would amuse himself in this way and that Mary would be complicit in it since Mary, “complaisant as a sister, was careless as a woman and a friend” (*MP*, 260). With the acquisition of the necklace comes more anxiety rather than less since she must now decide how to handle the combined attacks of a sister and brother.

When she returns home, Fanny finds Edmund in her room writing her a note. Edmund came to her room to present her with his own gift: A gold chain for her amber cross. He quickly presents her with the chain and begins to hurry away when she stops him. Fanny is now faced with a dilemma. Fanny is very grateful for the chain, but she no longer knows what to do. The chain Edmund has given her is exactly to her taste and, as a gift from her more-than-brother Edmund, the chain is perfect for the cross: “they must and shall be worn together” (*MP*, 262). Edmund is glad she is happy and he admits to Fanny, “Believe me, I have no pleasure in the world superior to that of contributing to yours. No, I can safely say, I have no pleasure so complete, so unalloyed. It is without drawback” (*MP*, 262). It is clear as he says this that he must be thinking of Mary, the other person to whom he desires to give pleasure, and observing that all he does to please her comes with some moral hazard that ruins his own pleasure. Fanny is so distracted by his kind words that she nearly forgets to state her dilemma. But she is brought back to her senses by Edmund. She tells her story about Mary’s gift and suggests that perhaps she should return the necklace. Edmund, who a moment ago seemed very much struck with the negative points of his association with Mary, seizes on this gift as a sign of Mary’s good nature and tells Fanny that she should not think of returning it (*MP*, 262-263).

Though Fanny prefers Edmund’s chain, Edmund insists that she wear Mary’s necklace. Though a few moments before, Edmund seemed concerned primarily with giving Fanny pleasure, he is now more concerned that Mary’s pleasure in giving Fanny a gift be unalloyed: “For one night, Fanny, for only one night if it be a sacrifice—I am sure you will upon consideration make that sacrifice rather than give pain to one who has been so studious of your comfort” (*MP*, 263). This gift gives Edmund hope that Mary is not lost to him. Edmund is convinced that the gift of the necklace shows real good will towards Fanny and would rather that Fanny sacrifice her own pleasure than cause any discomfort to Mary.

Edmund is clearly overcome with what he sees as a sign that Mary is coming to recognize and embrace the goods of Mansfield. If Mary can see the intrinsic value of Fanny, Mary is surely redeemable. The bond Edmund observes to be growing between Fanny and Mary bodes well for Mary's final preference being for Edmund and Mansfield and for a defeat of her preference for wealth and London society. This new balance in his favor is delicate and must not be disturbed by what might be perceived as a rejection. Returning the necklace might upset this delicate balance:

“...I would not have the shadow of a coolness between the two whose intimacy I have been observing with the greatest pleasure, and in whose characters there is so much general resemblance in true generosity and natural delicacy as to make the few slight differences, resulting principally from situation, no reasonable hindrance to a perfect friendship. I would not have the shadow of a coolness arise,” he repeated, his voice sinking a little, “between the two dearest objects I have on earth.” (*MP*, 263-264)

What Edmund perceives as Mary's kindness to Fanny, as we have observed in her earlier behavior, is really just an instrument for pleasing Edmund and, in this case, for helping her brother. There have been many like instances accessible in principle—if not accessed in fact—to Edmund's observation, but his observation is colored by his infatuation. His desire is to reconcile the liveliness and worldliness Mary acquired from living in London society with the humility and sensibility Fanny acquired from living at Mansfield. This is desired as much for the resolution of his own cognitive dissonance as it is for the good of Fanny or Mary. In his wish to reconcile the characters of Fanny and Mary, Edmund unconsciously becomes another means of promoting Henry's aims.

After Edmund has left, Fanny is disturbed by his speech. She is glad to be “one of his two dearest” (*MP*, 264). But she can hardly bear that the other “dearest” is Mary Crawford. Though Edmund's interest and affection for Mary was often implied in his discussions with Fanny, it was never so directly stated. From Edmund's unguarded speech, Fanny concludes that Mary and Edmund will indeed marry. Fanny has become aware by degrees of her own love for Edmund, but she tries to look past her feelings to view Edmund's situation with Mary in the proper light. Fanny does not want to lose her close relationship with Edmund, but she sees her desire as

inappropriate and selfish. The problem is that she cannot believe that Edmund has chosen an object worthy of his affection: “Could she believe Miss Crawford to deserve him, it would be— Oh! how different it would be—how far more tolerable! But he was deceived in her; he gave her merits which she had not; her faults were what they had ever been, but he saw them no longer” (*MP*, 264). Since she is not viewing Mary through the lens of love, Fanny is still able to see her clearly. Unfortunately, there is no way for Fanny to communicate her concerns to Edmund. She has seen him reinterpret all of Mary’s behavior in order to support his theory. Fanny would only seem ungrateful and unkind if she were to speak ill of Mary. Instead, Fanny is forced to wait for Edmund to observe something in Mary that cannot be reinterpreted. The greatest worry is that Edmund will not discover Mary’s true character until he is married to her.

Fanny recognizes that her feelings for Edmund must be considered inappropriate in any case. It is not only because Edmund is her cousin—cousins marrying was not unheard of, hence Sir Thomas’s concern about bringing her into the house—but because she considers herself unworthy of Edmund. For many years, she has been made acutely aware of her “place” by Mrs. Norris and her female cousins. Besides the humble view forced upon her by the opinions of others, she cannot help but be aware that she has no fortune to recommend her. Even if Edmund did prefer her—a possibility that she would not admit—he could not marry her since he is a younger brother with no fortune. The humble position forced on her serves her well in this case and allows her to discipline herself:

It was her intention, as she felt it to be her duty, to try to overcome all that was excessive, all that bordered on selfishness in her affection for Edmund. To call or to fancy it a loss, a disappointment, would be a presumption; for which she had not words strong enough to satisfy her own humility. To think of him as Miss Crawford might be justified in thinking, would in her be insanity. To her, he could be nothing under any circumstances—nothing dearer than a friend. Why did such an idea occur to her even enough to be reprobated and forbidden? It ought not to have touched on the confines of her imagination. She would endeavor to be rational, and to deserve the right of judging of Miss Crawford’s character and the privilege of true solicitude for him by a sound intellect and an honest heart. (*MP*, 264-265)

In spite of her best intentions to subdue her inclination, Fanny cannot help but feel some residual sentimentality toward the scrap of paper on which Edmund had been writing her a note. She saves this piece of paper, inscribed with the words “My very dear Fanny,” with her chain (*MP*, 265). This last indulgence of a forbidden feeling allows her some tranquility. Fanny’s desire to overcome her feelings for Edmund provides even more support to Henry’s cause.

The day of the ball was easier on Fanny than expected. She received some good news: Henry Crawford happened to be going to London and hoped that William would ride with him. William was to have had an exhausting trip back to rejoin his shipmates. Henry’s suggestion would have William leave a day early, but would provide him with a more comfortable ride as well as a chance to dine with Henry’s uncle, the Admiral (*MP*, 266). Fanny is happy that her brother will have a pleasant trip and Sir Thomas is glad that William will meet the admiral, who might be able to help him in his profession (*MP*, 266). Again, Henry has calculated the best way to please Fanny and has inadvertently pleased Sir Thomas. Helping William is yet another means to engaging Fanny’s heart.

The ball is to be Fanny’s introduction to society. If she were aware of her place in the evening’s proceedings, she would have suffered even more anxiety about her dress and conduct than she already had (*MP*, 267). Since she is unaware of the importance of its being her “coming out,” Fanny has modest ambitions for the ball:

To dance without observation or any extraordinary fatigue, to have strength and partners for about half the evening, to dance a little with Edmund, and not a great deal with Mr. Crawford, to see William enjoy himself, and be able to keep away from her aunt Norris was the height of her ambition, and seemed to comprehend her greatest possibility of happiness. (*MP*, 267)

During the day of the ball, her ambitions are not fulfilled. She is forced to sit with both of her aunts and Fanny becomes less enthusiastic about the ball after she suffers through Mrs. Norris’s complaints and harangues about the night (*MP*, 267). By the time she goes to prepare for the ball, she is exhausted.

Just as the already downcast and tired Fanny heads to her room, she is met by Edmund who wants to have yet another of his interminable discussions about Mary Crawford. Before he

discloses his intentions, Fanny is happy to see him. Soon, however, he launches into another retailing of his anxieties about whether Mary is really attached to him and whether she will agree to marry him. Edmund has just come from the parsonage where he has “engaged” Mary for the first two dances of the evening (*MP*, 268). Though she has agreed to dance with him, she has informed him that it will be the last time she will ever dance with him. Mary has made one final stab at influencing Edmund against ordination: She tells him that, “She never has danced with a clergyman [...] and she never *will*” (*MP*, 268). For Fanny, this can only be another piece of evidence confirming what she suspects about Mary’s character. Edmund is still unable to see past what he wants. He even wishes that the ball held in Fanny and William’s honor were not taking place just then right before he is to take orders. It is evident from his speech that he is struggling in his judgment of Mary’s character:

“But Fanny [...] you know what all this means. You see how it is; and could tell me, perhaps better than I could tell you, how and why I am vexed. Let me talk to you a little. You are a kind, kind listener. I have been pained by her [Mary’s] manner this morning, and cannot get the better of it. I know her disposition to be as sweet and faultless as your own, but the influence of her former companions makes her seem, gives to her conversation, to her professed opinions, sometimes a tinge of wrong. She does not think evil, but she speaks it—speaks it in playfulness—and though I know it to be playfulness, it grieves me to the soul.” (*MP*, 269)

It is interesting that Edmund speaks of Mary’s behavior and what she means to express in her speech as somehow being a less certain indication of her character than what he claims somehow to “know” about her. Edmund claims that he “knows” Mary to have a disposition as good as Fanny’s, but what evidence he has for this is not obvious. It seems rather that he has projected good qualities onto Mary in order to justify his attraction and his consequent imprudent attachment to her. He probably loved her because she was the first pretty girl who was not a sister or cousin to pay much attention to him. He was intensely physically attracted to her and since he could not admit that he could love someone against his conscience, he imagined her to be a better person than she evidently is.

Fanny tries to comfort Edmund since she knows that it would be dangerous to reason with him. She attributes Mary's behavior to her education (*MP*, 269). Even if Mary's disposition was a good one, or she had natural virtue, such attributes are not dependable and it is education that supports a good disposition and confirms virtue. To Fanny's suggestion that education has affected Mary, Edmund responds: "Yes, that uncle and aunt! They have injured the finest mind!—for sometimes, Fanny, I own to you, it does appear more than manner; it appears as if the mind itself were tainted" (*MP*, 269). This is the first time Edmund has granted that Mary herself might be flawed. Although a bit older than Fanny, Mary is at the same stage of life as most of the young characters of the novel. These young adults are finally choosing to embrace or reject their educations or habituations and to confirm their characters; while under the influence of their upbringings, they are forced to choose whether to continue to act and believe as they have in the past or to attempt to be a different sort of person. Those who have been brought up well find it easier to be good people for they need only examine the beliefs and habits they have already acquired, confirm and build on them. Those with bad upbringings will find it much harder to change course. Mary has had the influence of the good society in Mansfield Park for only a short time and though this influence has gone some way toward making her desire and value what is really good, she is still influenced by the many years she has spent under a very different sort of influence.

Fanny takes Edmund's speech as a request for her opinion on the matter: Is Mary only under the influence of a bad education or is Mary herself really bad? Fanny denies having the qualifications necessary to give advice on the matter (*MP*, 269). She recognizes that she might be biased by her own feelings for Edmund and that this might distort her view of Mary. More importantly, even if she had good advice to give, it would probably be unwelcome in the long run. Love advice usually backfires since the person asking for advice has usually already determined what he will do. Fanny has already discovered that if she advises Edmund against doing what he wishes, he will only silently resent her or, more likely, fight her with argument after argument until she is so exhausted she concedes his point. So far, all of Fanny's earlier gentle attempts to enlighten Edmund as to Mary's true character have resulted in endless attempts at justification on Edmund's side. Edmund acknowledges the wisdom of Fanny's refraining from judgment on the matter: "It is a subject on which I should never ask advice. It is the sort of subject on which it had better never be asked; and I imagine few do ask it, but when

they want to be influenced against their conscience” (*MP*, 269). Early on in the novel, Edmund did recognize an indication of Mary’s character and, though he does not choose to remember it, he did ask for such an influence against his conscience. He had hoped that Fanny would dismiss his worries and soothe his conscience. Now, he only wants to speak to Fanny so that he might work things out for himself. This is progress. Fanny also points out to Edmund that the conversation they are having might one day be problematic if he does in fact marry Mary. By the end of their conversation, Edmund comes to the conclusion that a marriage between Mary and him will never take place. This greatly detracts from Henry’s aim of engaging Fanny’s affections.

Fanny cannot help being cheered by the idea that Edmund will not marry Mary Crawford. Although she has sought to convince herself that she herself could never be Edmund’s choice, Fanny cannot help being happy that Edmund will not marry someone who so obviously does not have Edmund’s best interests at heart and that she will not have to face the pain of Edmund’s marriage so soon. The ball takes on a happier aspect and as she dresses, she looks forward to the evening. Fanny finds, to her relief, that the necklace given to her by Mary will not fit the loop of the cross. She is allowed to follow her own inclination and wear Edmund’s chain:

[Edmund’s] therefore must be worn; and having with delightful feelings joined the chain and the cross, those memorials of the two most beloved of her heart, those dearest tokens so formed for each other by every thing real and imaginary—and put them round her neck, and seen and felt how full of William and Edmund they were, she was able without an effort to resolve on wearing Miss Crawford’s necklace too. She acknowledged it to be right. Miss Crawford had a claim; and when it was no longer to encroach on, or to interfere with the stronger claims, the truer kindness of another, she could do her justice even with pleasure to herself. The necklace really looked very well; and Fanny left her room at last, comfortably satisfied with herself and all about her. (*MP*, 270-271)

Fanny is able to wear Mary’s gift with pleasure as well, since in addition to the necklace’s being becoming, the necklace’s giver no longer poses a threat to someone Fanny loves. Mary has been kind to Fanny and in that she has a claim to Fanny’s regard and gratitude. The necklace is no longer to be forced into a pairing with the cross, but is to lie next to the more appropriate chain

holding the cross.⁵² As a gift from Mary, the necklace has become a good, but Fanny has forgotten from whom the necklace came originally.

5. The Ball

After arriving at the ball, Fanny is glad to be engaged for the first two dances, even if she is to dance with Henry Crawford. Not having been told otherwise, Fanny feared that she would have no partner for the first dance unless much trouble had been gone through. Still, she is not entirely content with the manner in which Henry asks her: “But at the same time there was a pointedness in his manner of asking her, which she did not like, and she saw his eye glancing for a moment at her necklace—with a smile—she thought there was a smile—which made her blush and feel wretched” (*MP*, 274). Fanny is not able to overcome the discomfort this causes until Henry turns away and leaves her to herself. When Fanny sees Mary, Fanny must explain the new chain and the necklace together. Mary seems as taken with Edmund’s having thought to make the gift as Fanny was. When Fanny sees Mary’s reaction, Fanny realizes that a marriage between Edmund and Mary is not as hopeless as Edmund led her to believe.

Fanny has little time to ruminate on the subject and soon she is led to her partner for the first dance. Sir Thomas is much gratified that Henry has engaged Fanny for this first dance. Fanny is surprised to find that she is to open the dance with her partner; she is shocked to learn of her importance in the proceedings of the ball (*MP*, 275). She feels that she has been put on a footing with her cousins and cannot help reflecting with wonder on how her cousins might have envied her the chance to open a ball with Henry as a partner. The other guests are pleased with

⁵² The modest chain is paired with the cross. This can symbolize several things: First, the cross as a symbol of the church is more appropriately paired with the simple chain than with the grander necklace. Second, the cross as a symbol of Edmund the clergyman is more appropriately paired with the simple chain that might symbolize Fanny Price than with the fine necklace symbolized by Mary Crawford. Third, the cross as a symbol of her beloved brother is more appropriately paired with the simple chain of Edmund than with the necklace that came originally from Henry. Edmund is the more appropriate choice for taking on the role of Fanny’s best friend than Henry.

Fanny. Sir Thomas is proud of her. Though he cannot bring himself to attribute her physical attractiveness to her upbringing, he is glad to attribute her “education and manners” to the upbringing he has allowed her in his house (*MP*, 276).

The author offers us some more indications of Mary’s character at this point. Mary notices that Sir Thomas is much pleased by his niece and is able to infer at least part of the real reason. Though Mary does not like Sir Thomas, she seeks to please him by praising Fanny (*MP*, 276). Mary then turns to Lady Bertram to do the same. Lady Bertram appreciates the compliment to Fanny’s looks as she believes herself partly responsible since she sent her servant to help Fanny dress. (Lady Bertram did not know that her servant was sent too late to be of any assistance.) If it would have pleased Mrs. Norris, Mary would have repeated her praise of Fanny yet again. But she knew Mrs. Norris too well for that. Instead, Mary makes reference to how they must all miss Maria and Julia that night (*MP*, 277). This leaves Mrs. Norris well-pleased with Mary.⁵³ Mary’s only miscalculations come when she tries to please Fanny with compliments; her compliments only embarrass Fanny (*MP*, 277). Seeing Fanny blush, Mary believes that she has hit her mark in flattering Fanny and continues to do so, making Fanny much more uncomfortable. Mary cannot recognize the difference between the feigned blush of feigned modesty and true blush of embarrassment. Mary goes on to tease her about Henry’s attentions. This pleases Fanny even less and she becomes quiet. Mary expects Fanny to be pleased by Henry’s attentions while Fanny is anything but pleased. In addition, Fanny is embarrassed by the idea that the attentions might be obvious to onlookers. By the time Edmund claims his dances with Fanny, he is exhausted from an evening of trying to reason with Mary about his ordination. Fanny could not help observing the tensions between the two and takes what she has observed as a confirmation of Edmund’s earlier predictions about the end of their relationship. Since she is finally dancing with Edmund and it seems that Edmund is safe, Fanny cannot help being happy even with a tired and suffering Edmund (*MP*, 279).

At the end of the evening, a tired Fanny sits with her uncle, brother, and Henry. The three of them are discussing the departure of Henry and William on the morrow. Sir Thomas is still watching carefully for signs of Henry’s intentions towards Fanny. He asks Henry to join them for an early breakfast; Sir Thomas is convinced that Henry is in love with Fanny (*MP*, 280). The

⁵³ This attempt to flatter and please reminds one a bit of Mrs. Norris.

next morning William and Henry depart, and later on, Edmund departs in order to take orders. That evening, Sir Thomas makes several hints as to his expectations for Fanny. When his wife expresses her relief that at least Fanny will never leave, Sir Thomas modifies this to a wish that “She will never leave us I hope, till invited to some other home that may reasonably promise her greater happiness than she knows here” (*MP*, 285). Sir Thomas expects a proposal soon.

6. The Crawfords’ Loves

While Fanny is relieved by Edmund and Henry’s absences, Mary is troubled by Edmund’s absence. Mary’s feelings for Edmund are less easy to discern than are Edmund’s for Mary. During the week that Edmund is away being ordained, we are afforded a glimpse of what is going on in Mary’s mind. Mary misses Edmund every moment he is away and her discomfort is intensified by the purpose of his absence (*MP*, 285-286). Edmund leaves at the time when he will be most missed since all of the other young men have left the neighborhood as well. It becomes clear that Mary truly is attached to Edmund, but that she had been deceiving herself into thinking that through persuasion she could turn Edmund aside from his intention to take orders. If she could guide Edmund into a more remunerative or socially prominent profession that would take them to London, she could have both the man she loves and the lifestyle she has always expected to have. She does not seem to realize that the very things that make Edmund so good are incompatible with the sort of lifestyle she has in mind for him.

Though she is angry that Edmund is not more persuadable, she begins to examine her own actions. Mary even comes to regret some of the more inappropriate things she said to ridicule Edmund’s profession: “She was afraid she had used some strong—some contemptuous expressions in speaking of the clergy, and that should not have been. It was ill-bred—it was wrong” (*MP*, 286). Still, it is unclear in what way she sees her speech as having been “ill-bred” and “wrong.” For Mary, “ill-bred” seems to indicate only what is socially unacceptable; in speaking ill of the clergy, she has done something that just is not done by a lady. This gives us some clue as to what she might mean by “wrong”: “Wrong” for her is to miscalculate regarding what will bring about her purposes.⁵⁴ In trying to convince Edmund through deriding the clergy,

⁵⁴ Mary possesses cleverness but not the ability to discern right ends.

she has done something both socially inappropriate and ineffective in bringing about her desired consequences.

When Edmund extends his absence, Mary begins to feel jealousy for the first time. Edmund is staying with a friend who has sisters. Mary wonders whether one of these sisters has attracted Edmund (*MP*, 288). In an effort to gain more information, Mary approaches Fanny and in questioning Fanny about Edmund, Mary reveals the intensity of her attachment and her anxiety at Edmund's absence. Mary's conversation with Fanny is similar to the kinds of conversations Edmund has had with Fanny about Mary. Like Edmund's conversations with Fanny, the conversation is primarily one-sided: Mary spends most of the conversation speculating on Edmund's intentions, trying to decide on what her own feelings ought to be, and how best to continue his affection for her. Mary fears that she will not see Edmund before she leaves and she wonders what sentiments are appropriate to express in a message to Edmund:

“I should like to have seen him once more, I confess. But you must give my compliments to him. Yes—I think it must be compliments. Is there not something wanted, Miss Price, in our language—a something between compliments and—and love—to suit the sort of friendly acquaintance we have had together?” (*MP*, 287)

Mary's struggle is apparent here. She has determined that she cannot marry a mere clergyman, but she cannot help valuing and loving Edmund. If he had been rich or taken on a different kind of profession, she would have married him. She does not know what sort of good-bye is appropriate under such circumstances, those circumstances having been recognized by both Mary and Edmund.

Though Mary seems to have determined not to marry Edmund, she cannot bear the idea of being supplanted by another in his affections. She questions Fanny about the Miss Owens, the ladies at the house where Edmund is staying. Fanny has little information on these ladies, but Mary again cannot help speculating. She assumes that the young ladies in the house are “all very accomplished and pleasing, and one very pretty” (*MP*, 288). Mary is frenetic in thought. The ends she values shift from moment to moment. Since she has no stable sense of what is right, the ends change with her shifting feelings. For a moment, she drops the subject of the Miss Owens and wonders how her own absence will affect Mansfield. When Fanny will not emphasize that

Mary will be missed and thereby confirm Mary's power with Edmund, Mary changes the subject again (*MP*, 289). Mary tries on the theory that Edmund now belongs to the Miss Owens; he is "their lawful property" since he is a member of the same clergy as their brother and their father (*MP*, 289). She asks Fanny whether she expects Edmund to marry soon or at all. To this question, Fanny answers that she does not think so. This gives Mary the strength to abandon the subject since his not marrying means that she is at least not usurped in his affections (*MP*, 290). If Fanny was uncertain of whether Mary was really attached to Edmund, this "conversation" must have convinced her of Mary's attachment to Edmund.

Fanny's relief from Henry is short-lived. When Henry returns from his trip with William, he announces to his sister his intention to marry Fanny Price (*MP*, 291). Knowing her brother's former ways and his original intent merely to trifle with Fanny, Mary is taken completely by surprise. Once it becomes clear that Henry is serious, Mary is rather pleased. Having been used to success with women, it never occurs to Henry to think that his affection for Fanny might not be returned: "'Yes, Mary,' was Henry's concluding assurance. 'I am fairly caught. You know with what idle designs I began—but this is the end of them. I have (I flatter myself) made no inconsiderable progress in her affections; but my own are entirely fixed'" (*MP*, 292). Mary declares that her first feeling is to think Fanny a very lucky girl for marrying above her station, but that her second feeling is to see Henry as the lucky one for getting such "a sweet little wife" who will be "all gratitude and devotion" (*MP*, 292). Her true underlying feeling and first concern is for how it will affect Fanny's best friend in the family: Edmund.

We are given a glimpse into Henry and Mary's upbringings as well as their aunt and uncle's marriage when Henry describes how his uncle the Admiral must respond to Fanny. It is clear that the uncle and the aunt never prepared Henry and Mary for meeting people like Fanny and Edmund. The hatred that the uncle and aunt bore for one another was passed down to the children as a kind of skepticism about the existence of good marriage partners. Henry says of the Admiral:

"When Fanny is known to him," continued Henry, "he will doat on her. She is exactly the woman to do away every prejudice of such a man as the Admiral, for she is exactly such a woman as he thinks does not exist in the world. She is the very impossibility he would

describe—if indeed he has now delicacy of language enough to embody his own ideas.”
(*MP*, 293)

The aunt and uncle had instilled their prejudices in their adopted children. Meeting Fanny would prove to the Admiral that not all women are like Henry’s aunt or like the Admiral’s mistress. Henry himself had scarcely suspected such a woman existed.

It is a sign of Henry and Mary’s good natures if not of their good principles and upbringings that they are able to recognize and value the good in Fanny and Edmund. Although Henry is so little accustomed to Fanny’s kind of goodness he does not even know how to classify it, he is still able to detect the goodness and respect it. Mary and Henry go on to have a long discussion of Fanny’s goodness:

The gentleness, modesty, and sweetness of her character were warmly expatiated on, that sweetness which makes so essential a part of every woman’s worth in the judgment of man, that though he sometimes loves where it is not, he can never believe it absent. Her temper he had good reason to depend on and to praise. He had often seen it tried. Was there one of the family, excepting Edmund, who had not in some way or other continually exercised her patience and forbearance? Her affections were evidently strong. To see her with her brother! What could more delightfully prove that the warmth of her heart was equal to its gentleness?—What could be more encouraging to a man who had her love in view? Then, her understanding was beyond every suspicion, quick and clear; and her manners were the mirror of her own modest and elegant mind. Nor was this all. Henry Crawford had too much sense not to feel the worth of good principles in a wife, though he was too little accustomed to serious reflection to know them by their proper name; but when he talked of her having such a steadiness and regularity of conduct, such a high notion of honour, and such an observance of decorum as might warrant any man in the fullest dependence on her faith and integrity, he expressed what was inspired by the knowledge of her being well principled and religious. (*MP*, 294)

While Henry and Mary are able to recognize goodness in Fanny and Edmund, they are unable to recognize badness in themselves. Neither seems to be accustomed to self-examination even

though each carefully calculates the effect of his or her behavior on others. Henry and Mary seem to be a mere bundle of unexamined desires with no self-reflection, but excellent means-end reasoning. They possess cleverness and lack practical wisdom. They are both attracted to what is good when presented with it but there is no sense that they ever turn their discerning eyes inward to examine themselves. It makes sense that they would be skilled at determining the characters of others since they must use this knowledge of character to their advantage in achieving their desires. Neither is aware that there is something wanting in them and it never occurs to either that they might be unworthy of the objects of the affection they seek. They seem to believe of the objects of their desires that if they can get what they aim at, they must deserve what they aim at. Mary and Henry refer back to Henry's original plan to seduce Fanny and laugh over how Henry's plan will now be turned to the advantage of both (*MP*, 295). Although Henry claims that it was bad of him to consider hurting Fanny, he believes it was only bad given the fact that Fanny turned out to be such a good person. It never occurs to either sibling that such a plan was wicked no matter whom it was directed against and that having made and approved of such a plan reflects something bad in their own characters.

Henry goes on to say that what he really wants is to be able to trust a wife; he could "so wholly and absolutely confide in [Fanny]" (*MP*, 294). This concern about trust and fidelity reflects his upbringing in which women are seen as either manipulative and uncaring social climbers (e.g., Henry's aunt) or whores (e.g., his uncle's mistress); in Henry's experience women have primarily been mendacious and grasping. In Henry's view, Maria and Julia Bertram both fit these models in some respect: The sisters were both vain and competitive and Maria overly concerned with wealth and social position (*MP*, 297). In marrying Rushworth, Maria sold herself. In having been willing to break her engagement and run away with Henry, Maria showed herself to be unsteady and to have a vanity easily manipulated. When asked what they might think about his intentions to marry Fanny, Henry says of the Bertram sisters: "I care neither what they say, nor what they feel. They will now see what sort of woman it is that can attach me, that can attach a man of sense. I wish the discovery may do them good" (*MP*, 297). It is clear that Henry takes no responsibility for the bad behavior in which the Bertram girls took part. Even though he willingly and knowingly served as the catalyst for their bad behavior, he places the blame entirely on them. He does not realize that he is partially responsible for cultivating and

confirming the bad characters of each sister. Nor does he realize that he was building his own bad character in the process of amusing himself with the Bertram sisters.

Henry sees himself as the potential savior of Fanny. He does not recognize his own bad character and so does not see himself as being a threat to the good of those around him. He sees himself as Fanny's rescuer. He wants to save her from being "dependent, helpless, friendless, neglected, forgotten" (*MP*, 297). He cannot see that though Fanny is sometimes undervalued in the Mansfield house, she is at least under the influence and protection of two good men: Sir Thomas and Edmund. Not knowing himself, Henry believes that he is best qualified to make Fanny happy. But the sort of happiness he offers is only the worldly type: "What can Sir Thomas and Edmund together do, what *do* they do for her happiness, comfort, honour, and dignity in the world to what I *shall* do?" (*MP*, 297).

Henry finally proposes to Fanny after giving her some good news about her brother. Henry's trip to London had been to help William receive promotion. When Henry receives news of William's promotion, he uses it as an opportunity to propose while Fanny is under the obligations of gratitude (*MP*, 298). It is clear that Henry does feel real affection for Fanny. He loves to see her happy and watches her as she looks over the letters announcing her brother's promotion (*MP*, 298). When Henry declares his love to Fanny, she will not believe he is serious. Rather, she believes that Henry is trying to trifle with her as he did her cousins:

She considered it all as nonsense, as mere trifling and gallantry, which meant only to deceive for the hour; she could not but feel that it was treating her improperly and unworthily, and in such a way as she had not deserved; but it was like himself, and entirely of a piece with what she had seen before; and she would not allow herself to show half the displeasure she felt, because he had been conferring an obligation which no want of delicacy on his part could make a trifle to her. (*MP*, 201)

Given his past behavior, Fanny cannot help but see his declaration of love as a bit of acting. His past behavior has established an impression of him in Fanny's eyes that he cannot easily overcome. She tries to put him off, but as he gives vent to his passion he unmistakably makes a proposal. This overt proposal combined with her prior knowledge of his noncommittal way of

manipulating creates a conflict in her understanding of Henry. The confusion is so overwhelming that she has no choice but to flee in order to try to understand what has happened.

Fanny tries to reconcile what she knows of Henry with what seemed like a real marriage proposal and with her gratitude towards him for his helping William. Given that Henry has trifled with the Bertram sisters who had greater pretensions to being admired and sought after than she believes she does, she cannot believe that Henry could be doing anything more than trifling with her (*MP*, 302-303). Yet as she witnessed many times, what made Henry's trifling so effective was his seeming to commit himself to an attachment through language that was merely suggestive without being explicit. Henry has explicitly asked her to marry him. If Henry is trifling with Fanny, it is in a very different way from that in which he trifled with her cousins: "She would not have him be serious, and yet what could excuse the use of such words and offers, if they meant but to trifle?" (*MP*, 302). Henry has either grossly insulted her or he is sincere in his offer of marriage. Neither option appeals to Fanny. Still, she feels the pull of gratitude for the good done her brother and if Henry will only cease mentioning his affection again, she determines that she will forget his confusing and unpleasant proposal.

When Henry returns to the house for dinner, Henry gives her a note from his sister that tends to confirm Henry's seriousness. Mary is writing to express her approval and offer her congratulations to Fanny for attaching her brother (*MP*, 303). As the rest of the family discusses William's promotion and career, Fanny can only silently ponder the implications of Henry's attachment and proposal. Now that Mary is complicit in the affair, it is even more perplexing. All she knows of the Crawford siblings' habits tends to be against the seriousness of the proposal: "Nothing could be more unnatural in either" (*MP*, 306). Fanny cannot believe that *she* could create an attachment in Henry while the cousins she has always viewed as more attractive and as having more of a right to create an attachment were unable to do so (*MP*, 306). Despite the intensity of wrongness that would be involved in such conduct, Fanny begins to convince herself that Mary and Henry are both trifling with her. Fanny manages to avoid being alone with Henry, but is forced to write a reply to Mary's note in which she tells Mary, as far as her note pertains to Henry: "The rest of your note I know means nothing, but I am so unequal to anything of the sort, that I hope you will excuse my begging you to take no further notice. I have seen too much of Mr. Crawford not to understand his manners; if he understood me as well, he would I dare say behave differently" (*MP*, 307). Fanny cannot bring herself to believe in Henry's sincerity.

Having sent him away after dinner, Fanny hopes that she has put an end to whatever was going on. But the very next morning, Henry approaches Sir Thomas to ask for Fanny's hand in marriage. Sir Thomas comes to Fanny's East room to tell her what he thinks is good news. Sir Thomas is taken aback when he enters the room and sees that no fire has been lit. Fanny is forced to confess that her Aunt Norris will not allow her a fire (*MP*, 312). Sir Thomas interprets Mrs. Norris's notions on Fanny's upbringing as having been calculated to prepare her for a "mediocrity of condition" that might require austerity on Fanny's part (*MP*, 312-313). A happy Sir Thomas goes on to let Fanny know that such worries about her future condition have been rendered unnecessary: Mr. Crawford has approached Sir Thomas to ask his permission to marry Fanny. Sir Thomas goes on to give all the details of the conversation to Fanny without realizing that she is not happy about the proposal. When he offers to take her downstairs to accept Henry's proposal, he discovers Fanny's true feelings (*MP*, 313-314).

7. Sir Thomas's Influence

Sir Thomas is shocked to discover Fanny plans to refuse Henry. Having been absent during the time that Henry demonstrated his bad character—especially with respect to women—Sir Thomas can have no idea of their being any serious objection to Henry. When he asks Fanny why she will refuse Henry, Fanny can only reply, "I—I cannot like him, Sir, well enough to marry him" (*MP*, 315). Sir Thomas cannot help being displeased. He catalogues the polite reasons—reasons of advantage and her dependent position are left out for the sake of delicacy—Fanny ought to accept Henry:

"Here is a young man wishing to pay his addresses to you, with everything to recommend him; not merely situation in life, fortune, and character, but with more that common agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to every body. And he is not the acquaintance of to-day, you have known him some time. His sister, moreover, is your intimate friend, and he has been doing that for your brother, which I should suppose would have been almost sufficient recommendation to you, had there been no other."
(*MP*, 315-316)

Sir Thomas goes on to speculate that Fanny “does not know [her] own feelings” on the matter since as he points out, Henry’s manners had been so pointed as to make it difficult to mistake his intentions and Fanny had never seemed to find these manners objectionable (*MP*, 316). Still, Fanny is adamant and Sir Thomas begins to have suspicions that Fanny’s feelings are otherwise engaged.

Sir Thomas does not accuse Fanny, but he seeks to sound her out to discover whether she loves one of his own sons. He mentions his eldest son Tom as not sharing Henry’s laudable desire to marry early and his younger son Edmund as having already found “the woman he could love” (*MP*, 317). Sir Thomas looks for some reaction in Fanny and finding none is easy on the score of his sons. Unfortunately, this makes him conclude that Fanny is being irrational and rebellious.

Sir Thomas demands an explanation, but Fanny is barred from making her objections to Henry known. Since her objections are chiefly on the grounds of Henry’s conduct with regard to Sir Thomas’s daughters, Fanny cannot speak without incriminating Maria and Julia. Her only evidence for Henry’s bad character involves Maria and Julia—the day at Sotherton, the Play, the entire acquaintance with Henry before Sir Thomas arrived home involved the bad judgment and misconduct of the Bertram sisters as well as Henry’s own—and Fanny does not wish to betray her cousins (*MP*, 317-318). Fanny had hoped that her uncle, on whose judgment she had partly modeled her own, knew her well enough to trust her judgment and consider her refusal justified: “She had hoped that to a man like her uncle, so discerning, so honorable, so good, the simple acknowledgement of a settled dislike on her side would have been sufficient” (*MP*, 318). Fanny has misunderstood her uncle’s character. Although he wants to create the appearance of having such a laudable character, he is so firmly fixed on pursuing worldly advantage that he cares little about whether a bride “likes” her groom. He knew that Maria did not like Rushworth and he still very eagerly allowed the marriage to take place. Unfortunately, Sir Thomas cannot see past his own desire to have his niece well-settled. It turns out that Sir Thomas is less interested in Fanny’s having developed the ability to make good judgments than he is to have her willingly follow his judgment and bring his plans for her to fruition.

Sir Thomas’s is angered and affronted by Fanny’s refusal. Sir Thomas rebukes Fanny for her refusal to bend to his wishes and make a marriage offering both wealth and position beyond what might have been hoped:

“I had thought you peculiarly free from willfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have shewn me that you can be willful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you—without even asking their advice.” (*MP*, 318)

Fanny has always been grateful and respectful, pliable and good-natured. Had he known her character better, he would have suspected that there must be some good reason against her accepting the proposal. Sir Thomas, unfortunately, has made as little an effort to understand Fanny’s character as he did his daughters’ characters. Her deciding for herself with so little explanation is a shock to Sir Thomas and he hopes to influence her with these accusations. He goes on to reinforce his appeal by cataloguing the pecuniary considerations in favor of her consenting to marry Henry. He descends to mentioning the bad financial straits of her family and how her rising in the world would assist them. He claims that rather than thinking of her family, she prefers to indulge in fantasies of some future passion (*MP*, 318). Sir Thomas, being unaware of the doings of his daughters and Henry, tells Fanny that he would have given either of his daughters to Henry and if either had refused, he should have felt that daughter to be very ungrateful. His final accusation of Fanny is particularly painful to her since her first concern has always been to be properly grateful to her uncle: “You do not owe me the duty of a child. But Fanny, if your heart can acquit you of ingratitude—” (*MP*, 319). By the time he accuses her of ingratitude, she can no longer speak but only cry. He has forced her either to defend herself by revealing the wrongdoings of his daughters in her explanations or to suffer his believing that she is ungrateful. Fanny’s loyalty to her cousins along with her conviction that it is not her place to tell of their misdeeds wins out and she allows herself to be thought to be what she most feared being. Near the end of their conference, Sir Thomas does win from Fanny a conditional that gives him some hope. Fanny says, “If it were possible for me to do otherwise [than refuse...] but I am so perfectly convinced that I could never make him happy, and that I should be miserable myself” (*MP*, 320).

The thing Fanny feared most as a child has happened: Sir Thomas has judged her to be ungrateful (*MP*, 321). She is in the worst possible position since Edmund, the only person who

understands her or who might take her part, is absent. But Fanny is not even completely convinced that Edmund would approve her refusal of Henry's proposal. Edmund's usually good judgment has not been dependable, having often been distorted by his feelings for Mary. As Henry is Mary's brother, Edmund might not fully recognize Fanny's reasons for refusing Henry. Everyone might see Fanny as ungrateful and selfish not only because she has disobeyed her benefactor Sir Thomas but also because she had been offered the chance to better her own and her family's position. Rather than recognizing the moral nature of her refusal, all might see her refusal as a mere expression of personal preference. This all weighs on the side of Henry's claims. Her misery is exacerbated by the possibility that Henry—another man to whom she owes some gratitude—might really love her and that in refusing him, she might be making him unhappy as well. Yet, she cannot relent. Her judgment is against the proposed marriage and although there will be unhappiness on the part of many and she may lose the good opinion of people she cares about, she cannot bring herself to act against her conscience.

When her uncle returns after informing Henry of Fanny's refusal, he is kinder and tries to calm her. He assures Fanny that he will tell no one of the proposal and her refusal (*MP*, 322). Fanny is grateful and hopes to reinstate herself in his good graces. It seems that Sir Thomas has chosen a new tactic: he will be as kind as possible in order to play upon Fanny's sense of gratitude. When she returns from a walk suggested by Sir Thomas, she finds that a fire has been built in the fireplace of the East room: "A fire! it seemed too much; just at the time to be giving her such an indulgence, was exciting even painful gratitude" (*MP*, 322). Sir Thomas has ordered that she should have a fire every day in her East room. Sir Thomas's refraining from telling Mrs. Norris of the proposal is shown to be a great favor on his part requiring even more gratitude. At dinner, Mrs. Norris makes unkind reflections on Fanny's selfishness and ingratitude that even Sir Thomas finds excessive (*MP*, 324). Fanny cannot help but reflect on how much more unpleasant things might have been if Mrs. Norris knew of the proposal. This consideration on Sir Thomas's part certainly has its intended effect upon Fanny; she cannot be treated with kindness without the kindness prompting her gratitude and affection: "I must be a brute indeed, if I can be really ungrateful!" (*MP*, 322). Fanny ends the evening believing firmly that "her judgment had not misled her" and that once Sir Thomas has reflected further on the subject, he should see things her way.

8. Henry's Better and Worse Qualities

The next day Fanny is forced to meet with Henry in order to explain her refusal in person. But Henry will not take her answer easily:

He had all the disposition to persevere that Sir Thomas could wish him. He had vanity, which strongly inclined him, in the first place, to think she did love him, though she might not know it herself; and which, secondly, when constrained at last to admit that she did know her own present feelings, convinced him that he should be able in time to make those feelings what he wished. (*MP*, 326)

Besides being incapable of taking "No" for an answer and seeing Fanny's refusal as only temporary and provisional, Henry is also prone to being more attracted to what is less easily gained; Fanny's refusal makes her consent all the more valuable. He does love her and assumes that with time and patience, she will love him. Her refusal tends to confirm his judgment of her character as a rare woman: "[H]er conduct at this time, by speaking the disinterestedness and delicacy of her character (qualities which he believed most rare indeed), was of a sort to heighten all his wishes, and confirm all his resolutions" (*MP*, 326). Henry has no idea that Fanny's affections might be already engaged and attributes Fanny's refusal rather to her youth and inexperience; he believes that he has overwhelmed her and with proper time and reassurances, she will come to love him (*MP*, 327). He cannot imagine that he will not eventually be successful.

Despite all she can do while staying within the bounds of politeness to convince him that her refusal is final, it soon becomes clear to Fanny that Henry will not give up his suit. Fanny now owes a debt of gratitude to Henry for his having helped her brother gain promotion; she also feels that she owes him some gentleness given what seems to be his sincere love for her:

Here was a change! And here were claims that could not but operate. She might have disdained him in all the dignity of angry virtue, in the grounds of Sotherton, or the theatre at Mansfield Park; but he approached her now with right that demanded different treatment. She must be courteous and compassionate. (*MP*, 328)

But her kind and careful manner is interpreted differently by Henry. He believes that it indicates some relenting and some feeling for himself. Henry parts from Fanny with hopes of her changing her mind. It is his unrelenting optimism and confidence in his powers of winning her heart that most offends Fanny. She recognizes her obligation to refuse him gently, but cannot help being angry when her refusal is not accepted: "Here was again a want of delicacy and regard for others which had formerly struck and disgusted her" (*MP*, 328-329). This may rest on a mistake since the manner of her refusal might have misled him but she is not wrong in reflecting that Henry is deficient in having "no principle to supply as duty what the heart was deficient in" (*MP*, 329). In other words, Henry does not even recognize any commonly accepted principle of conduct to guide him where his conscience provides no guidance; her refusal ought to be taken seriously as a refusal and treated accordingly. Even if he could not believe her to be serious in her refusal, Henry ought to have behaved as though he believed her to be serious in her refusal.

When Sir Thomas hears Henry's account of Fanny's continued refusal, he is encouraged by Henry's confidence in an eventual success. Sir Thomas bides his time, but due to Henry's unwillingness to keep the proposal a secret finds that he must tell the rest of the family the news of the proposal. Of course, Mrs. Norris is displeased by anything that might distinguish or raise her niece, while Lady Bertram is pleased that her niece is admired by wealthy man (*MP*, 332). When Edmund returns, he is told the news as well. Just as Fanny feared, he is on his father's side and cannot understand Fanny's refusal. Edmund agrees that her present indifference to Henry temporarily justifies her refusal, but he believes that she cannot but come to love Henry eventually. Having received an unexpectedly pleasant welcome from Mary on his return home, Edmund is inclined to be hopeful that the characters of the Crawfords are compatible with characters like Fanny's and his own; he suggests that once in love and married, "it would appear that [Fanny and Henry's] dispositions were as exactly fitted to make them blessed in each other, as he was now beginning to seriously consider them" (*MP*, 335). This theory that Fanny and Henry will complement one another resulting in mutual improvement and advantage is part of his larger theory that he and Mary will do the same.

Henry continues in his attentions, albeit more gently and quietly than before. When Henry comes to dine, Fanny studiously avoids encouraging Henry. But after dinner, Henry is able to have some good effect on her opinion of him. Edmund and Henry come to the room where Fanny and Lady Bertram have been sitting together and upon discovering that Fanny had

been reading to Lady Bertram, Henry takes up the book of Shakespeare and reads from “Henry VIII.” Fanny is much struck with the quality of his reading and while she had noticed with what judgment and skill he had acted in “Lovers’ Vows”, her enjoyment of his acting then had been tainted by the impropriety of his involvement with Maria. Now sitting quietly and listening, she is able to give herself over fully to enjoyment of his skill:

His acting had first taught Fanny what pleasure a play might give, and his reading brought all his acting before her again; nay, perhaps with greater enjoyment, for it came unexpectedly, and with no such drawback as she had been used to suffer in seeing him on stage with Miss Bertram. (*MP*, 337)

Edmund and Henry observe Fanny’s increased attention and evident admiration of Henry’s reading, but she cannot be brought to offer any words of praise (*MP*, 337).

Edmund and Henry go on to discuss the need for skill in reading aloud, particularly for the clergyman. Henry shows himself to have thought with some good judgment on the subject of how a clergyman’s speech ought to be delivered so as achieve full effect. But Henry errs when he goes on to proclaim his desire to be a clergyman for he seems to define the good clergyman as merely a good and effective speaker who is able to influence many (*MP*, 341). He admits that he “has never listened to a distinguished preacher in [his] life, without a sort of envy” and goes on to explain that were he a preacher, he could preach only to the educated who could truly appreciate the skill inherent in his speeches (*MP*, 341). As he reflects further, he concludes that he could not enjoy preaching often for the most part of his enjoyment would come from having created expectation and desire in those who would come to hear him. It becomes clear from Henry’s speeches that he is more interested in being admired and sought after than in being the source of any good to his imagined parishioners. What he wants he could have as an actor, artist, or politician just as easily; he is a man of taste, but of taste only. Whatever resembles moral judgment in him is merely an appreciation for the beauty of the display of goodness and for the admiration it prompts in others. It is all a means to satisfying his vanity.

Fanny hears his speech about preaching and cannot help but make a sound of disapproval. Henry forces her to admit she finds him unsteady and inconstant. Once he hears this criticism, he is determined to show himself very steady in his affections and pursuit of Fanny:

“With such an opinion, no wonder that—But we shall see. It is not by protestations that I shall endeavor to convince you I am wronged, it is not by telling you that my affections are steady. My conduct shall speak for me—absence, distance, time shall speak for me—They shall prove, that as far as you can be deserved by any body, I do deserve you.” (*MP*, 343)

Fanny has inadvertently made Henry more set on persisting and at the same time, prompted him to unconsciously demonstrate his propensity to sudden enthusiasms and his desire to merit admiration. In trying to prove his constancy, he is following the dictates of the very character traits that make him so generally inconstant.

Sir Thomas is wise enough to estimate what must be the level of constancy a wealthy young man will have with little encouragement: “Sir Thomas was most cordially anxious for the perfection of Mr. Crawford’s character in that point. He wished him to be a model of constancy; and fancied the best means of effecting it would be in not trying him too long” (*MP*, 345). Sir Thomas tries to enlist Edmund’s help in convincing Fanny to relent, but before Edmund will help, he tries to find out Fanny’s true feelings. Edmund admits that if Fanny does not love Henry, she is right to refuse him regardless of the other reasons of interest and obligation urged for her acceptance of the proposal (*MP*, 346). But Edmund’s real concern is with whether Fanny’s current feelings are invincible; in short, he inquires whether with time Henry might have any chance of succeeding in his suit. Fanny is firm in her belief that he can never attach her. Fanny claims that, as for herself and Henry, “There never were two people more dissimilar. We have not one taste in common” (*MP*, 348). Following his theory, Edmund contradicts Fanny. He claims of Fanny and Henry: “You have moral and literary tastes in common” (*MP*, 348). Edmund’s first assertion in support of his view is strictly false. The two share aesthetic tastes; Henry and Fanny both recognize beauty and skill, but what Edmund calls “moral taste” for Henry really is only a taste for the sort of picture morality can present. It does not seem to be a true appreciation of morality on its own terms but as an art or display. Edmund agrees that Henry and Fanny differ in liveliness and optimism, but believes that Henry will encourage Fanny to be less serious and anxious. Following his own view of what a marriage between himself and Mary might be, he sees such a marriage as desirable and mutually advantageous.

Finally, Fanny speaks frankly and expresses her concerns about his moral character. She references what she thinks are decisive considerations regarding Henry's character. With regard to Henry's behavior during the play, Fanny cannot approve of his improper attentions to the engaged Maria and the lack of consideration shown for Rushworth. Edmund dismisses the play as an instance where all acted wrongly. Fanny mentions Henry's leading Julia on and playing the Bertram sisters against each other in their pursuit of his admiration. Edmund dismisses this concern by blaming his sisters for showing their desire for Henry's admiration "rather more unguardedly than was perfectly prudent" (*MP*, 350). Edmund claims that it was evident Henry had had no serious interest in his sisters and that Henry's current interest in Fanny shows his good judgment. An exasperated Fanny is forced to admit that she does not believe Henry has the right opinions "on serious subjects" (*MP*, 350). Again, Edmund dismisses this concern by claiming that Henry has not yet thought enough about serious subjects and that Fanny might help to guide Henry. Fanny rejects the idea that she should be responsible for his reformation, but Edmund declares his faith that Fanny is equal to it. It soon becomes clear that Edmund is running together his own plans for a reformation of Mary with his advice to Fanny. Edmund is on the side of this marriage because he is committed to the idea that his own projected marriage to Mary will be a success and because his Mary desires the marriage of Fanny and Henry. Edmund's last strategy is to report the disappointment and disbelief felt by Mary and Mrs. Grant, again attempting to play on Fanny's feelings of obligation. All this is enough to make Fanny realize she has no ally in her struggle against being persuaded.

Fanny is exasperated by this final appeal. That Mary and Mrs. Grant should be so surprised by her refusal of Henry is itself unbelievable: "Let him have all the perfections in the world, I think it ought not to be set down as certain, that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like himself" (*MP*, 353). Certainly, Henry was "acceptable" to the Bertram sisters, but that is no reason to think that Fanny should jump at the chance to marry him. As his attentions had previously been lavished on the Bertram sisters exclusively, Fanny had no reason to expect that he should change his object. And when Henry did change his object, even assuming that she could believe herself the object, Henry's past behavior to the Bertram sisters would give Fanny no reason to believe Henry's intentions honorable and his proposals serious:

I had not any idea that his behaviour to me before had any meaning; and surely I was not teaching myself to like him, only because he was taking, what seemed, very idle notice of me. In my situation, it would have been the extreme of vanity to be forming expectations of Mr. Crawford. (*MP*, 353)

Fanny goes on to point out that insofar as Henry is so deserving as his sisters think him, she was acting appropriately in not developing feelings for Henry. If Henry is so great, Fanny would be foolish to have entertained any idea of his being interested in her. Henry's sisters are not doing justice to Fanny if they expect her to have already risked her peace and happiness by developing feelings and hopes that were so likely to have been disappointed. Fanny concludes that Mary and Mrs. Grant's idea of what a woman ought to be must differ greatly from Fanny's idea (*MP*, 353).

9. Mary's Feelings and Views on Marriage

Mary herself comes to Fanny seemingly to plead Henry's case, but reveals a great depth of feeling for Edmund and even for Fanny and the Mansfield neighborhood in general. Mary begins by scolding Fanny, but when the two enter the East room Mary is reminded of her last visit to that room and cannot help reminiscing about happier and more hopeful times with Edmund. Mary refers back to the scene she and Edmund rehearsed there; the scene had Edmund's character "describing and recommending matrimony" to Mary's character (*MP*, 358). Mary recalls the feeling evident in Edmund's "looks and voice," but what she most loved was Edmund's violating his own principles for her sake: "His sturdy spirit to bend as it did! Oh! it was sweet beyond expression" (*MP*, 358). Mary laments that what might be seen as her triumph over Edmund's scruples was interrupted by the arrival of Sir Thomas. Though Mary does not acknowledge the wrongness of her feelings at the time, she does acknowledge that she now loves and respects even those who had stood opposed to her plans. She loves and respects everyone at Mansfield Park even in spite of herself. What was to be a harangue against Fanny becomes a sentimental good-bye: "Good, gentle Fanny! When I think of this being the last time of seeing you; for I do not know how long—I feel it quite impossible to do any thing but love you" (*MP*, 359). Fanny cannot help being struck by the depth of Mary's feelings.

As Fanny and Mary comfort each other, Mary declares that the two will become sisters one way or another. The implication is that either Fanny shall marry Henry or Mary shall marry Edmund; somehow they will be sisters: “Who says we shall not be sisters? I know we shall. I feel that we were born to be connected; and those tears convince me that you feel it too, dear Fanny” (*MP*, 359). Fanny tries to comfort Mary by reminding her that she is only going to another set of friends in London, but Mary is at least temporarily entirely under the sway of Mansfield and her love for Edmund. At least at that moment, Mary seems willing to give up the wealth and social station she had most valued in a marriage in order to be with Edmund in the good society of the park. Mary cannot help continuing to meditate on the East room rehearsal.

Being suddenly brought to herself, Mary begins to speak in favor of Henry’s proposal but inadvertently reveals a good deal about the habits of her London friends, her upbringing and her own opinions on marriage and the motives to it. Mary’s first tactic is to play upon Fanny’s vanity. She tells Fanny of how Henry’s devotion to Fanny has and will upset a good many young women who were trying for him themselves. In fact, one of the friends Mary is to visit—Mrs. Fraser—has a stepdaughter who is very much interested in getting Henry as a husband and Mary fears that she will be less welcome to the mother and daughter without the prospect of Henry as a husband. This brings Mary to reflect on the marriages of her friends. She admits that it would be a good thing for Mrs. Fraser’s stepdaughter to marry since the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Fraser is not a happy one:

“And yet it was a most desirable match for Janet [Mrs. Fraser] at the time. We were all delighted. She could not do otherwise than accept him, for he was rich, and she had nothing; but he turns out ill-tempered, and *exigeant*; and wants a young woman, a beautiful young woman of five-and-twenty, to be as steady as himself. And my friend does manage him well; she does not seem to know how to make the best of it. There is a spirit of irritation, which, to say nothing worse, is certainly ill-bred.” (*MP*, 361)

In this short description of the marriage typical in her social circle, Mary has communicated a good deal, more even than she realizes. First, she is telling the story of a marriage of utility entered into for the sake of money and security. That Mr. Fraser was rich and her friend Janet poor seemed to Mary an overriding reason to accept Mr. Fraser’s proposal. Yet, Mary is

surprised that such a marriage does not lead to the happiness and comfort expected. The outcome of this sort of marriage is relevant to Fanny's decision to marry Henry: One of the reasons urged for Fanny to accept Henry is his wealth and station and her own poverty. Mary's accidentally providing an example of a situation in which marrying for these reasons does not work out well is not an effective way of convincing Fanny to marry Henry.

Mary says of her friend's marriage that Mr. Fraser expects his wife to behave well, "to be as steady as himself" (*MP*, 361). This would not seem like an unreasonable expectation to Fanny but clearly seems unreasonable to Mary. Mary also laments that her friend Mrs. Fraser is not able to "manage" her husband well. This makes clear Mary's view that a woman must manipulate a man in order to get the desired behavior from him. A husband's judgment is not to be depended on; rather, a husband is someone to be taken advantage of. It makes sense that Mary would take such pleasure in remembering how Edmund's "sturdy spirit" bent under her pressure. Even as she is puzzled by the poor outcomes of actions based upon such values, she seems still to hold such values.

The marriages to which Mary is accustomed are marriages of bare mutual interest rather than attachment. Mary does acknowledge the superior marriages she has seen at Mansfield where husband and wife seem to have some real attachment to one another. But she continues to puzzle over her friend Mrs. Fraser's bad marriage:

Poor Janet has been sadly taken in; and yet there was nothing improper on her side; she did not run into the match inconsiderately, there was no want of foresight. She took three days to consider of his proposals; and during those three days asked the advice of every body connected with her, whose opinion was worth having; and especially applied to my late dear aunt, whose knowledge of the world made her judgment very generally and deservedly looked up to by all the young people of her acquaintance; and she was decidedly in favour of Mr. Fraser. This seems as if nothing were a security for matrimonial comfort!" (*MP*, 361)

In this speech, Mary reveals what she believes is careful consideration of a marriage proposal: Taking three days to ask advice before deciding. When Mary talks of foresight and consideration, she means something very different from what those at Mansfield Park would

mean, Fanny in particular. Mrs. Fraser received advice from those Mary considered best qualified to give it, including Mary's own worldly-wise aunt, and all were in favor of accepting the proposal. As Fanny has gathered from other things Mary has said, considerations of advantage—wealth and social position—weighed most with Mary's dear aunt so it is not surprising that she would be on the side of such a marriage. Given that it is public knowledge that this aunt's own marriage was unhappy, it would seem to follow that her expertise regarding marriage might be questionable. But Mary, rather than seeing these as counterexamples to what she has been taught makes for a good marriage, sees them as inexplicable exceptions that make the outcome of the what she sees as the best possible principles for obtaining a good husband uncertain. It seems that all of Mary's best friends have unhappy marriages.

All of this talk was only meant to illustrate how much in demand Henry has been. But rather than flattering Fanny into accepting Henry, Mary has offered Fanny many more reasons against accepting Henry to weigh against the only reasons she might have had absent any love for Henry. In her short speech, Mary has illustrated exactly why Fanny ought not to listen to the reasons of advantage offered for her acceptance of Henry. Reflecting on this conversation later, Fanny cannot help but conclude that Mary does love Edmund but that Mary had “still shewn a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so; darkened yet fancying itself light” (*MP*, 367). Not only has Mary given Fanny more reasons not to marry Henry, Mary has revealed that she is little used to self-reflection and that her own character is corrupt.

Mary goes on to question whether Fanny could really have been so unprepared for Henry's proposal as Edmund has suggested. She believes that Fanny must have had some thoughts on the subject and imagined what it might be to be married to Henry. Mary cannot conceive of Fanny's not looking to such considerations of vanity and personal advantage. Mary goes on to claim that Fanny was conscious of the fact that the necklace given to her had been indirectly from Henry and was given at Henry's request. This possibility had not even occurred to Fanny until Mary had given her an arch look at the time, but it was by then too late to give the necklace back without acknowledging that she understood and accepted what was implied in Mary's look. Mary finds that Fanny had never suspected that Henry was serious in any of his attentions and Mary cannot deny that, given Henry's behavior to the Bertram girls, Fanny had reason to doubt his intentions. Mary finally urges Fanny to accept Henry for the only legitimate reasons available, his love for her and the gratitude she owes him for the help he gave her brother

(*MP*, 364). These were the only reasons that carried any weight for Fanny in the first place and these are the only legitimate reasons Mary can leave her with.

Fanny is relieved that throughout all of these attacks no one has discovered the feeling that counts as a decisive reason in her refusal of Henry. Although Henry's character is questionable, gratitude and Henry's own love might have been enough to make Fanny feel the weight of obligation on the side of accepting. Had she not been in love with someone else, she might have come to love Henry. But since she cannot love Henry while she loves another, obligation is on the side of refusal. This is the decisive reason against acceptance and it is the only reason she cannot offer to others for her refusal.

CHAPTER EIGHT

COURTSHIP: FANNY'S HOME VISIT

1. Introduction

Fanny's consistent refusal to marry Henry seems a great betrayal to Sir Thomas. From the time Fanny arrived at the house, Sir Thomas has considered himself her great benefactor and, consequently, expects her to show gratitude in the form with which he is familiar. Fanny is supposed to show obedience and bow to Sir Thomas's greater wisdom. Resistance to his authority calls into question his view of himself as the wise and magnanimous ruler of the family. Sir Thomas's own vanity—a vanity carefully nurtured by his helpless wife and his mercenary sister-in-law—is threatened by Fanny's refusal. Sir Thomas has always planned and hoped to have Fanny married well; this was one of his major aims in bringing her to his home. It is particularly frustrating for him that Fanny herself now serves as the primary bar to achieving this goal.

Having never paid the smallest amount of attention to Fanny's treatment at his home, Sir Thomas believes that Fanny has been too spoiled by her residence there. He concludes that were Fanny to experience her own family's poverty, she would see the great value of Henry's proposal. Again, Sir Thomas emphasizes the wrong values. He thinks that since there is nothing obviously objectionable in Henry's person—after all, Sir Thomas has heard no harm of him—his wealth must be enough to make him a suitable husband. These are the same values that ruled in his daughter's choice of Rushworth for a husband, his own marriage to a vapid and useless wife, and his sister-in-law's venal marriage to Mr. Norris. In the case of his own daughter, acting in accord with these values will prove disastrous. To force Fanny to see the strength of these values, Sir Thomas sends her to her own family. He hopes that once in a house where these values have been little attended to, Fanny will begin to accept his superior wisdom on the subject of marriage and its uses.

Sir Thomas's plan does not, at first, hit its mark. Rather than being chagrined by the idea of visiting a house of poverty, Fanny is thrilled to be able to be amongst her real family. She believes that even though she was "lowest and last" in the Bertram household, she will be considered an equal member of her own family. Shortly after arriving at her parents' home, this

proves to be a mere dream. Life at Mansfield Park has sometimes been difficult for Fanny since she has been made by Mrs. Norris to serve as the lowest member of the household. At her parents' home, aside from William and the baby Betsy, everyone is treated as "lowest and last". No one is treated with consideration. All is disorder. Contrary to Sir Thomas's surmises, it is not the wealth that Fanny misses from Mansfield Park but, rather, the fact that anyone receives consideration and accommodation at all. At Mansfield Park, there is organization and order; things are regular and there is some sense of what is appropriate, especially when it comes to the treatment of others. At her parents' home, all must selfishly fend for themselves.

Fanny's time with her parents does make her treat Henry's proposal with serious consideration. It is not the extent of his wealth that attracts her, although Fanny does think about how she might be able to give one of her sisters a home were she married. What becomes Henry's greatest attraction is his familiarity as an object from Mansfield Park. Sir Thomas's plans are furthered by this trip. Sadly, these plans as well as the ones he made for his own daughters' good marriages are ultimately destroyed by the very thing that made Fanny hesitate in the first place: Henry's vanity.

2. The Home Visit

Edmund reports back to his father that he believes time is all that is needed to bring Fanny to accept Henry. But Sir Thomas hatches his own plan for persuasion. He decides to send Fanny home to visit the Price family so that she might see what it will be like to live without the protection of Sir Thomas or the position in life offered by Henry: The privations of life at her parents' house should be a means of convincing Fanny of the advantages in marrying Henry. Sir Thomas hopes that Fanny will come to miss Henry when he is gone: "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" (*MP*, 366). He is disappointed to find that the loss of consequence was not felt as a loss by Fanny. When it comes to pass that William intends to visit, Sir Thomas plans for Fanny to accompany William back to the Price house for a visit to the home she has not seen for nine years (*MP*, 368). Edmund approves the proposed visit as "right in itself" since Fanny ought to see her family and as being undertaken at the most convenient time. Sir Thomas does not share his main reason for proposing the visit:

[F]or his prime motive in sending her away, had very little to do with the propriety of seeing her parents again, and nothing at all with any idea of making her happy. He certainly wished her to go willingly, but he certainly wished her to be heartily sick of home before the visit ended; and that a little abstinence from the elegancies and luxuries of Mansfield Park, would bring her mind into a sober state, and incline her to a juster estimate of the value of that home of greater permanence, and equal comfort, of which she now had the offer. (*MP*, 369)

Sir Thomas wrongly believes that Fanny's long stay in his own house has made her too used to the comforts of wealth. What he supposes is that Fanny does not grasp the role that wealth plays in the comfort and society of Mansfield Park. According to Sir Thomas, "Her Father's house would, in all probability, teach her the value of a good income; and he trusted she would be the wiser and happier woman, all her life, for the experiment he had devised" (*MP*, 369). A short visit home should inculcate in her a respect for the value of wealth as a means to the sort of life to which she has become accustomed.

Fanny is very happy with the prospect of going home. The first part of Sir Thomas's plan goes well as Fanny is most willing to go to her family. Fanny still remembers what she felt so strongly when she was taken away from the Price house at age 9. Having been made always to feel inferior and dependent by Mrs. Norris and her female cousins, Fanny has longed for home where she had felt as though she had made a valuable contribution in helping to care for her younger siblings. She imagines that to be home will be her chance "to feel affection without fear or restraint, to feel herself the equal of those who surrounded her, to be at peace from all mention of the Crawfords, safe from every look which could be fancied a reproach on their account" (*MP*, 370). Fanny is also relieved by the idea that she will have time away from Edmund and during such time, she can endeavor to master the feelings she has for him. In short, a visit home means a return to the unconditional love of her family and a relief from all the oppression at Mansfield Park.

When Fanny writes to her family about making a visit, her mother writes a letter that convinces Fanny she will find greater warmth and affection at home than was there for her formerly. When Fanny was young, her mother did not distinguish her with any particular affection. But Fanny is led to expect by the letter that she may now have the chance for a closer

relationship with her mother. Fanny blames herself for the earlier lack of affection: “She had probably alienated Love by the helplessness and fretfulness of her fearful temper, or been unreasonable in wanting a larger share than any one among so many could deserve” (*MP*, 371). Fanny expects that now as she is older and can be more of more assistance to her mother, her mother might love her more.

A place where she can feel comfortable as an equal, time away from Edmund and the Crawfords, a chance to develop a closer relationship with her mother, and more time with her brother William are the goods Fanny’s expects from her visit. A few comments of William’s to Fanny suggest that something of the good Sir Thomas aims at might be achieved:

“I do not know how it is,” said he, “but we seem to want some of your nice ways and orderliness at my father’s. The house is always in confusion. You will set things going in a better way, I am sure. You will tell my mother how it all ought to be, and you will be so useful to Susan, and you will teach Betsy, and make the boys love and mind you. How right and comfortable it will all be!” (*MP*, 372)

William’s comments indicate a household in disorder. The parents are not disciplining the children; the mother is not good at domestic economy; the children are not being taught their lessons; and the only person trying to impose order is the eldest daughter who has assumed the position Fanny would have had in the household. Although Fanny does not notice what is suggested by William’s comments, it becomes clear that Fanny will also learn to appreciate Mansfield Park even more.

Before Fanny leaves, Edmund shares with her his plan to propose marriage to Mary. Fanny’s impending departure makes it necessary that Edmund remain at home a little longer to keep his parents company thus delaying the proposal. Edmund promises that when he has proposed and has news, he will write to Fanny. This Fanny dreads. In the weeks leading up to her departure, Fanny has been forced to be a means of communication between Edmund and Mary. Mary has sent her multiple letters in which memories of Mansfield Park are discussed in detail and each letter includes a few short lines of courtship from Henry. The letters seem evidently intended for both Fanny and Edmund so Fanny is forced to read aloud large portions of Mary’s letters to Edmund and to listen to Edmund’s loving words regarding Mary’s style of

writing and warmth of character. Mary's professed friendship for Fanny obligates Fanny to maintain a correspondence with her. On one hand, Fanny is forced to be the conduit between the man she loves and another woman; on the other hand, she is forced to endure reading the protestations of love from the man she does not love through reading the letters of the other woman (*MP*, 373-376).

Fanny's arrival at the Price house does not begin well. She and William are greeted with the news that William's ship is to depart early and he will be forced to leave Fanny alone with the family she has not seen for so many years. It also becomes clear that although Mrs. Price is friendly to Fanny, she is much more concerned with and interested in her son William than the daughter she has not seen for years (*MP*, 378). Mrs. Price makes a good deal of noise about getting some food for her hungry, traveler children but does little to bring it about. Even though she knew when they would be arriving, she has made no preparations for the reception of her children and spends her energy worrying over the fact instead of taking action to remedy the mistake. Very quickly we learn that Mrs. Price does not know how to manage her children or her maid, but is content to depend on her daughter Susan to take care of the things she cannot get others to do:

“Dear me!” continued the anxious mother, “what a sad fire we have got, and I dare say you are both starved with cold. Draw your chair nearer, my dear. I cannot think what Rebecca [the housemaid] has been about. I am sure I told her to bring some coals half an hour ago. Susan, you should have taken care of the fire.” (*MP*, 379)

It seems that all of the worst characteristics of Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram are joined together in Mrs. Price. She is lazy and indolent like Lady Bertram, but without the calmness and politeness of manner. She is querulous and bustling like Mrs. Norris, but without the facility and efficiency of action. In all of the bustle, the warm reunion Fanny had hoped for is passed over and forgotten.

Fanny's reunion with her father is even less warm than that with her mother. When her father arrives home, he curses and kicks Fanny and William's leftover luggage around in the passage-way. When Mr. Price enters the room, Fanny rises to meet him, but he does not see her at all and immediately lavishes his attentions on his eldest son William. William directs his

father's attention to Fanny and after admitting he had forgotten about her, a drunken Mr. Price greets her with some comments about her having reached womanhood and her "wanting a husband soon" (*MP*, 380). After this short "greeting," Mr. Price turns his full attention back to his son.

Besides William, Fanny finds she has five siblings at home: Susan—the eldest of those at home—seems to be the only one bent on having any order in the household. Sam, Tom, and the youngest brother Charles are bent on disorder and destruction. Betsy, the youngest of the children, is spoiled and prone to tattling and feeling entitled to take the belongings of her older siblings. All is chaos in the Price house. Fanny is left to sit and observe the workings of the house she had been so sad to leave; she despairs of the peace and domestic tranquility for which she had hoped. Everyone is yelling and running about; the tea is never served; William's things are mislaid or disorganized while he is preparing to return to his ship; her father is yelling profanities at the loud, romping boys. Fanny comes to the conclusion that her visit will be nothing like what she expected:

She was at home. But alas! it was not such a home, she had not such a welcome, as—she checked herself; she was unreasonable. What right had she to be of importance to her family? She could have none, so long lost sight of! William's concerns must be dearest—they had always been—and he had every right. Yet to have so little said or asked about herself—to have scarcely an enquiry made after Mansfield! It did pain her to have Mansfield forgotten; the friends who had done so much—the dear, dear friends! But here, one subject swallowed up all the rest. Perhaps it must be so. The destination of the Thrush [William's ship] must be now pre-eminently interesting. A day or two might shew the difference. She was only to blame. Yet she thought it would not be so at Mansfield. No, in her uncle's house there would have been consideration of times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention towards every body which was not here. (*MP*, 382)

Fanny understands the family's preoccupation with William, but recognizes that despite William's importance, it would have been right for the family to behave as though they were concerned with their long-absent daughter on her return. Manners and convention dictate as

much and rightly so, since neglect can be so hurtful and destructive of family cohesion. There ought to have been some organization to the reception received by the children whom they had expected home at that hour. That nothing is prepared is a sign that the Price family does not care, that the family does not care is a sign that the parents have taken no trouble to teach the children to care. Although their poverty exacerbates the problem, the real problem is that no one cares about or considers the feelings or comfort of others (*MP*, 391). Within a short time, Fanny's only real friend in the house—her brother William—has left her alone with what are essentially uncaring strangers.

After having settled in at the Price house, Fanny finds herself longing for things that she used to find unpleasant. Even Mary's letters would be welcome since Mary at least can participate in Fanny's interest in Mansfield Park and its inhabitants. As expected, Mary's letters arrive much less frequently since letters to Fanny can no longer serve as surreptitious letters to Edmund. Regardless of the writer's motivations, Fanny is surprised at her own gladness when she finally does receive a letter from Mary. As it turns out, Mary is writing because she has not heard from Edmund: "Your cousin Edmund moves slowly; detained, perchance, by parish duties" (*MP*, 394). Fanny's current circumstances—isolated from those to whom she is most attached and from good, orderly, polite society in general—add great value to Mary's letters (*MP*, 394). Even Fanny's correspondence with the unexciting Lady Bertram is of great interest to her. Sir Thomas's project of making Fanny acutely aware of the advantages and virtues of the type of society at Mansfield Park is proving successful.

There is one person who proves decent in the Price household: Susan—the sister upon whose shoulders has been placed the running of the house—turns out to be a young woman of good judgment but with an assertive temper that contrasts with Fanny's own quieter and gentler temper (*MP*, 395). When she looks past Susan's pushiness, Fanny is able to see Susan's natural sensitivity to what is improper in her house and this sensitivity is even more remarkable since it could not have been instilled by experience (*MP*, 395). Susan is ignored just as much as Fanny while love and attention is lavished on the boys of the family and the baby, Betsey. As Susan looks up to Fanny, Fanny is able to do her some good and the two become companions supporting each other in chaos of the Price household (*MP*, 397). In becoming the mentor of her sister Susan, Fanny has finally graduated to the role of moral guide just as Edmund had been for her.

Sir Thomas's plans for Fanny are forwarded by the arrival of Henry Crawford (*MP*, 399). It is not surprising that after so much time in such an unsympathetic environment even a visit from Henry would please Fanny once she is able to overcome her initial surprise and the sense of shame attending her surroundings. Fanny also discovers that her family's inconsiderate rudeness is reserved only for the family; everyone is on their best behavior with Henry (*MP*, 402). Henry brings news that Edmund is to visit Mary in London and Fanny silently assures herself that marriage between Edmund and Mary is now a certainty (*MP*, 401). Shortly after Henry arrives, he takes Fanny and her sisters for a walk. During the walk, the group meets her father and Fanny is obliged to introduce him to Henry. She is certain that Henry will think ill of her father and consequently of her, but as did her mother's, her father's manners change instantly upon perceiving the social status of Henry Crawford. Despite some irregularity in how their walk would have been conducted with the addition of their father—Mr. Price would have walked ahead with Henry, leaving his daughters to follow breathlessly—the interactions between Henry and Mr. Price go well.

When Henry is finally left in the company of just Fanny and Susan, he relates his most recent good deeds as inspired by Fanny: He has managed to keep a large, hardworking family from losing their home by going over his agent's head and renewing their lease and, generally, he has taken a more active interest in his business affairs. This all has its intended effect on Fanny: "This was aimed, and well aimed, at Fanny. It was pleasing to hear him speak so properly; here, he had been acting as he ought to do. To be the friend of the poor and oppressed!" (*MP*, 404). Just as he is beginning to receive her silent approval, he goes too far by alluding too explicitly to his hopes, but a change of subject to that of Mansfield Park is enough to bring him back into favor. In being more what an elegant gentleman ought to be than anyone Fanny has recently been with and by bringing news of the people and places she loves most, Henry is able to create a friendly complacency in Fanny: "she had never seen him so agreeable—so *near* being agreeable" (*MP*, 406).

Being attended by Henry on another walk, Fanny finds that Edmund's judgment regarding an alignment in aesthetic tastes between herself and Henry proves true. She finds herself agreeing and agreed with in her appreciation of the sea view and the natural world around her (*MP*, 409). Henry is there also to support her in the physical weakness resulting from her time at the Price house; Henry is able to give her his arm and extend her ability to walk out and

enjoy nature (*MP*, 409). Fanny cannot help appreciating Henry's consideration and kindness toward her loved ones. Henry himself is especially concerned about Fanny's health and offers to bring her home to Mansfield Park at her own convenience. His visit is a demonstration of what he has to offer Fanny. But in one area he is found wanting: When it comes to it, Henry must ask for Fanny's judgment on things ethical since he seems to have no judgment of his own, as he readily admits: "When you give me your opinion, I always know what is right. Your judgment is my rule of right" (*MP*, 412). It is clear that if the two were to marry they must make do sharing Fanny's portion of virtue. Still, by the time he leaves Fanny cannot help being sad at the loss of company and she even begins to believe he might really care for her (*MP*, 413-414).

Shortly after Henry's departure, Fanny receives a letter from Mary Crawford. The letter begins with a short synopsis of Henry's visit to Fanny, then a quick mention of the society Mary is keeping and a description of a visit from Edmund. Embedded in this is some indication of her struggle between London and Mansfield Park values. She mentions Maria's large house in town with some admiration and even speaks of Lord Stornaway—a man she spent some time maligning as a bad husband with "blackguard character" (*MP*, 416)—with complacency. Mary also shares her friends' opinion of Edmund—her friends were "much struck with his gentleman-like appearance" (*MP*, 416)—but seems still ashamed that Edmund will not be more than a clergyman and that someday soon the costume of a clergyman will set him apart from her kind of high society. In a postscript, Mary encourages Fanny to take advantage of Henry's offer to bring her home to Mansfield Park and mentions that Henry's intended trip to relieve his tenant in Norfolk must be delayed for the sake of a party. Henry's good deed pursued with the approval of Fanny must be put off in favor of the entertainment of a party and, as it turns out, the chief entertainment of this party will be watching the reaction of Maria on seeing Henry again: "He will see the Rushworths, which I own I am not sorry for—having a little curiosity—and so I think has he, though he will not acknowledge it" (*MP*, 417).

Fanny is again disgusted by the contents of the letter she has received from Mary. Mary has unconsciously let drop all sorts of truths about her intentions for Edmund and her mischievous intentions toward the newlywed Maria Rushworth. Fanny concludes from what she has read that, in the long run, Mary will accept Edmund but upon many unpleasant conditions. Mary will ask things of Edmund that outstrip his income or will require him to give up his chosen profession in favor of a more lucrative one. Fanny is especially offended by Mary's being

reassured by the approval given of Edmund by her friends and by her relief that Edmund looks well to her friends (387). Though it bothers her less, Fanny is also disturbed by the idea that Mary would seek to disturb Maria's peace by placing Henry again before her and by the idea that Mary would seek to turn Henry from a good purpose just to indulge her curiosity:

That Miss Crawford should endeavor to secure a meeting between [Henry] and Mrs. Rushworth, was all in her worst line of conduct, and grossly unkind and ill-judged; but she hopes *he* would not be actuated by any such degrading curiosity. He acknowledged no such inducement, and his sister ought to have given him credit for better feelings than her own (387).

Fanny is still able to see Mary clearly, but she has ceased to see Henry clearly. In the same way that Mary acts partly under the influence of Edmund's values thereby seeming to Edmund to have these values, Henry has been under the influence of Fanny and began to seem to Fanny to be better than he really is. After receiving this letter from Mary, Fanny is in suspense about the outcome of Edmund and Mary's courtship and less strongly about the outcome of Mary's attempt to turn Henry away from his good purpose. As she had tried to send word to Edmund by means of Henry and since Mary had implied that another letter would be forthcoming, Fanny waits to hear from someone what the outcomes have been but hearing from no one, she gives up.

Fanny turns her attentions to her sister Susan again and, after spending some time educating Susan both on history and informally on the habits of Mansfield Park, becomes convinced that her sister is fit for different things from what the Price household has to offer (388). Susan has "an innate taste for the genteel and well-appointed" (*MP*, 419) and the effect of Fanny's descriptions of Mansfield Park is that Susan longs to go there. Fanny feels some guilt for having introduced Susan to good things that may be out of Fanny's power to give her and this desire to help her sister even leads her to reconsider Henry's proposal. If Fanny were to marry Henry, she would have a home to which she could invite her sister:

And had it been possible for her to return Mr. Crawford's regard, the probability of his being very far from objecting to such a measure, would have been the greatest increase of

all her comforts. She thought he was really good tempered, and could fancy his entering into a plan of that sort most pleasantly (*MP*, 419).

All of Henry's kindness and his attempts to be more like the sort of man Fanny could love have had some influence on Fanny's judgment of Henry and have even started to endear him to her. Some of his flattery and deference have had their intended effect. Fanny has also come to see the importance of having an income sufficient to remain "genteel" and to be able to assist her family. Sir Thomas's scheme has been partially successful; at least, the visit has gone a long way toward forwarding his plans for Fanny's marriage to Henry.

3. Henry and Mary in Their London Habitat

There were still two months left for Fanny's visit when Henry had come to Portsmouth and had left to see his sister on the way to his Norfolk estate. Despite having sent word to Edmund by means of Henry, Fanny does not hear from him after the letter from Mary until the seventh week of the remaining two months. Edmund finally writes to her when he has returned home to Mansfield Park. Henry did in fact relay Fanny's message but Edmund has been in a bad state with regard to his marriage prospects. Edmund has found Mary strangely "altered" (*MP*, 421). Her worst attributes are magnified and on display in London. Under the influence of her friends, she is much worse than she was at Mansfield Park. Edmund has a low opinion of Mary's friends:

I do not like Mrs. Fraser. She is a cold-hearted, vain woman, who was married from convenience, and though evidently unhappy in her marriage, places her disappointment, not to faults of judgement or temper, or disproportion of age, but to her being after all, less affluent than many of her acquaintance, especially than her sister, Lady Stornaway, and is the determined supporter of every thing mercenary and ambitious, provided it be only mercenary and ambitious enough. I look upon her intimacy with those two sisters, as the greatest misfortune of her life and mine. They have been leading her astray for years (*MP*, 421).

No doubt Edmund's description of Mrs. Fraser and Lady Stornaway is accurate, but having heard Mary's own description of her relationship with these women, Fanny cannot possibly accept Edmund's blaming them entirely for Mary's defects. Fanny's knows from Mary's own mouth that these women were very much under the influence and guidance of Mary's own beloved Aunt who had also educated the young Mary. Although Mary and the sisters may reinforce one another's bad habits, it is clear that they all have received similar educations in the ways of marriage and the value of wealth. Edmund has left London convinced that Mary may refuse him because he cannot offer her the sort of income she has come to expect and he acknowledges some justice in her expectations (*MP*, 421-422).

By some means Edmund has become convinced that a marriage between Fanny and Henry is certain. It may be that it was his own and his father's wish as well as the wish of Mary. This creates another problem with a refusal from Mary: It would mean being cut off from Fanny as well. If Fanny marries Henry and Mary refuses Edmund, Edmund will have no bosom friend to turn to for comfort. Now, Edmund's best friendship and his happiness in love seem to depend on his ability to win over Mary Crawford (*MP*, 423).

Edmund reports to Fanny that Henry's meeting with Maria went just as one would suppose knowing Henry to be devoted to Fanny: "[Henry] thoroughly knows his own mind, and acts upon his resolutions—an inestimable quality" (*MP*, 423). But Edmund's description of the event contains two disheartening facts: That Henry went to the party where he met with Maria is one—he had been hastening to relieve his tenant but was turned aside by curiosity—and that Henry was "surprised" by Maria's coldness to him. Given his reassurances about his good intentions and the benevolent scheme he had entered into with Fanny, it was to be expected that he would follow through with the scheme. If he can be so easily turned aside from his plans by a sort of malevolent curiosity, Henry is not the man Fanny was beginning to believe he was and he is not the sort of man Edmund reports him as being. Henry neither "knows his own mind" nor has he "act[ed] upon his resolutions."

In this letter Fanny has found that Edmund's continues in his blind pursuit of Mary, Henry has shown himself unreliable, and Fanny must wait until after Easter to come home to Mansfield. Fanny regrets having even wished for a letter and even gives way to something like bitterness. Her thoughts betray her frustration and disgust with her best friend and former mentor; Edmund's blindness with regard to Mary leads Fanny to conclude that he will at last

marry her: “Why is it not settled?—He is blinded, and nothing will open his eyes, nothing can, after having had truths before him so long in vain.—He will marry her, and be poor and miserable. God grant that her influence do not make him cease to be respectable!” (*MP*, 424). Fanny is equally frustrated by Edmund’s blaming Mary’s friends for her bad habits: “She is quite as likely to have led them astray” (*MP*, 424). In this state of mind she closes by wishing that Edmund finish with wavering and do what seems inevitable given his prior judgment: “Fix, commit, condemn yourself” (*MP*, 424). Recovering from this temporary exasperation, Fanny ends by softening her feelings toward Edmund and feeling grateful for the trust Edmund has shown in opening his private thoughts to her.

Soon another letter arrives from her Aunt Bertram with the bad news that Tom has become gravely ill away from home and Edmund has gone to attend him. After a series of alarming letters from Lady Bertram reporting the state of Tom’s health, his return home and his descent into more severe illness, Fanny reflects upon her feelings for her cousin Tom. She had never been much attached to him but when contemplating losing him, she cannot bear it. Her concern and compassion for him is all the greater when she thinks about how he came to be sick in the first place and how his life so far must be such as to make him even more wretched in his fear of death (*MP*, 425-426). Despite the crisis, Easter passes without a word about anyone’s coming to fetch her.

Fanny misses the beauty of springtime at Mansfield Park, but Fanny wants most of all to be home in order to be of use to those she loves there. Fanny concerns herself with how she might have at least calmed and comforted Lady Bertram. Given Fanny’s desire to be home and to be helping those she loves, Fanny is very puzzled by the fact that the Bertram sisters decided not to come home to Mansfield. She cannot understand how the sisters could want to be so far away when the family was in need (*MP*, 432). Fanny concludes that “the influence of London [was] very much at war with all respectable attachments” (*MP*, 433). London had led Mary away from her “respectable” love for Edmund and led Maria and Julia away from a proper love of home and family.

While Fanny waits in suspense at Portsmouth, she wonders when and if she will hear from Mary. She also wonders whether Henry eventually kept his resolution to go into Norfolk to help his tenant. When she receives a letter from Mary, its contents are shocking. After a few apologies for not writing sooner and an attempt at seeming concerned about Tom’s health, it

becomes clear that Mary is writing in order to ascertain how likely it is that Tom will die leaving Edmund the heir to the estate. Mary expresses herself very appropriately on the subject until she makes an attempt to be clever: “Fanny, Fanny, I see you smile, and look cunning, but upon my honour, I never bribed a physician in my life. Poor young man!—If he is to die, there will be two poor young men less in the world; and with a fearless face and bold voice I say to any one, that wealth and consequence could fall into no hands more deserving of them” (*MP*, 434). With these few lines, Mary has proved herself everything that Fanny and the reader feared that she was. She imagines everyone thinks as she does, that everyone is mercenary. Worse, she actually believes that it is appropriate to relay these feelings and hopes about the death of Tom to his own cousin Fanny. What might have led her to do so must have been either that she could not resist putting on paper the clever thoughts she had on the subject or that she really believes that because Fanny cares for Edmund she would want him to have good things at any price. Either way, she has misjudged the audience of her letter.

Mary’s letter also reveals that Henry never went to Norfolk. Rather than doing the good deed discussed, he remained in London to trifle with Maria and then followed Maria into another part of the country to continue the entertainment.⁵⁵ Mary’s protestation that Henry cares for no one but Fanny make what Henry is doing worse, for if he really does care only for Fanny his only motive for trifling with Maria is to flatter his own vanity by reigniting her passion for him. Mary has renewed the offer Henry made to bring Fanny back to Mansfield and although going home is what Fanny wants most, she now has no desire to have any obligations to the Crawford siblings. She is disgusted with Mary’s “cold-hearted ambition” and with Henry’s “thoughtless vanity” (*MP*, 436). Despite her disgust, she does have the strong desire to be at home again, her true home at Mansfield Park. In the end, it is her fear of acting against her uncle’s wishes that determines her not to accept the offer of a ride home. Fanny reflects that all of Edmund’s work at overcoming the evil influence of Mary’s education has only served to overcome her disposition to reject him from a prejudice against his profession. Edmund had not been able to overcome

⁵⁵ Maria’s reaction to Henry’s courtship of Fanny is what would be expected: She is envious and, to some extent, humiliated (*MP*, 485). But Maria’s first big event—a party on the 28th—should remind her of what she has gained in gaining Rushworth instead of Henry.

Mary's love of wealth or her belief that it was the most important consideration in marrying (*MP*, 436).

4. The Betrayal

After turning down the Crawfords' offer, Fanny expects another letter from Mary pressing her to accept the ride. The arrival of a letter from Mary takes a bit longer than expected, but Fanny assumes that it will contain a renewal of the offer. Instead, the letter is full of allusions to some mysterious and terrible accusation involving the Rushworths and Henry Crawford. There are many references to some mysterious "they"—a "they" who may be any combination of Rushworths and Henry—who have left some place or other together. The one thing that is clear is that Mary is intent on conveying the idea that "Henry is blameless" in the matter, whatever the mysterious matter is (*MP*, 437). Whatever it is that is going on, Mary clearly believes that Fanny must already have heard something of it. Mary closes her letter with the ominous words, "But why would you not let us come for you? I wish you may not repent it" (*MP*, 437). The mysterious allegation and the events behind it are made to seem to somehow hinge on Fanny's having rejected the offer of a ride home that would have taken Henry far away from the Rushworths.

Fanny is shocked by what she has read, but she is equally confused by it. Fanny can only guess that Henry has done something foolish with respect to Mrs. Rushworth or Julia. From the wording of the letter, Fanny surmises that the Rushworths have left town suddenly and gone to Mansfield Park, which must mean that whatever crime was committed could not be serious enough to have broken up the Rushworths or caused great shame to the Bertram family. So far as that goes, Fanny's mind is at ease. In the letter, Mary implies that whatever Henry has done is such as "to excite [Fanny's] jealousy" (*MP*, 438). Fanny's jealousy is not aroused, but she does find herself disappointed in Henry. She had begun to believe he really was devoted to her in the way he claimed. Fanny is puzzled, as any virtuous person would be, at how Henry could really feel a strong and particular affection for her and yet be the flirt and admirer of some other woman (*MP*, 438). As vanity is largely absent from Fanny's motivational set, she cannot see what might draw a man like Henry with so much to lose—assuming he really does love Fanny—to risk his future happiness. In truth, Henry is only falling prey to one of his strongest vices. We

have seen in his prior acting career and in his description of his interest in great preaching how he loves to be admired. Besides the vice of vanity, Henry has shown a proclivity to sudden and temporary enthusiasms. When faced with Maria's coldness on the first meeting after her marriage, one can only imagine that he was carried away in the temporary enthusiasm of renewing the love that once satisfied his vanity.

Fanny's own thinking on the subject betrays her lack of experience and showcases her own virtue. She thinks to herself that either she has been much deceived by Henry's attention and Henry does not love her or that Henry does love her and nothing could have happened. But clearly something did happen so Henry must have been fooling her despite seeming to really care. Because she is only now having this sort of experience with vice, she does not consider that Henry may really love her and yet engage in a behavior that would seem to imply otherwise. For Fanny, love implies certain inclinations that would make it impossible to feign an interest in someone other than the loved one. Even in the case of a merely professed love, it would seem that certain duties—fidelity being one of them—would be incumbent on the lover and she cannot see how one could fail to recognize that duty. What seems clear to Fanny is not so clear to the vitiated Henry who has long been in the habit of gratifying his vanity by attaching foolish women. Henry does not recognize any inconsistency in his behavior since his flirtations have nothing to do with love for another person and so cannot possibly conflict with a love for Fanny. It might be that since Fanny and Maria are so different and his feelings for the two women are so different, he does not see them as in competition with each other. It is more likely that his enthusiasm blocked not only his ability to reason morally, but prevented him from even considering his actions in a moral light. His means-end reasoning was intact while the moral considerations remained silent.

Fanny waits uncomfortably for another letter explaining Mary's first. She receives no second letter from Mary, but hears more news from an unexpected corner. Her father is reading the newspaper and runs across an article making oblique reference to some matrimonial problems of a "Mr. R of Wimpole Street" whose wife has run away "with the well known and captivating Mr. C" (*MP*, 440). Although out of kindness and loyalty to the Bertram family Fanny seeks to downplay the article to her father, she is convinced of her mistake in her reading of Mary's letter. Suddenly, it becomes clear that the "they" who had left were not Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth but Henry and Mrs. Rushworth (*MP*, 440). Fanny is again shocked when she thinks

back over Mary's letter in which the great evil of what has happened is downplayed and sees this as yet another indication of Mary's bad character (*MP*, 441). The evil of what was done cannot be downplayed. In addition, the bad consequences will be spread to everyone she loves. As Fanny herself points out, Maria was married a very short time and Henry claimed to be in love with Fanny. In addition, the guilty woman's brother was on the verge of proposing to the guilty man's sister while the guilty man's supposed beloved is the cousin of the guilty woman. Even worse, the guilty man's half-sister is married to the parson who holds Mansfield Park living so that when all of this occurs no one can escape the constant reminders and shame of the act. The combination of Mary's prior letter and the newspaper article convince Fanny of the rumor's truth, "*His* unsettled affections, wavering with his vanity, *Maria's* decided attachment, and no sufficient principle on either side, gave it possibility—Miss Crawford's letter stamp it a fact" (*MP*, 441).

When Fanny momentarily considers how the crime will affect Edmund and Mary's marriage prospects, she quickly shifts to considering other effects lest she accidentally feel glad of the crime (*MP*, 441). It seems the mark of a virtuous mind to command itself to turn away from unjust thoughts and not be tempted to feel glad of an evil for the sake of its effects. An evil is an evil, no matter what its effects. For Fanny, the evil of the act can be separated from its effects. Although she worries about the consequences which will indeed be grave in this case, she chooses to ignore the good consequences (i.e., Edmund being saved from Mary) and consider only the bad consequences. Sir Thomas and Edmund, she believes, will be affected most since the two were the most deceived. But even if it had affected no one, Maria and Henry's act would have been an evil. The surprising part is that the reasonably-expected bad consequences of the action even for themselves would not serve as a deterrent to two such selfish people.

Fanny is again left to wait on news from Mansfield Park. When a letter does come, it is from Edmund and the letter is again very vague about news of Henry and Maria. But it contains even more bad news: Julia, probably in a pique of envy, has eloped with Mr. Yates (*MP*, 442). Sir Thomas is doing his best to overcome his own terrible feelings and continues to search for his eldest daughter. Edmund's letter contains Sir Thomas's invitation to Fanny to come home to Mansfield Park and to bring her sister Susan with her. Edmund will come for them the next day. One of Fanny's dearest wishes has been granted, but not in the way she would have wished; "She was, she felt she was, in the greatest danger of being exquisitely happy, while so many were

miserable. The evil which brought such good to her! She dreaded lest she should learn to be insensible of it” (*MP*, 443). Again Fanny is worried and takes care that she should not become unaware of the evil of the act when the act has brought such good consequences to herself. She reminds herself to remain conscious of the difference between the moral valence of the act itself and the consequences it brings about.

When Edmund comes to collect Fanny and Susan, Fanny is both glad to be going home and full of compassion for what Edmund must be feeling. Edmund is obviously miserable but wants to control his feelings as much as possible. During the ride home, Fanny is happy to see the familiar countryside but longs to comfort Edmund who must suppress his feelings around Susan (*MP*, 445). The forced silence between Edmund and Fanny seems only to increase the discomfort of each though each seeks to avoid the subject partly from a fear of increasing the other’s discomfort. Edmund, unaware of the effects of Portsmouth on Fanny’s health, attributes her ill looks to the shock and pain of the recent event (*MP*, 446).

The person at home most crushed by the events is Mrs. Norris, as she had always preferred her niece Maria and had been the main orchestrator of the now failed marriage from which Maria had fled. Her disappointment in her own handiwork overwhelms her and at the moment of the family’s greatest trouble—a trouble she seemed to have wished for—she is unable to serve in her bustling, controlling manner: “She was an altered creature, quieted, stupefied, indifferent to everything that passed” (*MP*, 448). Like Fanny, Mrs. Norris wished for something the results of which she did not expect—she did not expect that her own actions would have helped to bring about the downfall of her favorite⁵⁶ and leave her incapable of glorying in the misfortune of the Bertram family (*MP*, 448). In order to avoid blaming herself, like Mary Mrs. Norris blames Fanny for not accepting Henry’s proposal.

In her attempts to comfort and distract Lady Bertram, Fanny comes to learn the details of Maria and Henry’s running off together (*MP*, 450). It seems that Maria had gone to visit some friends while Mr. Rushworth was going to get his mother from Bath. These friends of Maria’s were also good friends of Henry’s and allowed him constant access to their house. As she did

⁵⁶ Maria is fashioned by Mrs. Norris to be like Mrs. Norris. Through Maria, Mrs. Norris hoped to see what might have happened had Mrs. Norris been in the position of her sister Bertram. The spectacular downfall and disgrace of Maria is the downfall of Mrs. Norris by proxy.

during the excursion to Sotherton, Maria again absconded without Mr. Rushworth's leave. Mr. Rushworth had returned home with his mother to find his wife absent and had become suspicious. There had been rumors and an angry Mrs. Rushworth senior had begun to spread rumors by means of her maid in order to prevent the return home of Maria. Maria apparently had now thought of return and the evidence indicated that she and Henry were hidden away somewhere together. Despite the fact that there was no hope of saving Maria's "character" (*MP*, 450)—Sir Thomas still sought her in order to prevent her descent into greater personal vice. Maria's character is now decidedly vicious but he hoped to prevent her mind and soul from being too much tainted, from becoming much more vicious.

Sir Thomas is unhappy in all his children including Edmund. As Sir Thomas has no idea of Mary's bad character, he grieves for his son and the seemingly innocent girl he had hoped to marry since there can be no alliance between their families now. Fanny reasons correctly that he can also no longer be angry with her for not accepting Henry's proposal now that Henry's character is laid open to him (*MP*, 453).

Edmund will not talk of Mary for a few days after reaching Mansfield Park and though he has commented to Fanny, on seeing her ill looks, "No wonder—you must feel it—you must suffer. How a man who had once loved, could desert you! But *your's*—your regard was new compared with—Fanny, think of *me!*" (*MP*, 446). These words must have sounded selfish to the reader as it sounded as though Edmund found his suffering greater than Fanny's. But when he tells Fanny of his meeting with Mary right after the terrible act, it becomes clear that he must have been referring to how deceived they both were and he the more deceived and the more foolish of the two. Edmund had gone to meet Mary in what he believed would be their mutual sorrow, but Mary had immediately approached the subject of Henry and Maria's crime pragmatically with no hint of moral outrage. Rather than seeing the morally criminal nature of the act, Mary repeatedly calls it "folly" (*MP*, 457-458). Mary sees the indiscretion as wrong only because it brings about terrible consequences—consequences not intended by the actors—and not because the act was bad in itself:

She reprobated her brother's folly in being drawn on by a woman whom he had never cared for, to do what must lose him the woman he adored; but still more the folly of—

poor Maria, in sacrificing such a situation, plunging into such difficulties, under the idea of being really loved by a man who had long ago made his indifference clear. (*MP*, 454)

Mary is shocked at nothing but the stupidity of the act. She is shocked that her brother and Maria have played the game so ill, not that they have done something wrong that indicates and perpetuates evil of character in both of them and that may have a very different sort of consequence in the world to come. If Henry and Maria could have done a better job of hiding their indiscretion, there would have been no crime. The crime was in detection: “She saw it only as folly, and that folly stamped only by exposure” (*MP*, 455). According to Edmund, “it was the detection, not the offence which she reprobated” (*MP*, 455). In Mary’s eyes, the two were negligent rather than vicious. Morality is pretense and subterfuge for Mary. Morality is merely conventional and what society does not know of cannot be a crime.

The only justice Mary does in her speech is to Fanny and by implication to Edmund, for she has always somehow recognized their value. When she regrets the loss of Fanny as a sister, she has not yet resigned herself to the loss of Edmund as a husband (*MP*, 457). Despite valuing Fanny as she should, she still cannot recognize the propriety of Fanny’s refusal to marry Henry. She believes that Fanny might have “fixed” Henry (*MP*, 457). She believes that if only Fanny had accepted Henry, Henry might never have had the free time to engage in a flirtation with Maria. Again, she can only approve behavior that leads to desired consequences and can either not see the difference between mere means-end reasoning and practical wisdom or, which amounts to the same things, does not believe in morality at all. Edmund diagnoses Mary’s character:

The evil lies yet deeper; in her total ignorance, unsuspectingness of there being such feelings, in a perversion of mind which made it only natural to her to treat the subject as she did. She was speaking only, as she had heard others speak, as she imagined every body else must speak. Her’s are not faults of temper. She would not voluntarily give unnecessary pain to any one, and though I may deceive myself, I cannot help but think that for me, for my feelings, she would—Her’s are faults of principle, Fanny, of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind. (*MP*, 456)

Mary has a good nature or some natural virtues—a good temperament. She is cheerful and would not willingly hurt anyone. But her habits, from her childhood, have been such as to overlay her temperaments with all sorts of vices so that her evil thoughts and desires are had cheerfully and without malice.

Edmund has not yet disclosed Mary's final speeches. She suggested that Maria's family support and countenance a marriage between her and Henry, "recommending ... a compliance, a compromise, an acquiescence, in the continuance of sin, on the chance of a marriage which, thinking as I now thought of her brother, should rather be prevented than sought" (*MP*, 458). Edmund is so shocked that he reproves Mary immediately. She takes his reproof with mixed feelings—she seems to feel a sense of shame but in the long run stands with pride in her London sophistication and makes a saucy speech about Edmund's sermonizing (*MP*, 458). Realizing that a marriage between Edmund and Mary was now impossible, Fanny finally feels at liberty to disclose the contents of the letter in which Mary expressed her hopes for Tom's death. Though painful, this is able to provide some more comfort to Edmund as it shows her even more unworthy than he thought.

5. The Final Sums

In the last chapter, Austen tells us the final thoughts of the characters and the final outcomes of the previous action. As for the characters that turn out vicious, Austen claims that she will not dwell on their guilt and misery. Still, she spends a few pages telling us what becomes of the more deservedly unfortunate people. The slightly less vicious, slightly stupider fellow Rushworth ends best. Despite the inconvenience and embarrassment of a very public divorce from Maria, his public reputation remains untarnished and he is able to hope to marry again. As Austen points out, it was very clear and ought to have been clear to Rushworth that Maria never cared for him and pity is not easily forthcoming for a man who suffered indignities for having been so stupid as to believe himself preferred in the face of so much evidence to the contrary and who was so much the dupe of his own vanity (*MP*, 464).

The guiltier man in question—Henry Crawford—despite suffering private disappointment in having lost the woman he loved forever was at least not shunned by society. Austen details the vices and states of mind that lead Henry to sacrifice forever his chance at happiness with Fanny. As we observed in Fanny's own thoughts at Portsmouth, she was coming

to respect and care for what seemed like a reformed Henry. If he could have carried out his good resolutions, he might have eventually won Fanny's love and her hand in marriage. But his "curiosity and vanity" led him to delay leaving town in order to observe the behavior of the newly-married Maria (*MP*, 467). When greeted with a cold indifference, his vanity led him to want to reestablish himself as a favorite in the eyes of Maria. What he did not understand was that Maria did really love him and her cold indifference was her last defense against a passion so strong that she would ruin her own reputation in pursuit of its object. Without ceasing to love Fanny, Henry pursued Maria's admiration and received something so much stronger than admiration. In the end, the flirtation that turned into an affair could not be kept secret since Maria's passion made her reckless and made her want to leave her husband. This exposure made it seem inescapable that the two should run off together. Even as he ran away with Maria, Henry still preferred Fanny, and after he was forced to live a while with Maria, he preferred Fanny's character still more (*MP*, 468). Though Henry's penance must be private, Austen leads us to believe that Henry—a sensible man in spite of his sudden enthusiasms and his vanity—must be pained by the evil he did to his friends the Bertrams and, most of all, by the loss of Fanny—"a woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved" (*MP*, 469).

Maria is left to suffer the most from the affair since her shame was both public and private. As Austen points out, the woman's punishment is greater in cases like Maria and Henry's for the woman loses her reputation and is usually ejected from good society, often not even welcome in her own parents' home. The foolish and vain Maria, bearing a bit more of a resemblance to her husband that one might have expected, gave herself over to a passion for and into the hands of a man who clearly never cared for her. The evidence of the first flirtation and abandonment at Mansfield Park ought have taught her he did not truly care for her, but her feelings for him had overwhelmed any sort of prudence—her desire to believe he loved her led her to ignore clear evidence to the contrary. In addition, she was surely resentful of her cousin Fanny whom she believed could have so little claim to being loved by Henry. As Maria always was taught to believe herself superior to Fanny, it must have been a blow to her to hear that Henry had proposed to Fanny and it must have seemed a great triumph to overcome Henry's feelings for Fanny. When it becomes clear that Henry will not marry her, this is Maria's chief comfort: "She had lived with [Henry] to be reproached as the ruin of all his happiness in Fanny,

and carried away no better consolation in leaving him, than that she *had* divided them. What can exceed the misery of such a mind in such a situation?" (*MP*, 464).

Maria is burdened with an additional evil. When it becomes clear that Sir Thomas will not invite Maria back into his home, Maria's chief teacher and defender Mrs. Norris resolves to go and live with Maria. The two are sent away to live together in seclusion and be one another's mutual punishment, Mrs. Norris's affection and flattery never having created a matching affection in Maria (*MP*, 465).

The Grants, shamed by having been the means of bringing Henry Crawford to Mansfield Park, do their best to quit the area as soon as possible. When Dr. Grant is able to take a post in London, the Grants and Bertrams are all relieved. The wounded Mary, having rejected the society of her former London friends, goes to live with her kind sister Mrs. Grant. When Dr. Grant dies, Mary stays on with her sister and though she fully intends to marry an older brother with a great deal of money, she is never able to find any who can compare to Edmund. Mary has been unfortunate in having developed nearly incompatible tastes: She desires the goodness and modesty of Edmund and the Mansfield Park set combined with the wealth of the London set (*MP*, 469). Her love for Edmund cannot be supplanted by love of another since she is unable ever to find someone comparable, much less superior.

Excepting Mrs. Norris and Maria, things improve for everyone from Mansfield Park. Julia's marriage to Mr. Yates turns out to be less bad than originally thought. Both Julia and Mr. Yates are contrite and solicitous to gain the approval of Sir Thomas. Mr. Yates stupidity is not as great as Mr. Rushworth's and he is eager to learn from and be guided by the judgment of Sir Thomas (*MP*, 462). It turns out also that his estate is a bit larger and less encumbered by debt than supposed so the temptation to the vices actuated by the need for money is lessened. Young Tom after having suffered through his illness and been forced to be alone with his thoughts has become more sober: "He had suffered, and he had learned to think, two advantages that he had never know before" (*MP*, 462). After some consideration of his contribution to the corruption of his sister by bringing her into close intimacy with people he know little about by means of the play, he comes to regret his earlier carelessness and thoughtlessness. Accordingly, being surrounded by the sensible inhabitants of Mansfield Park, he comes to be more steady and sensible himself.

Although Edmund is temporarily the most affected in having been disappointed in love, his sadness is of short duration. After spending the summer in tête-à-têtes with Fanny, Edmund is able to learn not to regret losing a woman who, in a sense, was the product of his imagination: “After wandering about and sitting under trees with Fanny all the summer evenings, he had so well talked his mind into submission, as to be very tolerably cheerful again” (*MP*, 462). Though Austen refuses to provide a timeline for the progression from regretting the loss of Mary to a positive desire to marry Fanny, a suitable length of time and closeness brings Edmund to love Fanny and hope that she can return his affection. Edmund’s early habits of “loving, guiding, protecting [Fanny]” as well as his having been primarily responsible for her education make her the perfect object for his affection and the ideal match for him (*MP*, 470). In fact, Sir Thomas’s having neglected offering the warmth of a father to Fanny is what required that the conscientious Edmund should come to her aid at such a young age. Not being aware of Fanny’s own strong feelings for him, Edmund spends some time trying to woo her and is pleasantly surprised at his success as well as the later admission (probably well after their marriage) that Fanny had preferred him all along (*MP*, 471). When approached for his permission, Sir Thomas is only too happy to give his consent to a marriage that he once considered highly undesirable but now is the best chance to hold together the good society of Mansfield Park.

The person whose mind is most affected by the evils is Sir Thomas. As what might be thought of as the sovereign of his house, he blames himself for the crimes, vices, and sadness of his family. When Sir Thomas considers the education he had given his daughters, he sees his errors. His chief error was putting Mrs. Norris too much in charge of his daughters. In allowing her to flatter and indulge the Bertram sisters, he had allowed his daughters affection to be alienated from himself. He had played the disciplinarian while Mrs. Norris had played the sycophant. He had become a source of fear and aversion to his daughters, offering them only stern commandments and the threat of punishment without any affection or instruction. Consequently, they had sought to only outwardly conform to his requirements in order to avoid disapproval and correction; he had made his daughters play the hypocrite in his presence. At the same time, Mrs. Norris had offered complete approval and even admiration and encouragement for any and all of their “natural” behavior. With her, they could be themselves with no worries about judgment or punishment (*MP*, 463).

Sir Thomas comes to a further and more disturbing conclusion about his daughters: “Something must have been wanting *within*” (*MP*, 463). Not only was it the case that his daughters had received bad education, they had been allowed to acquire bad habits resulting in their having been missing some internal sense of what was right and fitting. The moral education Sir Thomas had given them consisted in precepts to be memorized, but he had never forced them to act on these precepts; “Active principle” had been missing from their education:

They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice...He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility, he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them. (*MP*, 463)

Sir Thomas blames himself for having overlooked the most important part of his daughter’s education since this part was the part that might have prevented their vice and helped them avoid its consequent misery.

Sir Thomas’s happiness at gaining a daughter in law like Fanny is not surprising given his reflections on his mistakes as father. He is now able to see her superiority. By accident and by Edmund, she was taught the very things he believed he ought to have taught his own daughters. Now that the character of Henry had been opened to him, he could see the justice of Fanny’s refusal and the mixture of a very proper loyalty to his daughters and a fear of not being believed that led her not to try to lay open Henry’s character to Sir Thomas earlier. His initial charitable act of bringing her into his household, though it was carried out negligently by an inappropriate distinction between her and his own daughters, ended in the formation of a young woman of good character who could be a good wife for his son:

He might have made her childhood happier; but it had been an error of judgment only which had given him the appearance of harshness, and deprived him of her early love; and now, on really knowing each other, their mutual attachment became very strong. (*MP*, 470)

In the long run, what he had done accidentally in distinguishing his own daughters from Fanny was actually conducive to her virtue. On the death of Dr. Grant, the Bertram family is finally free of any connection with the Crawfords and his son Edmund and new daughter Fanny are able to come home and complete the family circle by taking the Mansfield living (*MP*, 473).

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Austen's *Mansfield Park* shows how the habits inculcated and examples set for young people influence the trajectories of their lives. The second chapter detailed how the sorts of marriages made by the Ward sisters aligned with the kinds of friendships Aristotle described in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. All three marriages were failures in the Aristotelian sense. For the young people, these marriages served as unfortunate models of what marriages ought to be. Only Fanny was shielded from seeing the badness of her own parents' marriage until she was old enough to accurately judge it, to avoid becoming inured to it, and to reject it as a model of the sort of marriage she should make. Instead of viewing any of the married couples as models, Fanny took her emerging model of marriage from true friendships themselves. She looked to her friendships with her brother William and her cousin Edmund to discover what is important to permanent close relationships. Edmund has had the theoretical model of marriage offered by the church to consider along with the marriages of his parents and aunt, but he is taught what a truly good marriage is by Fanny herself. The other young people looked primarily to their guardians for their models of marriages and for the values to be sought in a partner. Even the cynical Crawfords are revealed to have acquired their marriage models from their aunt and uncle, who also had a decidedly bad marriage. This marriage was arguably worse than the marriages of the Ward sisters. Although it did not end in divorce for practical reasons—the aunt wanted to keep her financial and social position—it ended in the estrangement of partners. Given the bad marriages of their elders, it is unsurprising that many of the young people make bad marriages themselves.

The characters of the young people were formed by those who set out to educate them and to guide their development. Those who planned to be Fanny's original benefactors and who planned to educate her for a good marriage fail in their roles: In the case of Sir Thomas, he never took the time to know his ward or to see to his plans himself. In the case of Mrs. Norris, she never intended to benefit Fanny at all. Both of these failed benefactors bring benefits only accidentally through neglect. Edmund notices Fanny without anyone to care for her or guide her and chooses to take on the role of her mentor. Although he is successful, he later is found to be

inferior to Fanny in his own judgment and the roles of mentor and protégé must reverse. After this Fanny becomes his true mentor in what a truly good marriage ought to be.

The other young people are taught by their guides to be vicious in a variety of ways, but their dominant vice is vanity. All see themselves as superior and, consequently, see themselves as being owed the very best. Their vanity prepares them for misery since it prepares them to expect what they do not deserve and to pursue what cannot make them happy. Maria seeks, first, to satisfy her vanity with a marriage of wealth and high status, and then finds herself drawn to satisfy her vanity with being preferred by a man who cares little for her. These two satisfactions of vanity prove incompatible. The end is her disgrace and divorce, leaving her neither love nor money. Julia seeks to satisfy her vanity by being the preferred of the Bertram sisters. By this means, she could have both the wealth she was taught to value and be supreme over her sister. Her failure to receive gratification in this way leads her to fall prey to the flattery of the nearest man and eventually to elope with him. She is less bad off than her sisters, but her marriage is not based on mutual esteem. Rather, it is based on her husband's fortune-seeking and her fit of pique. Since Henry and Mary both allow vanity to rule them in different ways, they find themselves alone. Henry had the chance to marry someone who would, at least, have been a good influence on him and whom he actually found he could esteem. No woman had seemed worthy to him before. His vanity with regard to the attentions of Maria ruined his chance to be with Fanny. He sacrificed future happiness for the chance to gratify immediate vanity. Mary ruined her potential happiness but ensured Fanny's by preferring her own cleverness and value of wealth and London social status. She could not sacrifice the opportunity to speak a few clever words that, in the end, revealed her character and alienated Edmund from her forever.

In the end, Aristotle's notions of what makes a good marriage, a true benefactor, and a good education are vindicated. Marriage like friendship can only be complete when it is based upon the virtue of the partners. A true benefactor must be invested in his beneficiary, paying close attention to the beneficiary's character and needs, in order to truly be of benefit. Good education depends on proper habituation provided by a mentor superior in virtue. Where the upbringings of the young fall short of the Aristotelian model, the lives of the young can be permanently marred or even spoiled.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Katherine Guin received her Ph.D. and M.A. in philosophy for Florida State University and her B.A. in philosophy from Millikin University. Her primary research interests are in ethics (especially Plato and Aristotle) and 19th century literature. Katherine has also taught Introduction to Ethics, Ancient Philosophy, and Philosophy in Literature at SUNY, The College at Brockport. Currently, she plans to devote her time to reading many more novels.