ESSAY IN JUDGMENT: READING FOR AESTHETICS IN *MANSFIELD PARK*

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My dissertation demonstrates how *Mansfield Park*, which contains philosophically compelling claims about judgment generally and aesthetic judgment specifically, makes these claims through a reading experience that is itself an exercise in aesthetic judgment. Although this experience could be had by any actual reader of the novel, the experience of every actual reader depends upon her willingness to measure the exercise of her own faculty of judgment against that of the self-reflective, aesthetically disinterested, yet emotionally engaged reader whom the novel itself hypothesizes. With this hypothesized reader, I argue, the novel encourages readers to realize this ideal of aesthetic judgment while also explaining the various ways they might fall short. This hypothesized reader, I argue further, strives to follow a demand similar to Mikhail Bakhtin's demand in "Art and Answerability" for each individual to make art and life answerable to one another.

Mansfield Park challenges readers to make art and life answerable primarily through a double plot structure; narrative techniques that complicate the distance between characters and readers; and the portrayal of the characters' various failures of judgment. I employ methods of rhetorical narratology in my analysis of the novel to highlight the specifically literary ways it contributes to questions of philosophical aesthetics. This approach also accounts for the extent and types of disagreements about the novel in the critical literature about it. Within the general structure of a marriage comedy, *Mansfield Park* tells another story that challenges the expectations raised by that structure: the story of Fanny's complicated perspective on Mansfield Park as both she and it change. I call this story the novel's position plot. By complicating readers' expectations for and judgments of the characters, the novel challenges readers to consider the extent to which their judgments of the characters and of the novel should be grounded in their expectations for a marriage comedy and the extent to which they should be informed by the novel's portrayal of how one's position affects one's judgment. The novel manipulates readers' expectations as well as their distance from the characters in clarifying the limits and possibilities of both disinterested and aesthetic judgment.

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I. Statement of Argument

My dissertation demonstrates how *Mansfield Park*, which contains philosophically compelling claims about judgment generally and aesthetic judgment specifically, makes these claims through a reading experience that is itself an exercise in aesthetic judgment. Although this experience could be had by any actual reader of the novel, the experience of every actual reader depends upon her willingness to measure the exercise of her own faculty of judgment against that of the self-reflective, aesthetically disinterested, yet emotionally engaged reader whom the novel itself hypothesizes. With this hypothesized reader, I argue, the novel encourages readers to realize this ideal of aesthetic judgment while also explaining the various ways they might fall short. This hypothesized reader, I argue further, strives to follow a demand similar to the one which Mikhail Bakhtin makes in "Art and Answerability," namely, that each individual must make art and life answerable to one another. It is important to emphasize both directions of Bakhtin's demand. A widespread tendency to consider art frivolous often overshadows the importance of art to life. While art not made answerable to life loses its relevance, life not made answerable to art loses the ability to imagine things differently. Uniting art and life in this way is, essentially, a problem of judgment, indeed, several interrelated problems. It involves the proper judgment (i) of the work of art; (ii) of its relation to one's life; and (iii) of the relationship of judgments in and about art to similar judgments in and about life.

These problems, as well as the answers to them, are *in nuce* what I draw out of *Mansfield Park* in the chapters that follow. Since my efforts to do so should be seen in the light of two larger discourses in which the nature and value of literature have been debated, I accordingly begin here by reviewing the major positions in each discourse. This review aims

primarily to clarify how my work not only fits into but also contributes to these two wider discourses. The first discourse, widespread in virtue ethics, claims that literature is philosophically valuable. The second discourse, on which both reader-response and rhetorical criticism rest, sees literature as essentially communicative. Because I am arguing that *Mansfield Park* has something philosophically valuable to communicate to its readers, it makes sense for me to explain in reference to each of these discourses, first, my understanding of the relationship between philosophy and literature, and, second, my method of reading, i.e., rhetorical narratology, as a means of bridging an all-too-frequent and all-too-unfortunate disciplinary divide between philosophy and literature.

II. Ontological and Moral Interests in Literature

Philosophy most often asks two types of questions about literature: ontological and ethical.[1] Of these, the ethical questions, as questions of valuation and judgment, are far closer to my own. But the ontological questions do resemble my Bakhtinian concern with the relationship between fictional worlds and real life, so I begin with a few words about those questions.

Ontological questions have to do with the nature of fiction and fictional entities. Philosophers debate whether fictional entities exist, and, if so, in what way, as well as whether or not they can be created.[2] Neither the premises nor the results of these debates figure significantly in this dissertation, as I take it for granted in a perhaps philosophically

[1] Cognitive approaches to philosophy and literature are fast developing within both sets of questions. I focus here, however, on non-cognitive approaches exclusively since it is to these approaches that my work primarily relates. As will become clear in the following pages, I am interested in the phenomenology rather than the neurology of reading.

[2] Meinong's object theory accounts for a variety of non-existent objects, including fictional; D.K. Lewis's modal realism locates fictional entities in possible worlds. For an article that both summarizes and argues against what it takes to be current philosophical orthodoxy, the belief that authors create fictional characters, see Brock.

naive way – as I think most readers of fiction do – that there are such things as fictional entities. More pertinent here, as I have indicated, are the philosophical investigations into the relationship between fictional and real worlds. But these proceed at an abstract level quite distant from the reading experience that they claim to implicate and that I, by contrast, seek to describe in detail. Nevertheless, metaphysical, logical, and semantic investigations into the relationship between fiction and reality do complement my literary investigation into how novels themselves define the terms of their relationships with readers and how readers might try to redefine those terms. I want to clarify further this complementary relationship between the questions asked in philosophy of literature and those asked in this dissertation by means of a brief explanation of an enduring topic in the philosophy of literature, the so-called paradox of emotional response to fiction.

The paradox of emotional response to fiction relies on two premises: first, people respond emotionally to fiction; and, second, emotional response requires belief in the existence of whatever one responds to emotionally. So-called pretend theorists, notably Kendall Walton, solve the paradox by denying the first premise, explaining that the emotions people feel in response to fictions are not real, but rather quasi- or fictional emotions. This explanation is part of Walton's conception of fiction, and art in general, as a kind of game of make-believe.[3] Although the notion that reading or watching movies is akin to playing a game of make-believe explains some features of our engagement with fictions, critics of the pretend theory argue that the analogy between art and make-believe does not hold.

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[3] See *Mimesis as Make-Believe* for Walton's general theory and "How Remote are Fictional Worlds from the Real World" for his treatment of a question central to this dissertation, albeit in a quite different way. The article addresses the distance between fictional and real worlds with reference to how truth can be used in relation to fiction, another question central to philosophical investigations of literature. Walton develops his theory, especially in relation to photographs and music, and clarifies the relationship between fiction and imagination in his recent collection *In Other Shoes: Music, Metaphor, Empathy, Existence*.

Philosophers in this camp, such as Noel Carroll, Peter Lamarque, and David Novitz, target the second premise, that existence-beliefs are necessary for emotional responses. According to these theorists, real emotions can be, and often are excited by thoughts, or mental representations. Thought-theorists differ amongst themselves with regard to the details of emotional responses to fiction, but they all offer compelling insights into the function of fiction as something able to excite emotional responses. Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* deals with a special case of the paradox of emotional response to fiction. His discussion of the appeal of horror both delineates the genre and confirms the aesthetic potential of monsters and revelatory plot structures. Lamarque's argument, in "How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?," that we respond emotionally to fictions as descriptions, i.e., as (following Frege) sense without reference, grounds his interest in fiction's ability to "create complex structures of thought in our minds" (302).[4] For Novitz, imagination is central to fiction's ability to impart knowledge of all kinds.[5] These thinkers continue to be cited in ongoing debates about the relevance of the paradox and the nature of emotional responses to art.[6]

These metaphysical and epistemological debates focus on distinctions that underlie, but are not consciously observed in, everyday reading experiences. Though they understand this experience differently from one another, all the approaches mentioned above argue more or less explicitly for the value of fiction generally and of literature specifically. Moral philosophers of literature share this commitment to the value of literature. Their interest in

[4] See also Lamarque and Olsen for a developed theory of the value of literature.
[5] See *Knowledge, Fiction, and Imagination* and "Fiction, Imagination, and Emotion."
[6] See Stecker for an argument that a combination of Walton and Lamarque's views can lead to a greater understanding of emotional responses to fiction and their special functionality; Irwin and Johnson for a solution relying on mirror neurons, which, they claim, do not distinguish between fiction and reality; and Tullman and Buckwalter for an argument that current understandings of emotion do not enlist the notions of existence employed in the paradox.

literature's moral value, however, seems to require a different sort of justification, one which readers are far more likely to recognize as part of their experience of fictional worlds. How do works of fiction engage us morally? What kinds of moral examples do they provide, and how are they conveyed? How do works of fiction affect one's behavior in real life? These questions are clearly related to, but also quite different from, the ontological questions discussed above. They are furthermore related to, but still distinct from, the questions asked in this dissertation. How so is what I want next to clarify.

In contrast to the philosophers already mentioned who work in generalities, moral philosophers must ask their questions of specific texts. Dealing with the moral value of specific literary texts requires making interconnected moral and literary – in other words, aesthetic – judgments. Moral philosophy of literature is thus susceptible to disagreements about not only the moral but also literary merit of any given example. Because moral philosophy develops its arguments by reference to specific texts, it is much closer to literary criticism than the philosophical approaches discussed above that deal in generalities about literature's ontological status.[7] Though both literary critics and moral philosophers deal with specific texts, they do so in ways that are importantly different. Moral philosophers have already answered a question that literary critics debate, namely, whether a text tells us about ethics. In other words, moral philosophers turn to literature to answer questions of moral philosophy. This truism is important to bear in mind because the approach of literary critics,

[7] It would be odd if some fictional works had an entirely different ontological status than other fictional works. However, see arguments for (by Skov Nielsen, Phelan, and Walsh in "Ten Theses abut Fictionality") and against (by Dawson in "Ten Theses against Fictionality) expanding the study of fictionality to include any kind of non-referential uses of language, e.g., thought-experiments, political speeches, conversational instances. Those for expanding the use of fictionality argue for degrees of fictionality, while Dawson reminds us that something must either be or not be fictional.

who read texts for a variety of reasons, can look quite similar despite its very different motive and orientation.

I will return to the overlap between literary criticism and moral philosophy after looking briefly at several leading figures in moral philosophy's turn to literature. Both Alisdair MacIntyre and Martha Nussbaum looked to literature to enrich, or even correct, limits and shortcomings of traditional philosophy, particularly problems of moral language. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues that the incoherence of moral language can only be corrected by a return to virtue ethics, an ethics both bound up in narrative and exemplified in literature. For MacIntyre, virtue requires a narrative to unify one's efforts to approach its ideal, and outstanding examples of such narratives are provided by great or serious literature. MacIntyre finds in Jane Austen, and more specifically, Fanny Price, an example of a virtue ethic centred on constancy and justice.[8] This reading of *Mansfield Park* helps MacIntyre clarify his definition of the virtues as well as the relationship he posits between narrative unity and virtue. Though he links Austen's aesthetic and ethical achievements, MacIntyre reads literature primarily to elucidate a particular idea of ethics rather than to explicate the particular literary qualities of a text.

While MacIntyre turns to literature to clarify a moral outlook that Enlightenment philosophy obscured and that neither phenomenology nor analytical philosophy can restore, Nussbaum calls attention to a richness of moral experience in literature that cannot be

[8] See Tarpley's book-length study of *Mansfield Park* and Fanny Price in terms of constancy. Interestingly, Tarpley also links Austen and Bakhtin. Emsley reads Austen in light of the philosophical tradition of the virtues, arguing that each heroine faces ethical questions of how to live. Ryle describes Austen as a moralist, "interested from the south side in some quite general or theoretical problems about human nature and conduct in which philosophers proper were and are interested from the north side" (286). See also Dunn, who contrasts MacIntyre's and Said's readings of *Mansfield Park* to highlight the complexity portrayed by the novel and not captured by either of these readers. Holquist uses Bahktin to enrich MacIntyre's view of narrative and cognition by providing a way to evaluate different narratives. The Bahktinian standard he identifies is a recognition of diversity.

expressed in the language of traditional philosophy. Nussbaum spends more time than MacIntyre does defending the formal particularity that literature contributes to moral philosophy, and, correspondingly, more time with her literary examples. She too, however, brings a specific conception of ethics to her readings of literature, in this case an Aristotelian ethics favouring the particular and private over the general and universal. In *Love's Knowledge*, she argues that novels, especially those of Henry James, offer vital answers to the Aristotelian question of how to live. The way to live, according to Nussbaum, is to cultivate a sensibility able to negotiate conflicting values and make moral judgments with reference to the unique contexts that demand them. Reading novels can, furthermore, contribute to the cultivation of this sensibility. For Nussbaum, James's novels are an essential part of moral philosophy, supplying something uniquely literary and valuable to the questions that preoccupy moral philosophers.

Nussbaum's claim for the philosophical value of literature, which relies on particular readings and supports an Aristotelian philosophy of the particular, has recently been challenged by Alan Goldman, a philosopher who, if not within the same camp as Nussbaum, is in a closely aligned one. In *Philosophy and the Novel*, Goldman makes a claim for literature's philosophical value that, while also Aristotelian, emphasizes the general ethical truths that can be learned from particular readings. Engaging both the ontologists mentioned above, especially on questions of literature's truth-value, and the moral philosophers just discussed, he not only argues for, but also provides examples of, the philosophical value of the novel. For Goldman, the novel's aesthetic and philosophical value resides in its ability to engage readers cognitively, imaginatively, emotionally, and psychologically. Goldman presents the exercise of these faculties as an end in itself, while also linking their engagement to the potential for teaching general moral truths.

One of Goldman's examples is Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, which he reads as portraying the stages of moral development. Interestingly, he begins his analysis of the novel with an overview of current psychological and philosophical understandings of moral development, understandings with which he then credits Austen as grasping in all their complexities long before they were articulated in other disciplines. On the one hand, this approach seems to strengthen his claim that novels are philosophically valuable, while, on the other, it privileges not only the moral generally, but also a particular conception of moral agency and development. In other words, Goldman – like MacIntyre and Nussbaum – brings to the interpretation of novels a preconceived notion of morality.

Of course these moral philosophers must have well-developed notions of morality. Reading particular novels in terms of these philosophical notions, claim moral philosophers, can enrich both our understanding of the novels and of the notions of morality. However, as I mentioned above, this means that moral philosophers must defend both their notions of morality and their literary interpretations. Nussbaum in particular has been charged not only with failing to address poststructuralist challenges to traditional notions of morality, but also with the often related charge of importing her own, suspect, values into her literary interpretations.[9] This charge bothers moral philosophers less than it does literary critics because the former are interested primarily in developing and defending particular moral questions rather than developing and defending particular reading practices and interpretations. Moral philosophers and literary critics may be susceptible to some of the

[9] Ramal singles out Nussbaum as an egregious example of a general tendency in moral philosophy to read one's own values into literature. Gibson groups Nussbaum with other "pre-Barthesian" narrative humanists such as Lionel Trilling (cited in Hale, "New Ethics" (896-7)). Harpham charges Nussbaum not only with importing her own values into her readings, but also with denying autonomy to the aesthetic.

same sorts of charges, but their disciplinary differences make different defences available to each group.

As MacIntyre and Nussbaum turned to literature to broaden their investigations into moral questions, suspicions about humanism, and ethics itself, pushed literary critics away from ethical questions.[10] Recently, literary critics such as Dorothy Hale and other "new ethicists" have redefined the ethical concerns of reading in terms of the encounter with alterity offered by novels.[11] Hale, furthermore, finds common ground with Nussbaum in spite of the latter's alliance with the traditional morality rejected by the new ethicists. Both Nussbaum and the new ethicists, argues Hale, understand the modern novel as offering an experience of individual freedom by confronting us with our inescapable sociality. Hale links this experience to a defence of literary value, an ethical defence that may open more channels of communication between moral philosophers and literary critics.

Part of what complicates the relationship between literature and philosophy is a reductive tendency of each: philosophy reduces literature to useful exemplifications,[12] while literary criticism reduces philosophy to mere explanation.[13] Stanley Cavell, however, avoids both pitfalls and makes the tension between literature and philosophy productive. In *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare*, Cavell clarifies how and why his investigation of

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[10] Of course, ethical questions were never entirely abandoned by literary critics. I will return below to the prominence of ethics in rhetorical narratology, the method closest to my own.
[11] See "Aesthetics and the New Ethics: Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century," "Fiction as Restriction: Self-Binding in New Ethical Theories of the Novel," and "*On Beauty* as Beautiful? The Problem of Novelistic Aesthetics by way of Zadie Smith," which argues that Smith's novel compares novelistic and philosophical treatments of beauty. As her title indicates, Hale uses Smith's novel to help her articulate a novelistic aesthetic of alterity.
[12] The recent collection, *Jane Austen and Philosophy* (edited by Marinucci), includes readings of Austen that seek to clarify philosophical concepts such as epistemic injustice and Aristotelian friendship.
[13] One notable exception to this tendency is Pinch, who links Austen's narrative techniques with philosophical questions of self-knowledge. She reads *Emma*, for example, as asking a question central to feminist philosophy: how women can know (xix).

skepticism in Shakespeare's plays does not begin with predetermined philosophical content to be illustrated by literary works, asking, "Is the issue of communication between philosophy and literature itself a philosophical or literary issue?" (3). His insistence on keeping that question open guides his epistemological interpretations, which, therefore, preserve the literariness of his answers. In this way, he allows literature to say something philosophically significant in a uniquely literary way.[14]

Like Cavell, my approach to the philosophical significance of literature leaves open the relationship between literature and philosophy, looking to the works themselves to define that relationship. The ability of individual novels to define in particular ways their relationships to philosophy is part of what motivates my investigation into aesthetic questions in and about the novel in general. I take for granted, in other words, that novels make interesting contributions to philosophical questions of aesthetics. But which questions and how the contribution is communicated depends, I insist, on the particular novel.

My insistence on allowing individual works to dictate the terms on which they are read attempts to avoid the kind of literary interpretation that has been usefully described as instrumental. Derek Attridge gives a theoretical, and Michael Clune a historical, account[15] of the rise of instrumental interpretation, a general term for criticism that reads literature with a predetermined agenda to clarify something beyond the text itself. My attempt to avoid instrumental interpretation also shares a commitment of both Charles Altieri and Joshua Landy. Altieri and Landy make different but equally compelling cases for the value of

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[14] See Franke for a reading of *Disowning Knowledge* which not only characterizes Cavell's approach as one of acknowledging otherness, but also speaks to engagement with fictional characters, especially those of tragic theatre, as a way to understand our human predicament and ground our relations to others. I will discuss *Mansfield Park*'s portrayal of private theatricals as a way to misunderstand ourselves and others in Chapters Four and Five.
[15] See Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* and Clune's *American Literature and the Free Market: 1945-2000*.

literature by proposing experiential alternatives to instrumental interpretation. Altieri's interest in approaching texts as purposive and self-evident works frames the wide sense in which I understand literature as communicative. Landy's conception of formative fictions capable of training people in life skills helps clarify my reading of *Mansfield Park* as an exercise in judgment.

In *Recknoning with the Imagination; Wittgenstein and the Aesthetics of Literary Experience*, Altieri counts as instrumental interpretation also any approach that claims to yield knowledge, turning instead to imaginative engagement as the source of literature's potential value. Imaginative engagement, for Altieri, involves approaching the text as a work, as self-evident and purposive, as the result of intention. Altieri defends aesthetic intention against New Critical claims for literature's independence from context and authorial intent, deconstruction's critique of identity, and ethical objections to the hierarchical structure of authorial intention. "Without intention," explains Altieri, "there is too much possibility and too little focus. The text remains just a thing rather than a 'work' inviting a specific mode of imaginative activity" (34). According to this understanding, intention merely anchors the possibility of a response, allowing exploration into how a work achieves what it does.

Altieri infers intention from the imaginative activity of reading. He "take[s] 'purposiveness' to refer simply to our need to attribute self-consciousness to authorial actions in order to establish their significance for the force of the art object even though we cannot have a definite concept of the agent's reasons" (9). In order to respond to literature, in other words, we must read as if a work is written by someone for some purpose. I understand narrative as communicative in a similar way: as meaningfully intended. I do not invoke particular agents, a specific communicative act, or a particular type of content that

can be communicated.[16] Thus, though the terms communication and rhetoric smack of the kind of knowledge claims Altieri works to avoid, I use them here to describe the purposiveness Altieri finds it necessary to attribute to works of art. For Altieri, this purposiveness rewards close reading and imaginative engagement, and "will also enable us to make claims for the social significance of literary experience because of the self-reflexive modes the active imagination can afford social life" (42). My rhetorical approach also attempts to engage a work's purposiveness through close reading, but I am interested in making a claim for the philosophical significance of literary experience.

Landy's idea of formative fictions, elaborated in *How to Do Things with Fictions*, helps clarify my attempt to uncover philosophical significance without falling completely into instrumental interpretation. Like Altieri, Landy seeks to "reclaim fiction from the meaning-mongers" (9), to stop looking to literature for an instructional take-away. According to Landy, formative fictions do not "provid[e] knowledge per se – whether propositional knowledge, sensory knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance, or knowledge by revelation – what they give us is *know-how*; rather than teaching, what they do is *train*. They are not informative, that is, but formative" (11). This idea of readings texts in order to train particular, valuable skills intersects with my claim that *Mansfield Park* asks to be read as an exercise in judgment. Like Landy, I treat fiction as inviting a kind of formative engagement, a challenge and opportunity to see and think differently.[17] Landy's claim about formative fictions is, however, normative and pragmatic in a broadly ethical sense. He singles out four types of training available from different kinds of texts, and makes the case that we ought to let these texts instruct us in how to read them in order to "help us become who we are" (10).

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[16] See Banfield (*Unspeakable Sentences*) for a linguistic critique of literature as communicative.
[17] Attridge also emphasizes the challenging aspect of literature, particularly as related to creativity and individuality.

My claim about *Mansfield Park* as an exercise in judgment is neither normative nor pragmatic, (though I do hope to show why such a reading is interesting and worthwhile). Instead, I want to bring to light the novel's contributions to philosophical aesthetics. These contributions relate to the connections between art and life that Altieri and Landy call upon in their claims about the value of literature. Altieri draws literature into relevance by treating "the skills we need to engage art objects [as] basically the same skills we need to negotiate the many interpretive situations we encounter in our daily lives" (6). Landy's claim about formative fictions as teaching "strategies for flourishing" also rests on the idea that how one reads can be, and, for Landy, *ought* to be, connected to how one lives. These ideas about the potential for connecting art and life are made in the context of literary studies' struggle for relevance, and the consequences of attempting to prove that relevance in extra-literary terms, hence the characterization of much criticism as instrumental. *Mansfield Park*'s contribution to philosophical aesthetics also has to do with negotiating the relationship between art and life. But, in the world of *Mansfield Park*, art and life are not alienated, but rather problematically intertwined. For the characters of the novel, the differences between art and life need to be clarified and re-established before a productive connection can be made, work that the novel invites readers to do as well.

I hope my intention to explore *Mansfield Park*'s contribution to philosophical aesthetics without either reducing the novel to an example or limiting its contribution to knowledge claims is becoming clear. Next, I elaborate the method of reading that best suits my intention, a method that allows a work of literature to speak for itself on two counts: both what and how it wants to communicate. Rhetorical narratology provides a framework for an inside-out method of reading that permits individual literary works to speak for

themselves, when – in accord with their basic purposiveness as works – they speak to readers.[18]

III. Methodology: Rhetorical Narratology

Rhetorical narratology has roots in Russian Formalism and poetics. Its commitment to the formal elements of texts goes hand in hand, however, with its understanding of narrative as a rhetorical act, an act of communication. Rhetorical narratology thus allows for an exchange between reader and text, rather than remaining at either the text-centred extreme of some formalism or the reader-centred extreme of some reader-response and reception theories of literature. As I noted at the outset, this dissertation reads *Mansfield Park* as an exercise in judgment, an exercise which the text initiates and in which readers engage. The method of rhetorical narratology provides the tools and terms for studying how the text's formal elements structure a range of diverse responses and possible engagements.

The formal elements important to this study fall into the three main areas delineated by theorists such as Tzvetan Todorov and Gerard Genette and studied in contemporary narratology: temporal relations, narrative levels, and viewpoint. In *Narrative Discourse; An Essay in Method*, Genette works out his theory of literature in relation to a single work, Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*.[19] Fully aware of the tension between theory and criticism, he strives (like Cavell in relation to philosophy and literature and Bakhtin in relation to art and life) to make this tension productive. Genette does so by keeping the terms in motion; as he says in his preface, "perhaps the real relationship between 'theoretical'

[18] There is a related concern here regarding genres and individual exemplifications which I will deal with when I discuss generic expectations in Chapter One.
[19] See Landy (*Philosophy as Fiction*) for a reading of *Recherche*'s related philosophical and novelistic contributions.

dryness and critical meticulousness is one of refreshing rotation and mutual entertainment" (23).[20]

This dissertation likewise focuses on a single work. My goals here, however, are much more modest than articulating a general theory of literature. My choice to analyse a single novel is aimed at two interrelated goals. The first is to bring to light *Mansfield Park*'s specific contribution to questions of philosophical aesthetics, more specifically, to aesthetic judgment; the second is to provide an example of how poetics and rhetorical narratology can be used to reveal what specific works of literature might have to say about the aesthetic questions central to their enterprise, but not often approached directly by rhetorical narratologists. These include not only questions of aesthetic judgment, but also aesthetic experience and the nature of the literary work of art.

Todorov, whose structuralist and semiotic poetics seeks to clarify the general laws and conditions under which literary meaning operates, sees (in 1973) questions of aesthetic value as something in the future of poetics, when the division cutting a work off from its reader can be bridged. "[I]f we find means to study what is commonly called the 'taste' or the 'sensibility' of a period," he ventures, "whether by investigation of the traditions forming them or of the aptitudes innate in each individual, then a passage will be established between poetics and aesthetics, and the old question as to the beauty of the work can be raised once again" (69). Todorov sees the reader as providing the potential link between poetics and aesthetics because his formalism does not privilege the text over the reader as the locus of meaning. He insists on both the unique aesthetic of each individual work of literature and the special, subjective nature of aesthetic judgment.

[20] In later work, Genette turns to aesthetic questions both in literature and in general.

Todorov suggests that a potential study of taste or sensibility might bring poetics and aesthetics into conversation by considering either how a specific period's sensibility is formed or how taste functions in any given individual. The first consideration points to a reception theory which asks how a work is beautiful to these people at this time. The second points to reader-oriented theories dealing with how a work is beautiful to people in general.[21] Reception and reader-oriented theories abound, but few ask questions of aesthetic value, preferring instead to focus on the ideology of signification or the possibilities of literature affecting life.[22]

Those works do not achieve the kind of passage between aesthetics and poetics that Todorov imagined, nor does my own. Whereas considerations of a period's sensibility tend towards political and ideological readings, those of individual taste tend to be psychological and cognitive. My own work seeks to reveal a different kind of passage between literary and aesthetic questions, one that does, however, share Todorov's respect for the uniqueness of both texts and readers. This study of *Mansfield Park* offers an example of how a literary text itself contributes to understandings of both uniquely literary and general questions of aesthetics.[23]

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[21] Todorov equates beauty with the value of literature, a value he locates in the "dynamic unit" of work and reader (69).

[22] Fish's work on interpretive communities shifted focus from text to reader and relocated textual significance in the shared interpretive practices of specific groups of people at specific times. Mailloux's reception histories show the various cultural, political, and ideological forces at work in specific acts of interpretation. Holland's psychoanalytic reader-response theory sees interpretation as a function of individual identity. Psychological and cognitive findings about empathy form the basis of Keen's study of how empathy with fictional characters functions, and how this empathy may or may not affect how readers behave in real life.

[23] The focus here is theoretical and general, rather than historical. I am not, however, unaware of the richness of aesthetic debate in Austen's time, and will have more to say in Chapters One and Six about terms (such as disinterestedness and common sense) central to that debate.

Wayne C. Booth, in his seminal work of rhetorical narratology, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, analyses different types of fictional narrative according to how they are employed by authors to affect readers. He is not concerned with either flesh-and-blood authors or readers, but rather those implied by the narrative. Since *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, the concepts of implied author and implied reader have been actively argued and modified.[24] I make use of these concepts here in a way that I hope complements work on flesh-and-blood authors and readers. Throughout the dissertation I employ phrases such as "the reader who sympathizes with Fanny will respond…". These phrases are never intended to refer to actual readers, whose individual responses to any part of the narrative I consider both obscure in themselves and outside the scope of this project. Instead, such phrases refer to aspects of how the text structures a diversity of possible responses.[25] The text presents readers with various choices. I attempt not to describe the unique complexity of actual individual readings of the novel, but rather how these textual choices are presented. *Mansfield Park* invites a range of different responses. Insofar as it can be read as an exercise in judgment, it invites reflection on how one's own response measures up against other possibilities.

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[24] The notion of the implied author is most often criticized for cutting a work off from its historical context or attempting to authorize interpretations that amount to a critic's own opinion. See *Style* 45.1 (2011) for a series of articles reviewing, criticizing, and, predominantly, defending, the implied author. I favour a pragmatic defence of the interpretive value of the implied author and implied reader. In general, I hold to the principle that its explanatory power may justify an interpretation. See also Nehamas for the idea of a postulated author as the formal, not efficient, cause of a text.

[25] See Stewart for an interrogation of how the texts of classic realism write, "conscript" their readers. Though I share Stewart's conception of the reader as "a drastic abstraction of the self, spirited away from self-identity by text, a subjective construction spun out from moment to moment by the subvocal rematerialization of the graphic signifiers on the read, not just opened, page" (10), I emphasize possible choices and challenges presented by the text in contrast to Stewart's interest in the reader constructed specifically through uses of direct address and structural parallel. Stewart's theoretical and historical exploration of this reader avoids the pitfalls of both contextual and formal criticism, the extremes of which turn the reader into a "pawn of cultural indoctrination or…placeholder for textual signification itself" (12).

James Phelan continues and expands Booth's work in five (and counting) books, his "ongoing effort to write a comprehensive account of the rhetorical theory of narrative" (*Experiencing Fiction*, xiii). In the fifth book, *Experiencing Fiction; Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative*, Phelan "attempt[s] to lay out [his] principles and methods for connecting readerly experience to interpretation and theory, and to model the interpretive practice that follows from these principles and methods" (x). Judgments of three types, interpretive, ethical, and aesthetic, connect readers and text in a "feedback loop" which develops as the narrative progresses. Phelan's focus here on judgment, especially aesthetic judgment, as well as his articulation and exemplification of an inside-out method of reading, make this work of special importance to my own approach.

Above, I noted moral philosophers' tendency to read literary works according to pre-conceived notions of morality. While moral philosophers are explicit about their moral interests in literature, literary critics often are not, sometimes bringing preconceived notions of morality to a text without defining or defending these moral ideas. Phelan argues for reading inside out in order to avoid evaluating texts according to preconceived moral or aesthetic ideas, and instead, to evaluate each text according to the moral and aesthetic standards it sets for itself.[26]

I adopt Phelan's method of reading from the inside out, with one significant modification, a modification having to do with the relatively narrow conception of aesthetic judgment appropriate for his project in contrast to the relatively broad conception of

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[26] G. Stewart also advocates reading from the inside out, "not to evade context but to seek for a way of registering it, from the inside out, as firstly a textual concern" (9). He bases this methodology on the structure of narrative fiction itself, which "works up and out from the individual (language, plot, personal agents) to the cultural totality" (7). Landy sees a formative fiction as "contain[ing] within itself a *manual for reading*, a set of implicit instructions on how it may best be used" (13). Altieri's imaginative engagement directs itself to "how the texts calls attention to its manner as defining the significance of its matter" (59).

aesthetic judgment and the realm of aesthetics in general appropriate for mine. For Phelan, aesthetic judgments have to do with the artistic qualities of the narrative and its parts. Following Phelan's method of reading from the inside out, these aesthetic judgments are not based upon preconceived notions of aesthetic value, but are rather part of a "process of reconstruction and evaluation," of "identifying the nature of the work's narrative project and analyzing the skill with which it executes that project" (13). The "inside" of Phelan's reading thus resides at the level of "narrative project," the text as artistic construct. My question about what specific works of literature might contribute to philosophical aesthetics begins at a level below, the level within the fictional world. Do the characters of a novel have aesthetic experiences? What do these experiences mean to them? Do the characters interact with art objects and, if so, how?

These questions about the role that aesthetic issues, in the broadest sense, play within a fictional world comprise the starting point of my investigation into what a given novel might contribute to philosophical questions of aesthetics. The aesthetic experiences of fictional characters cannot, of course, be separated from a work's narrative project. The relationship between the aesthetic experiences of a novel's characters and the novel's overall project, however, cannot be predetermined. Reading from the inside out provides a way to understand how each text defines this relationship. My approach to *Mansfield Park*, then, focuses on aesthetic questions, while my use of Phelan's method assures that I am not merely applying a predetermined rule and standard to the text.

Call this approach my Kantian modification of Phelan's theory. Judgment is often the application of a general rule to a specific situation. In his discussion of beauty, however, Kant distinguishes between determinative and reflective judgments. Whereas determinative judgments involve the application of an established rule to a particular case clearly governed

by the rule, reflective judgments proceed from the particular case to the search for a rule that might subsume cases of this sort. In order to follow Bakhtin and make art and life answerable to one another, interpretation cannot be the application of pre-given rules, but must rely instead on reflective judgments.[27] *Mansfield Park*, I argue, has much to say about the challenges besetting such judgments without pre-given rules, the role that standards and ideals play in such judgments, and the relationship between judgments of art and judgments of life.

IV. Chapter Summaries

Having reviewed my understanding of the relationship between philosophy and literature, as well as my method of reading, I can now restate my interpretation of *Mansfield Park* as a practice of judgment. Inside the fictional world, the characters exemplify a range of different types of judgments. They approach the practice of judgment with various degrees of sincerity; they embrace and avoid judging out of self-interest; and they confuse and manipulate the difference between judgments of art and judgments of life. The characters' various judgments and different kinds of judging are presented, in turn, with various degrees of irony by the narrator, who invites readers to judge the characters in complicated and sometimes contradictory ways. The novel's plot structure, furthermore, challenges readers' expectations, encouraging them to examine the grounds of their judgments of the characters. The challenge *Mansfield Park* offers readers has provoked a wide range of judgments of the novel itself. The critical literature on *Mansfield Park* is divided over the merits of the novel

[27] Altieri's distinction between instrumental interpretation and imaginative engagement relies on Kantian conceptions of judgment and aesthetics. He demonstrates the currency of idealist aesthetics in part through Wittgenstein's concept of exemplification, which he "believe[s]…addresses the fundamental way that art proves useful in a purely practical sense" (28).

and its characters. In the first chapter of this dissertation I review this literature in order to elaborate my claim, which, I argue, resolves this debate. The novel's combination of a marriage plot with a plot about Fanny's perception of the world, I contend, explains the different standards of judgment at play in the novel and in judgments of it and its characters.

Chapter Two focuses on how the contrast between Fanny Price, the "heroine," and Mary Crawford, the "rival," challenges readers' judgments. Both the "heroine" and her "rival," (terms that are uneasily applied to Fanny and Mary) exemplify different kinds of flawed judgment and their different consequences. Whereas Mary's ambitious partiality leads to unhappiness, Fanny's failures to achieve the disinterestedness for which she strives do not prevent her from achieving a happiness for which she dares not hope.

Chapter Three contributes to critical discussions of the relationship between the real and the represented in the episode of *Mansfield Park*'s private theatricals. My reading clarifies not only the relationship between social and theatrical roles, but also the different modes of judgment appropriate to reality and representation. I analyze Austen's literary devices to draw out the consequences of the various ways in which *Mansfield Park*'s characters confuse reality and representation. The episode also invites readers, I argue, to consider the relationship between their judgments of the fictional characters and those of real people with whom they share a world.

Chapter Four develops the conclusions of Chapter Three by focusing on Fanny's behavior during the private theatricals. Fanny's struggles and mistakes are presented by the narrator with both sympathy and irony. This presentation poses important questions about Fanny's status as a literary representation and the mode of judgment appropriate to her. Readers are invited to ask: To what extent is Fanny an idealized heroine? To what extent is Fanny a realistic heroine? How should a reader respond to and judge the narrator's irony?

What is the relationship between these judgments about irony and judgments of the aesthetic accomplishments or failures of the novel?

The novel's complicated combination of realism and idealism provides the terms in which Chapter Five discusses Fanny's increased importance within the fictional world. As the plot-geometry of *Mansfield Park*'s two love triangles develops, these literary modes – as well as the different sets of standards by which the novel's two plots invite readers to judge Fanny – come into more direct conflict. This conflict, I claim, exemplifies how fiction can and must recommend its own standards of judgment.

Chapter Six's analysis of the different kinds of partiality represented in *Mansfield Park*, especially surrounding Fanny's refusal of Henry and her visit to Portsmouth, contributes not only to debates about the success of this episode, but also to discussions of partiality and the possibility of disinterested judgment. *Mansfield Park* challenges readers to consider their own partialities in relation to the novel and its characters, as well as to relate these biases with those that might affect their judgments of real people.

The final chapter takes up the idealism of *Mansfield Park*'s conclusion, which is condemned by many critics. I argue here that the novel's conclusion is a strength rather than a weakness. The conclusion, I show, wraps up the novel's instabilities as well as its tensions by emphasizing the difference between fiction and life and, in doing so, invites readers to consider how their judgments of the novel and its characters might inform their judgments in life.

V. The Contribution of a Philosophical rather than Contextual Approach to Aesthetic Judgment in *Mansfield Park*

In order to further clarify my method and contribution, I will, in this section, contrast the formal, ahistorical emphasis of my inside-out method with the contextual emphasis so common in Austen scholarship, and perhaps so tempting given the development of moral and aesthetic philosophy in the century preceding her.[28] I insist on reading Austen outside her historical context not because of any objection to contextualization, but rather because it is the predominant approach to Austen's novels, an approach usefully complemented by non-contextual readings, which, I might add, is how readers in contrast to literary and cultural historians read.

Mansfield Park contains many specific references to writers such as Shakespeare, William Cowper, and Samuel Johnson, as well as discussions of specific aesthetic activities such as playing music and estate improvement. In this dissertation, I do not devote attention to any of these explicit references to aesthetic objects or activities. My treatment of *Lovers' Vows*, for example, focuses not on the theatrical, literary or socio-historical interactions between the play and novel, but instead on the manipulations of social and theatrical roles explored in the episode of the private theatricals and the questions of judgment that this exploration raises.

My interest in *Mansfield Park*'s contribution to questions of philosophical aesthetics, in short, is ahistorical. By "questions of philosophical aesthetics" I mean a group of questions and ideas explored by different kinds of thinkers in different times. A contextualist might respond that all these explorations and ideas are also embedded in their particular histories, that any investigation into such concepts as "judgment," "beauty," "sense," "taste," etc. must account for the historical and contextual forces at work in any given articulation of them. While I do not deny the importance of any of these contextual studies, I do deny any claim to their exclusive validity. That is, I assume the validity of exploring ideas and artworks

[28] There are, of course, many different kinds of contextual readings. I am interested here in those that situate Austen in a philosophical or intellectual context.

outside particular contexts, if only as a thought-experiment that can hopefully inform or complement various contextual resituatings.[29] The validity of such work is testified to also by philosophy's distinction between philosophy and the history of philosophy.[30]

Let me therefore reiterate: exploring Austen's use of and relationship to Shakespeare, Cowper, Johnson, or the other specific aesthetic practices and discourses mentioned in *Mansfield Park* can be fruitful, but is not the work of this dissertation. Instead of placing Austen in a specific context or in relation to specific aesthetic works or thinkers, I ask how her work contributes to a broad group of concepts and questions not limited in time or space. The narrator of *Mansfield Park*, in exploring Fanny's thoughts about Henry's persistence, comments that "it would not be fair to inquire into a young lady's exact estimate of her own perfection" (224). Similarly, while it may not be fair to inquire into Austen's exact estimate of the influence and persistence of her work, I do think it reasonable to assume that she would not have limited her audience to her immediate contemporaries. Her work, in other words, has relevance to and has been found engaging by readers even with limited knowledge of her historical context and the aesthetic practices referred to in her novel. Though reading *Lovers' Vows* and knowing of the landscape improver Henry Repton might enrich a reader's literary as well as historical experience of *Mansfield Park*, the novel itself provides ways for readers ignorant of this context to explore the issues implied by these references.

Moreover, focus on Austen's and *Mansfield Park*'s context can obscure, just as much as it can illuminate, the achievements of the novel. To clarify this point further, let me turn to a

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[29] I consider contextual work as occupying a similar status as thought-experiments. Contextualists often see their work as both objectively valid and exclusive; I present mine as persuasive and complementary.

[30] See *Philosophy in History* for a series of essays considering the relationship between intellectual history and philosophy.

contextual reading of Austen and *Mansfield Park* that overlaps significantly with my non-contextual approach. In *Austen's Oughts*, Karen Valihora situates Austen in the "century of thought about judgment that precedes her work" (30). Her discussion of judgment in this century of thought and in Austen shares many additional emphases with my own, such as aesthetic distance, disinterestedness, partiality and impartiality, and standards of judgment. Exploring the different ways these concepts are explicated in Valihora's work in contrast to mine will help clarify my method and contribution, as well as the shortcomings to which contextual criticism so easily succumbs.

The obvious connections between Austen's interest in judgment and the theoretical explorations of the subject dominating moral and aesthetic philosophy in the eighteenth century make reading Austen in terms of this thought both interesting and common.[31] That Austen explores issues also central to thinkers such as Adam Smith and Shaftesbury may be a given, but how she does so, how scholars might connect them, and how doing so pays off needs articulation in each case. Is it enough to say that these thinkers are working out similar issues in distinct media? Does near contemporaneity necessitate relevance? What kind of reading "situates" an author in a "century of thought"? What justifies such situating?

Valihora's approach, like much contextual reading, assumes rather than defends the validity of such situating. I suggest, however, that contextual readings are subject to a criterion of judgment applicable also to theoretical approaches: that attention to the work,

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[31] See, for example, Despotopoulou, who uses Adam Smith's idea of an impartial spectator to develop ideas of the male and female gaze in *Mansfield Park*. Fletcher and Monterosso invoke Smith's ideas of empathy and restraint in their discussion of Austen's use of free indirect speech. Knox-Shaw reconstructs the intellectual tradition of Austen's home as that of the Anglo-Scottish skeptical Enlightenment. Wainwright considers Austen's conception of character Lockean. Garson's study of "moral taste" reads Austen as participating in the moral-aesthetic discourses of her time. Her reading of *Mansfield Park* emphasizes the discourses of natural taste, sensibility, resources, and (anti-)accomplishment. L. Clark reads *Mansfield Park* as a Shaftesburean soliloquy in novelistic form.

on the one hand, and application of the theory or consideration of context, on the other hand, must mutually illuminate one another. In other words, Valihora's proposal to read *Mansfield Park* in terms of eighteenth-century moral and aesthetic philosophy should, if done well, tell us something both about the novel and the discourse of the picturesque, which is the particular context in whose terms she situates *Mansfield Park* (though the term "picturesque" appears nowhere in the novel).[32] Valihora asserts the importance of Austen's formal achievements and makes narrative perspective central to her argument, but her contextual reading of *Mansfield Park* and Fanny Price in terms of picturesque tourism and impartial spectatorship imposes these terms on the text and consequently distorts Austen's achievement.

Valihora's chapter on *Mansfield Park* is the final in her exploration of the relationship between moral philosophy and aesthetics in the eighteenth century. Austen, whose work, according to Valihora, "represents only the culmination of a century of inquiry into the art of the impartial perspective" (59), is accordingly read by Valihora in the terms of this inquiry. *Mansfield Park* in particular turns to "the critique of distance offered in the discourse of the picturesque" (58) to "suggest…that attaining a perspective that is morally and aesthetically complex enough to prevail…means actually being able to impose a certain way of seeing" (59). This reading relies on a contrast between impartial spectatorship and picturesque absorption. Valihora argues that Austen "situates her heroine, Fanny Price, as both impartial

[32] Valihora stresses the number of times the name Repton appears in the novel (I find only five, in a single conversation (three of them uttered by the eager-to-impress and inarticulate Mr. Rushworth) rather than the eight she claims). Repton was an improver Valihora discusses as "associated with the pretentious side of picturesque renovation" (290). She uses this association to claim that "Austen mocks the idea that one can actually, literally, 'improve' on the natural" (291), connecting the improvement of landscape with that of human nature, a topic she associates with Fanny and Edmund in relation to the Crawfords. But how does the idea of the picturesque help clarify her contrast between Rushworth and Henry, on the one hand, and Edmund and Fanny, on the other?

spectator…and picturesque tourist absorbed in the people and events around her" (58-9). What does this reading teach us about *Mansfield Park*, impartiality, and the picturesque?

I will look first at Valihora's characterization of Fanny as impartial spectator and picturesque tourist. In her Introduction, Valihora claims that it is Austen who "situates her heroine" as both impartial spectator and picturesque tourist (59), whereas in the chapter devoted to *Mansfield Park* – "The Impartial Spectator of *Mansfield Park*" – Fanny "occupies two roles: while she struggles to become a properly impartial spectator, she seems more often to play the part of picturesque tourist" (279). Back in the Introduction, Valihora locates Fanny's struggle not only in relation to impartiality, but rather as both impartial spectator and picturesque tourist: "in both roles, Fanny struggles to find the right perspective to bring to bear on *Mansfield Park*" (59). These small differences point to larger problems in how Valihora uses the terms of eighteenth-century moral and aesthetic philosophy to read *Mansfield Park*. How might Austen situate Fanny in either of these roles and how would readers identify Fanny in them? What is the difference between Fanny's struggle to occupy a role and her playing a part? How are this role and part defined by the text? Does Fanny identify herself as either an impartial spectator or a picturesque tourist? How do Fanny's struggles to find the right perspective refer to impartiality or picturesque views? Valihora does not address these questions.

This dissertation devotes much attention to Fanny's struggles to judge and behave according to various standards and ideals. I draw these multiple standards and ideals from the text itself, and connect them to the, also multiple, standards and ideals by which the novel suggests its characters might be judged. My method relies on close-reading, attention to plot, and detailed analyses of narrative perspectives. Valihora's contextual approach, in

contrast, reads *Mansfield Park* in terms of the threat to disinterested judgment that she argues is posed by the picturesque (279, 287 and passim).

Why ought readers expect Fanny to be an impartial spectator? In her Introduction, Valihora suggests that Austen situates Fanny as an impartial spectator because she is "sidelined at the play rehearsals, benched in the gardens at Sotherton" (58), but the terms "sidelined" and "benched" suggest an imposed and emotional distance rather than the disinterestedness of an impartial spectator. Why would readers expect someone who is "sidelined" or "benched" to watch impartially something from which she has been excluded?

In her chapter's first reading of a specific passage, an episode Valihora introduces as "a subtle parody of the whole idea of the picturesque prospect – and along with it the idea of aesthetic distance" (279), Fanny "finds a picturesque prospect at her service" (279). This picturesque prospect features Edmund, Mary, and the horse that Fanny has been expecting to ride. Valihora's use of the picturesque emphasizes the combination of Fanny's distance from and absorption in "the scene" (279). In fact, it is the very distance of Fanny "as a tourist" in this "picturesque prospect" who "would occupy the foreground, which opens onto a long-distance" (279) that Valihora uses to form her contrast between impartiality and absorption. "While one might think that at this distance," according to Valihora, "Fanny must be an impartial spectator, she enjoys a peculiarly detailed view of everything that passes" (279). But why would "this distance" position Fanny as an impartial spectator of what Valihora has already described as an emotionally charged situation? (She introduces it thus: "Fanny walks out one morning looking anxiously for Edmund" (279).) Valihora suggests that mere distance provides impartiality only to elaborate how the picturesque challenges any such connection. In other words, Valihora's reading of the scene in terms of a

picturesque aesthetic "predicated, not on distance, but on absorption" (281) is what generates the expectation that Fanny "must be an impartial spectator."

Valihora's analysis of Fanny's complicated position during the private theatricals repeats the same pattern. "Once she has refused a part in the rehearsals of *Lovers' Vows* at Mansfield," Valihora remarks, "one might expect Fanny to take on the morally privileged role of an observer of the main action" (283). On what would such an expectation be based? How does this "morally privileged role of observer" actually relate to Adam Smith's "idea of a properly impartial spectator," the idea, Valihora claims, which Austen tests in this episode? Valihora again emphasizes Fanny's interest and absorption in the private theatricals, concluding that "Fanny is an impartial spectator in name only; in reality, she is a jealous and agitated conscript to the sidelines" (284). But who has named Fanny an impartial spectator other than Valihora herself? As Valihora insists (though unfortunately conflating the distinct instances of Fanny's jealousy with her relatively peaceful, though not unproblematic, involvement), the narrative emphasizes Fanny's complicated and not entirely disinterested position as both observer of rehearsals and participant in the scheme of the private theatricals. "The impartial spectator we might be expecting to guide us through the action," Valihora proclaims, "has been recast as a picturesque tourist: absorbed within the frame and taking her readers with her" (284). Valihora's projection of the picturesque onto *Mansfield Park*, I counter, recasts Fanny as an impartial spectator only to elaborate the picturesque's challenge to such a position. Valihora gives no account of why one might expect Fanny to be an impartial spectator. In fact, her descriptions of Fanny's exclusion from these scenes undermines the idea of Fanny's being positioned as impartial.

There are, however, reasons other than providing a target for picturesque aesthetics to consider Fanny as a spectator as well as in the terms invoked by Valihora such as

impartiality, interestedness, and imagination. My own analyses of these scenes in particular (in Chapter Two, section III and Chapter 4)) and of Fanny generally emphasize the same terms, but draw them from textual analysis of the narrative's management of perspective and distance together with attention to the novel's plot structure and the different kinds of expectations which it might raise for readers. Thus I need not rely, as does Valihora, on an unspecified and general "one might expect" to introduce the possibility or expectation of Fanny's impartiality. My rhetorical-narratological approach allows me to explain why readers and Fanny herself might expect her to be an impartial spectator, how and why she is not, and the consequences of her various kinds of partialities (in comparison with those of the other characters) and the way they are presented by the narrative.

Expectations of impartial judgment are raised, I show, at various levels of the narrative. First, according to my inside-out method of reading, standards of impartial judgment are important within the fictional world. For example, my analyses of the different ways values are espoused and ignored at Mansfield Park and in London (Chapter One, section IV); of the various ways characters relate to social (and theatrical) role-playing (Chapters Three and Four); and of the characters judgments of one another throughout explore the complicated and various ways that impartiality (as well as completeness) is invoked as a standard of judgment within the fictional world. Moreover, my analysis of *Mansfield Park*'s double plot structure connects the role of impartial judgment within the fictional world to the challenge posed to readers' judgments of characters by the different expectations raised by this plot structure. Furthermore, the model of self-reflective judgment yielded by this approach acknowledges the infinite range of interests and partialities readers might bring to their judgments of *Mansfield Park*, and explains how the novel encourages readers – if not literary

and cultural historians – to reflect on both their own and other possible judgments of it and its characters.

My exploration of judgment in and of *Mansfield Park* clearly shares many of the terms of picturesque discourse specifically, as well as the broader discourse of eighteenth-century moral and aesthetic philosophy. Reading these explorations of judgment together, considering the particularity of their different forms, articulating their convergences and divergences, and identifying moments of mutual illumination, would certainly be interesting work. It is not, however, the work of this dissertation. Nor, for that matter, is it an accomplishment of Valihora's book. While I am interested in a close-reading that draws out *Mansfield Park*'s unique contribution to philosophical aesthetics generally, Valihora forces the specific terms of eighteenth-century moral and aesthetic philosophy onto Austen and *Mansfield Park*, reading both novelist and novel as illustrations of her own interpretations – perhaps impositions – of the interaction between moral and aesthetic judgment in this period.

The problems with Valihora's contrast between Fanny as an impartial spectator and a picturesque tourist repeat on a small scale the larger problems with her reading of Austen's novels as "draw[ing] together these two strands of thinking about art…neoclassical formalism and the art of perspective and arrangement elaborated in picturesque aesthetics" (228). Valihora takes for granted Austen's "well-known…deployment of picturesque categories" and associates the values of neoclassical formalism with "strict, measured, judicious impartiality, the standard of the narrator" (228). The association of Austen's narrator or narrative voice with some kind of objective, often moral, standard is not unusual

in readings of Austen; but it is, as is the case here, more often asserted than explained.[33] If Austen's narrators embody a neoclassical standard of judgment, are they all the same? Are the narrators' judgments consistent and univocal? How does this standard appear in the different narrative modes of third-person narration, quotation, and free indirect discourse?

Valihora links neoclassical aesthetic values with Austen's "formal, measured, almost abstract style" and "the standard of the narrator" (228). But, as we have seen, Valihora appeals to this standard in order to articulate the challenge posed to it by picturesque aesthetics. What will supply the category of picturesque aesthetics at this level of the argument? "Austen's irony," it turns out, "at once distances us from this ideal standard at the same time as it makes it the principle of all judgments, of character, conduct, propriety, and proportion" (228). Austen's irony, like her narrative voice, is often burdened with excessive and unexplained interpretive weight.[34] Here, irony distances readers from the ideal standard identified with Austen's formalism and narrator, and it makes the same ideal standard a principle of judgment (within the fictional world or in relation to it?). In other words, irony, according to Valihora, imposes a standard already embodied by the narrator and form of the novels while also distancing readers from that standard. Irony is often associated with

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[33] Hough's discussion of Austen's mixed style, for example, associates her objective narrative with a moral standard governing absolutely both her novels and her world. Though I find unconvincing Hough's insistence on the absoluteness of this standard and the correspondence between Austen's fiction and her world, his detailed analyses of narrative style can be interesting. Tandon's premise, in contrast to Hough's, is that Austen's society can no longer rely on indicators of virtue, particularly polite conversation, that are nonetheless still required.

[34] I have already mentioned Trilling's oft-cited reading of *Mansfield Park*, which understands Austen's irony as "a method of comprehension" (181). For many critics, for example, Brenner and Burdan, reading *Mansfield Park* as ultimately ironic preserves an aesthetic accomplishment potentially undermined by what they consider the novel's didacticism or failures in Fanny's conception. Duffy and Mudrick, on the other hand, condemn the novel for its lack of irony. Kirkham reads *Mansfield Park* as promoting a feminist agenda of rational agency by treating Fanny ironically and turning irony against the reader. Tauchert locates the irony of Austen's novels in their combination of romance and realism.

distance, but I am unsure how it functions to impose a standard that Valihora associates also with Austen's narrator, defined as an impartial judge representing the neoclassical aesthetic values of unity, completeness, and order. Valihora's formulation, I suggest, expresses the confused relationship that she posits between neoclassical and picturesque aesthetics, on the one hand, and moral and aesthetic judgments, on the other.

The tension in Austen that Valihora locates in the combination of neoclassical and picturesque aesthetic values is read differently by a number of other thinkers, including myself. In the "Review of the Literature of *Mansfield Park*" in the next chapter, I discuss several examples of how critics of *Mansfield Park* specifically locate the tension, which can be described most generally as one between form and content. Valihora elaborates her contrast between neoclassical and picturesque aesthetic values with a contrast between Austen's novels as "aesthetic wholes…governed absolutely by such criteria as unity, integrity, proportion, and completeness (27), and a pervasive irony that undermines "any standard Austen introduces to order judgment" (27). This description of complete and harmonious, yet always ironic, aesthetic wholes confuses rather than clarifies Austen's aesthetic achievement, an achievement this dissertation shows goes beyond the aesthetic categories of the eighteenth century.

To reinforce this conclusion, let me return to the picture that Valihora paints of the relationship between neoclassical and picturesque aesthetics, on the one hand, and moral and aesthetic judgment, on the other. Valihora insists that the "aesthetic means" of Austen's novels "bear the weight of [their moral] project" (228). This moral-aesthetic unity is itself governed by the neoclassical values of "unity, order, harmony, and sufficiency" (229); but, because "any fulfillment" of the promise of "this crucial aesthetic and moral standard…is explicitly ironic, fictional, the province of art" (229), readers are provided with a distance

that allows for reflection. "Austen suggests," Valihora claims, that "ideal standards inform life and ought to direct self-reflection but are never congruent with it" (229). This assertion sounds similar to my own argument about standards of judgment and the relationship between art and life, but instead of locating these ideal standards in Austen's inheritance of neoclassical aesthetics and an absolute, yet also absolutely ironic, "standard of the narrator" (228), my analysis describes in detail the specific ideals and standards at work within the fictional world, at the level of the narrative, and in how readers judge the characters as well as the novel. My focus on aesthetic concepts and narrative art, in other words, allows me to draw out a complex picture of judgment that is not only specific to Austen's novel, but also relevant to thought about judgment including and beyond the discourse of the picturesque.

I must finally turn to Valihora's reading of the end of *Mansfield Park*. Her focus on the contrast between impartial spectator and picturesque tourist, on ways of seeing and judging in the terms of eighteenth-century moral and aesthetic thought, leads to the following conclusion:

> The ordering principle that finally prevails in *Mansfield Park* is the one that can at once appeal to and invoke a moral vision comprehensive enough to be held in common; it is a vision of the way things ought to be that acquires such status only because it can appeal to, rather than impose on, others. (297)

Fanny, according to Valihora, can finally "impose an integral order" (298) because she appeals to "what ought to be" even as she is immersed in a series of partial and problematic scenes. The slippage between "imposing," "invoking," "sharing," and "appealing to" in Valihora's descriptions of the final vision of *Mansfield Park* betrays the problems with her own imposition of the terms of eighteenth-century moral and aesthetic thought onto the novel. Though Valihora emphasizes the reflection encouraged by Austen's narrative art, she

is oddly unreflective about her own judgments and interpretations of the novel and its characters. How, for instance, does the narrative show the final picture of life at Mansfield Park as one that Fanny has made possible through an appeal to something shareable? How might an appeal to an "ought" be shared? Valihora's emphasis on the imposition of perspectives makes this sudden turn to the idea of a shared perspective surprising. Valihora herself describes the accomplishment of "the elusive moral landscape" as "finally realized in Fanny's harmonizing imagination, and then, in short order, in real life. Fanny returns to a Mansfield that will be totally transformed" (297). But what role does the narrative give Fanny in this transformation and how is it different from the imposition of partial perspectives which, for Valihora, comprise the subject of the novel? How and where does Valihora locate "the emphasis on a Fanny who decisively acts at the end of the novel" (297)? Fanny's ultimate "role at [Mansfield's] moral center" (297) does not necessarily make her instrumental in achieving it, yet Valihora gives no indication of how Fanny accomplishes this shared moral picture.

The idea of a shareable moral order with which Valihora concludes her reading brings together the contrasts between ideal and artificial, moral and aesthetic, neoclassical and picturesque, that interest Valihora. "In not only imposing a frame and a point of view, but allowing us to see them at work," Valihora concludes, "Austen teaches us how to see and gives us the distance necessary to reflect" (299). I share Valihora's admiration of Austen's artistry in representing and enacting different kinds of framing, partialities, and appeals to standards. My exploration of this achievement, however, does not strive for a single, shareable or imposable, way *Mansfield Park* "ought to be" read. Instead, I find that attention to the aesthetic concepts central within and significant for the fictional world of *Mansfield Park* suggests a mode of judgment that is self-reflective. Although Valihora

elaborates a concept of reflective distance, she does not reflect on her own interpretive practices or conclusions. This shortcoming results in an imposition rather than a convincing, shareable, interpretation.

Certainly such an interpretation of *Mansfield Park* and eighteenth-century moral and aesthetic philosophy is possible. Reading the novel in this philosophical context might clarify, expand, and complement eighteenth-century philosophical investigations into impartiality, disinterestedness, distance, imagination, and judgment. Exploring these philosophical ideas in the novel might illuminate aspects of the novel that have not yet been appreciated. Such accomplishments, however, are not the goal of this dissertation.

Instead, this dissertation identifies judgment and aesthetic distance as the subjects on which *Mansfield Park* contributes most to philosophical aesthetics. More particularly, I explain how judgment might rely on standards and ideals; the limitations and possibilities of different kinds of disinterestedness; and the possible relationships among judgments in and of art to judgments in and of life. The last question especially picks up on the idea, which is central to my project, that *Mansfield Park* issues a Bakhtinian challenge to make art and life answerable to each other. This challenge implies, I claim, that this, or any, novel's contribution, precisely as a work of literature, to philosophical aesthetics resides in the reading experience. So, to get at *Mansfield Park*'s specifically literary contribution, its philosophical import cannot be separated from what we do and what we might do when reading the novel.

Within the fictional world of the novel we encounter characters who confuse and manipulate aesthetic distance; who hold various relationships to ideals of impartiality and disinterestedness; and who make various kinds of mistakes of judgment. These characters

and their interactions, in turn, are presented to readers through a double plot structure by a narrative voice that takes various distances from the characters and readers.

The plot structure of *Mansfield Park*, I argue, combines an idealized, Cinderella-type marriage plot with a focus on a realistically portrayed idealistic heroine whose main concern is to occupy her humble position. This plot structure challenges reader's expectations for and evaluations of its characters by suggesting different outcomes for and standards of judging them. The narrative voice of the novel, furthermore, moves in and out of the characters' perspectives and thoughts in ways that show readers more than the characters themselves know, sometimes encouraging proximity and sometimes distance.

Mansfield Park's depiction of its characters' values and their evaluations, its double plot structure, and its narrative voice work together to suggest, I argue, a mode of judgment appropriate to fiction and relevant to life. This mode of judgment involves comparisons, or, judgments of judgments, at various levels. The centrality of competing values and evaluations within the fictional world of *Mansfield Park* makes these processes themselves objects of readers' judgments, judgments further complicated by the novel's plot and narrative voice. These complications encourage reflection on how a reader assesses the characters (and their values and evaluations). But this is not all. The novel, I show, encourages readers to compare their own acts of judgment not only with those of the characters, but also with other possible readers. Through this act of comparison, any individual reader might approximate the reader hypothesized by the text, an emotionally-engaged, aesthetically-disinterested, and self-reflective reader who strives to make art and life answerable to each other.

The mode of judgment suggested by *Mansfield Park* thus encourages both the imaginative and emotional freedom associated with aesthetic engagement (in both positive

and negative understandings of the aesthetic) and the reflection and disinterestedness associated with aesthetic distance. Readers might bring both their own particularity to their reading of the novel and their reading experience into real life relevance. To do so, they must balance partiality, bias, and incompleteness, which are nonetheless necessarily disinterested due to the aesthetic distance separating readers and characters, with reflection on the causes and consequences of the interests that can compromise their judgments.

This kind of reading is encouraged by what I've called *Mansfield Park*'s Bakhtinian challenge to make art and life answerable. In my analysis of the novel, I emphasize the effort and responsibility involved in making art and life answerable, uniting them for and in one's own person. Bakhtin, however, does not forget to emphasize the vulnerability of answerability, the liability to blame that, according to him, answerability entails. This aspect of answerability is important for *Mansfield Park*'s contribution to philosophical aesthetics specifically and for the potential value of literature more generally.

In the dissertation, I approach both *Mansfield Park*'s contribution to philosophical aesthetics and questions of literary value via the details of the novel. I hope that my readings of specific passages are compelling; but, more than that, I hope that when readers find themselves in disagreement, the terms of the disagreement can be usefully negotiated through the framework of aesthetic judgment and distance that I elaborate here. This possibility informs my combination of a broadly defined focus on aesthetics with a method of reading that attempts to let the novel speak for itself.

Attempts at value-less reading are – often rightly – disparaged as obscuring the values that any reader necessarily brings to a text, or worse, as assuming that the values brought are necessarily universal and unquestionable. My focus on aesthetics guides my reading in a way that I hope both opens up and holds together the plurality of engagements

encouraged by the novel and realized through the particular interests and commitments of actual readers. I hope, in other words, to have illuminated a particular, aesthetic, aspect of the text so that it can be better seen and discussed, discussed in ways that include questioning the scope and limitations of my particular spotlight.

Similarly, although the dissertation does not claim to stake out new ground on a variety of topics much-debated within Austen scholarship, for instance, free indirect discourse, irony, or realism, my reading of *Mansfield Park* brings these topics together in a novel and useful way within a comprehensive framework of judgment. My use of this framework is, I think, justified by the importance of "judgment" as a concept in Austen's work generally and *Mansfield Park* specifically. My combination of a broad focus and detailed reading also addresses the relative neglect of aesthetics in philosophical approaches to literature and the sometimes-strained dialogue between literary criticism and philosophy that I discussed above. *Mansfield Park* itself provides the terms for a philosophical engagement, terms that clarify how the question, central to rhetorical narratology, of how works of literature communicate, might be framed philosophically. In this way, the dissertation joins a growing dialogue between philosophers and literary critics about literary aesthetics, and I invite my readers to judge it as such.

Chapter One: The Plots of *Mansfield Park*

I. *Mansfield Park* as a Marriage Comedy and More

The marriage plot of *Mansfield Park* can be summarized as the story of a poor relative who ends up marrying the upstanding cousin whom she has hopelessly loved. Fanny Price is brought as a young girl to the estate of her well-married aunt. She falls in love with her cousin, Edmund Bertram, the only person at Mansfield Park who befriends her. This cousin, already ineligible to Fanny because of her social standing as well as their familial relationship, is soon attracted to another woman, Mary Crawford, who returns his affection in spite of being unwilling to marry a lowly clergyman, which is what Edmund, as a second son, is destined to be. Mary has a brother who, after having flirted with and disappointed both the Miss Bertrams, turns his attention to Fanny as the only young woman left to conquer, and a particular challenge due to her shyness. Fanny, having seen his behavior towards her cousins and being already in love with Edmund, refuses Henry's eventual marriage proposal. In response to her refusal, Fanny's uncle returns her to her parents' home so that she might learn the value of Henry Crawford's offer. Meanwhile, Edmund heads to London planning to propose to Mary. When Henry runs off with Fanny's married cousin, who had never really gotten over him, Mary's reaction reveals her true character to Edmund and both Edmund and Fanny return to Mansfield Park. Edmund learns to love Fanny and they marry. This summary of *Mansfield Park*'s marriage plot, however, does not adequately describe the action of the novel, and so there is good reason to read it as something more than, or perhaps other than, a marriage comedy.

Mansfield Park, like Austen's other novels, focuses on a young woman and ends with her marriage. Fanny is not, however, a typical heroine, and the subject of the novel is not primarily how she manages to marry the hero. Within the general structure of a marriage

comedy, the novel tells another story that challenges the expectations raised by that structure, the story of Fanny's complicated perspective on Mansfield Park as both she and it change. The ways in which the novel does not fit the model of a marriage comedy, I argue, are directly related to the novel's concern with both its characters' and its readers' judgments. My basic claim is that the novel's presentation of its characters' failures to judge disinterestedly challenges readers to consider the grounds of their own judgments of the characters and of the novel.

This chapter accordingly identifies what I call a position plot in addition to *Mansfield Park*'s marriage plot. My goal is to explain how these two plots challenge readers' judgments of the characters and the novel. But first, I situate this claim in relation to the critical literature on the novel.

II. Review of the Literature on *Mansfield Park*

Mansfield Park is often singled out as Austen's problem novel, a work that does not fit in with her others or that merely attempts something at which another work succeeds. Critics and Janeites alike engage in "Fanny wars,"[1] attacking and defending the novel's timid heroine and, more generally, conflicting in their judgments about the novel's merits – aesthetic and moral. At the same time, another group approaches the novel dispassionately, accepting it and its characters as unproblematic. Why is *Mansfield Park*'s reception so divided?[2]

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[1] For an overview of the "Fanny wars" see Troost and Greenfield. Though their focus is Fanny's popular reception, they also give a useful summary of scholarly reception. For a picture of Austen criticism in general, see the introduction of Johnson and Tuite's useful volume.

[2] Though it is difficult to overstate the extent of this division, it should be noted that disagreement characterizes discussion of Austen's work in general. I will have more to say

My claim in answer to this question follows a long line of such claims. Some critics discuss the novel itself as flawed. Others locate the problem in the reception, arguing that the novel has been misunderstood. This position generally either limits the novel's proper audience, usually to historical contemporaries, or returns to some obscurity in the novel that leads to misunderstanding; this obscurity itself can be considered a merit or demerit. This dissertation falls into the final group: those arguing that the novel presents a kind of challenge, one that is taken up in different ways by different readers (though, as the "Introduction" indicated, my interest is in different hypothetical readers rather than in actual or historical readers). I do not claim to have uncovered a final and correct reading of the novel, but rather a structure that helps explain the disagreement it is meant to provoke.

It is generally agreed that *Mansfield Park* is, like Austen's other novels, a marriage comedy. What is at stake and how to determine the desired outcome, however, is not entirely clear. *Mansfield Park* thus also lends itself to interpretations seeking to fit the novel into various kinds of contexts. And such interpretations, of both *Mansfield Park* and Austen herself, abound. Was Austen, as Marilyn Butler asserts in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, an anti-Jacobin writer of didactic fiction? Or, as Peter Knox-Shaw counters in *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, a centrist exploring questions significant to skeptical Enlightenment thinking? Does *Mansfield Park*'s pessimistic realism make it the first great novel of the Victorian era, as Julia Prewitt Brown asserts in *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and Literary Form*?[3] Or does it abandon realism in favour of romanticism and a monstrous, solitary heroine, as Nina Auerbach would have it? Can Marvin Mudrick's position that *Mansfield Park* fails completely in its complete lack of irony be defended more or less than Lionel Trilling's

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below about how scholars discuss *Mansfield Park*'s place in the context of Austen's other work.

[3] Collins also characterizes *Mansfield Park* as a Victorian novel and Yeazell suggests that this characterization is, paradoxically, due to *Mansfield Park*'s archaic elements.

contention that the novel brilliantly directs irony at irony itself? Does *Mansfield Park* depict a world of stability or change, shared language or no possibility of communication? This list of questions could go on at much greater length. I will take up other central issues in the critical literature in the chapters that follow. In this chapter, I will limit myself to the various interpretations of the novel's plot and subject matter.

First, however, I will attempt to clarify the standards by which critics judge the novel and its heroine. Critics argue that Fanny or *Mansfield Park,* on the one hand, lives up to a particular standard or ideal, or, on the other, criticizes or challenges a particular standard or ideal. I have already mentioned in the "Introduction" that Fanny is considered a moral ideal by many virtue ethicists interested in literature. Literary critics, too, approach Fanny as a moral ideal. But, while philosophers tend to see Fanny in terms of philosophical ethics, literary critics generally situate Fanny in relation to literary types, religious and political discourses, or feminine and feminist ideals. All these approaches claim to locate *Mansfield Park* in its proper context, but they disagree about what the context should be. Though these contexts often seem complementary, the particular readings of Fanny and *Mansfield Park* that these diverse contextual focuses yield usually are not.

In the introduction to the 1988 edition of her 1975 *The War of Ideas*, Butler situates her not-explicitly-feminist work in relation to feminist thought since the book's initial publication, aligning her interest in Austen's historical context with feminist criticism's tendency to contextualize rather than idealize Austen. Like Butler, Margaret Kirkham situates Austen in her historical context. However, while Butler's historical reading shows Austen to be participating as a conservative in established novelistic discourses, Kirkham's makes her an advocate of what she calls Enlightenment feminism, as articulated by Mary Wollstonecraft in particular. Kirkham reads *Mansfield Park* as an ironic, feminist treatment of

ideal conduct-book heroines. Though Fanny Price shares the physical weakness of sentimental heroines of the type favoured by Rousseau, she is not such an ideal heroine, according to Kirkham. Instead, the irony with which she is treated shows her as a rational moral agent.[4]

Both Mary Poovey and Nancy Armstrong also discuss Austen's relationship to ideals of femininity. Poovey focuses on three women authors' figuring of the ideal of feminine propriety, whereas Armstrong, in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, discusses how the novel itself reshaped middle class ideals. These differing analyses of how Austen and her novels both participated in and influenced nineteenth-century ideals of femininity have in common ambiguous and problematic notions of agency and causality.[5]

The problematic links that Poovey and Armstrong make between fiction and bourgeois ideology dovetail with critical conceptions of realism as the purveyor of the illusion of objective reality and transparent language. Such monolithic views of the nineteenth-century novel have largely given way to more nuanced considerations of both particular authors and their relationships to various historical settings.[6] William Galperin's *The Historical Austen* resituates Austen at the origins of realism not retrospectively, as, he argues, had become customary, but contextually, in a way that recaptures Austen's style as it

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[4] See Jenkins for a discussion of why Fanny cannot be a moral ideal, but can be a feminine ideal.

[5] See A. Anderson for a useful criticism of these literary critics' metaleptic move to make gender a site of power. See Downie for a criticism of Armstrong's expansive definition of the middle class and an argument placing both the Bertrams and Austen herself in the gentry. May finds logical inconsistencies in many of Armstrong's claims. Greenfield aligns herself with Armstrong's association of conduct books and middle-class ideology, likening Fanny to a conduct-book heroine.

[6] Claims for regulatory realism include Armstrong's specific claim about the novel as well as Eagleton's more general claim about aesthetics as inescapably ideological. For more nuanced views, see Shaw (*Narrating Reality*), who argues against conceptions of regulatory realism, uncovering instead a realism that engages readers. He develops the view of "fiction train[ing] us in processing reality" (207) in "Austen's Realist Play." Levine sees realists themselves struggling with the ambiguity of their project.

emerges. This shift in perspective shows Austen's use of free indirect speech and her relationship to the marriage comedy as original and oppositional rather than ideological and regulatory.

When Galperin devotes his attention to *Mansfield Park* specifically, however, he characterizes the novel as a "missed opportunity" at a number of levels. Most importantly, for Galperin the novel "chronically misfires" due to a disjunction between the realistically represented world and the idealistic moral standards of the novel's heroine, narrator, and plot (127). This assessment relies on a contrast between realism and idealism, here in the form of didacticism, which appears again and again in the criticism of *Mansfield Park*. I will return below to the importance of this contrast for my own argument, as well to those of other critics who characterize the novel as a challenge.

Austen's realism is generally associated with her limited subject matter and unobtrusive narrative voice. These characteristics are also often linked to Austen's famous irony. Realism and irony are opposed to idealism and didacticism, elements associated with the happy endings demanded by marriage comedies. The basic structure of a marriage comedy demands a heroine and hero who are, or become, worthy of each other and of happiness. The hero and heroine must overcome obstacles related to these two demands in order to achieve their inevitable marriage. The marriage comedy often shares these basic plot elements with the romance, but differs in the quality of the world and characters treated. Heroes and royalty populate the world of romance; the world of the marriage comedy, by contrast, is inhabited by more down-to-earth characters. In addition, these realistic characters must overcome their obstacles in more realistic ways.[7] The marriage comedy, in

[7] François considers "the question of Austen's 'Romanticism'" as "the question of accommodating romance to realism" (220, note 2). She interestingly connects Fanny's reticence and passivity with Austen's realism: "the novel's wit lies in presenting a heroine

short, combines a romantic and idealized structure with realistic characters.[8] Judgments about *Mansfield Park* depend, in part, on the extent to which the novel is taken as a marriage comedy or a romance.[9]

Critics disagree, as I have mentioned, about the kind of marriage comedies Austen writes, about the kind of marriage comedy *Mansfield Park* is (or is not), and about what *Mansfield Park* is about. Disagreements about the subject matter of the novel overlap with disagreements about *Mansfield Park*'s plot. A much-discussed line in a letter of Austen's complicates disagreements about subject matter: some interpret the line as identifying *Mansfield Park*'s subject as ordination, while others do not think she refers to the novel at all.[10] My method of reading makes Austen's letter of little importance here, but critics'

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who never acts on principle alone but whose rational and disinterested judgments repeatedly dovetail with her secret desires and personal debilities. Austen's 'realism' – humanist in its readiness to accommodate human limitations – consists of so qualifying the heroism of a self-effacing virtue with conditions that make it easy to practice that Fanny's example is finally less admirable than merely excusable, humanly forgivable" (244). François uniquely characterizes the challenge posed by *Mansfield Park* (as well as by Fanny) in her reading of the novel as participating in an aesthetic of reticence rather than expression, an aesthetic she elaborates through the concept of the open secret, "where the term *open secret* refers to nonemphatic revelation – revelation without insistence and without rhetorical underscoring" (xvi).

[8] See Frye's *Anatomy* for general approaches to and relationships among realism, irony, satire, and romance, and *Secular Scripture* for a focus on the structure of romance. This focus leads Frye to note the tension between characters and plot in Austen generally (39-40), and to an interesting reading of Fanny as an archetypal romance heroine existing on two levels, and having two social identities (76).

[9] See Tauchert for an argument that Austen's use of romance allows her to write marriage comedies that preserve feminine autonomy in their mediation between real and ideal. To the debated categories "romance" and "marriage comedy," one can add "comedy of manners" and "didactic novel." Lynch's discussion of how the image of Austen and her novels was wielded in the interwar period ("At Home with Jane Austen") usefully connects battles over genre and canon with social and political concerns and tensions, reminding us that oppositions between Austen's realism and preceding romances have as much to do with the context in which they are made as with the texts that they characterize.

[10] Chapman associates the sentence with *Mansfield Park* (appendix 6), and it is invoked by critics as different as Lascelles and Galperin. See Edge for an overview of the interpretations of Austen's letter, and an argument that she did not refer to ordination as the subject of *Mansfield Park*. Mandal concurs, citing the context, and arguing that Austen was well along in

enduring discussion of the subject of *Mansfield Park* is of interest. Ordination is indeed an important question in the novel: the hero's imminent ordination conflicts with the rival, Mary's, ambitions. But there is little reason to consider ordination the central issue of the novel other than uncertainty about what that central issue is. In addition to ordination, critics argue that *Mansfield Park* is primarily about improvement, education, lack of authority, and instability, to name a few possibilities.[11]

A number of critics argue that *Mansfield Park* is about family. Paula Marantz Cohen characterizes *Mansfield Park* as a "family romance," (670) analyzing it in terms of family systems theory. In this analysis, the ideal ending of the marriage comedy becomes a utopian picture of family equilibrium. According to Cohen, this ideal picture of family life achieves a balance between the two options chosen by most other nineteenth-century fiction: the tragic or the conventional happy ending. Tara Goshal Wallace also reads *Mansfield Park* as primarily about family, but rather than a utopian picture of family life, she sees a dystopian and competitive family. This reading of *Mansfield Park* as portraying a "dark and pessimistic" world in which authority fails to create moral consensus is part of Wallace's larger claim that Austen's work in general articulates discomfort with authority. David Kaufmann argues that

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Mansfield Park when she wrote the letter. Donohue also gives a useful overview of debates about ordination as the subject of *Mansfield Park*. Instead of resolving the interpretation of Austen's letter, however, Donohue re-interprets the "ordination" that interests Austen in *Mansfield Park* as restoring order to a disorderly society. Bonaparte also argues that Austen is interested in the "ordination" of society, but her reading of Austen as philosophical, metafictional, and romantic makes this ordination something possible only in fiction. Soloway sees the subject of the novel not as ordination, but rather the right wife for an ordained minister.

[11] Duckworth famously compares estate improvement with personal improvement in his reading of *Mansfield Park*. Brenner also reads *Mansfield Park* as primarily about improvement, but its impossibility rather than its accomplishment. Duffy sees *Mansfield Park*'s real subject as the disintegration of society, but finds the novel's didacticism incompatible with his standards of realism. Wiesenfarth reads *Mansfield Park* as a dramatization of Fanny's education and Fleishman, in a rare monograph devoted entirely to *Mansfield Park*, characterizes the novel as a *Bildungsroman*.

Mansfield Park has both a marriage and a familial plot. Critics and readers see the end of *Mansfield Park* as problematic, Kaufmann argues, because they misunderstand or disagree with Austen's assertion that family relations take precedence over marital connections. Eileen Cleere takes this emphasis on family a step further, arguing that *Mansfield Park* advocates endogamy. Tess O'Toole, like Kaufmann, identifies two plot strands in *Mansfield Park*, this time an adoption as well as a marriage plot. Whereas O'Toole explains Fanny's frailty as part of a larger strategy to minimize the importance of bloodlines in maintaining the estate culture into which Fanny is adopted, Cleere identifies Fanny as a familial insider rather than outsider, one whose value should be reinvested in the family rather than wasted outside of it. These different interpretations of *Mansfield Park* paint conflicting pictures of both the novel and what it says about family.

Additional critics identify *Mansfield Park* as challenging traditional plot structures. Charles Hinnant claims that all of Austen's novels subvert the sentimental courtship plot by delaying closure and recasting the ideal elements of these traditional plots ironically and realistically. Austen, he claims, "is calling into question easy assumptions about the characters and the narratives in which they appear" (299). Taken together, Hinnant argues, the storylines of Austen's novels reveal the idealized elements of courtship novels as dangerous illusions preventing real love.

William Magee, like Hinnant, looks at all six of Austen's novels to make a general argument about her relationship to the courtship plot. In contrast with Hinnant's synchronic perspective that characterizes the novels as anti-courtship, Magee's diachronic view charts Austen's developing relationship to this plot structure, from the first, simplest adoptions of it, through struggles with its restrictions, to, finally, a complex use of the courtship plot to

enlarge women's possibilities and value.[12] *Mansfield Park* occupies the middle stage of this progression, Magee argues, when Austen resists the rigidity of the conventional ending – the marriage between Edmund and Fanny – by using two love triangles to provide the sense of a real choice. Magee explains disappointment with the conventional end of *Mansfield Park* as a consequence of Austen's "flexibility" with the conventional plot, associating this flexibility with Austen's move towards "less fixed and more realistic" plots (202).

In *Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation*, Bharat Tandon singles out *Mansfield Park* as uniquely frustrating readers' expectations. This goal fits into Tandon's larger argument that polite conversation in Austen's world and her novels is still required, but no longer reliable as an indicator of virtue (18). Austen's novels, therefore, invite readers to be active and exercise their "'tempers of mind'" (35-6). *Mansfield Park* accomplishes this aesthetic goal in part by using nineteenth-century plot conventions "while declining to locate its own important transitions at those points" (217). The content of the novel, for Tandon, thus sits uneasily with its form.

In "Fanny Price: 'Is she solemn? – Is she queer? –Is she prudish?,'" George Haggerty asks, in the spirit of Ralph Rader, why Fanny challenges readers' sympathies (177). Haggerty's formalist analysis focuses on Fanny's purpose as a heroine and emphasizes the centrality of her perspective, especially her unacknowledged feelings for Edmund. *Mansfield Park* concludes, argues Haggerty, with Austen's creation of a new world in which Fanny and Edmund's union may not be exciting, but is realistic and natural. "What is 'quite natural'

[12] Among other characterizations of Austen's oeuvre are M. Butler's division of the novels into those about a heroine who is wrong and those about a heroine who is right (166), and Brown's into those of satiric realism and ironic comedies (37-49). C.S. Lewis distinguishes *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* from the four other major novels on the basis of their solitary, unchanging heroines (28-30).

about this ending," Haggerty concludes, "is really how un-natural the novel has made it seem" (187).

All these critics, it should be clear, grapple with the challenging plot structure of *Mansfield Park*.[13] Haggerty's description of the end of the novel as unnaturally natural points to the same difficulty Tandon and Galperin discuss as a disjunction between form and content, Maggee and Hinnant identify as a resistance to plot convention, and critics like Mudrick and Halperin (in "The Trouble with *Mansfield Park*) call a failure of irony.[14] My reading of *Mansfield Park* explains these disputes about the plot structure as a result of the different standards of judgment at work in the novel.

As I noted at the outset of this review of the literature, my dissertation falls into the group of criticism including Hinnant, Magee, Tandon, and Haggerty that considers *Mansfield Park* productively challenging.[15] Both Hinnant and Magee link *Mansfield Park*'s difficult plot structure to the challenge, mounted by all Austen's novels, to the conventions of the courtship plot. Their studies of all Austen's novels in relation to the traditional courtship plot share my emphasis on a contrast between realism and idealism as well as attention to irony. But, whereas Hinnant and Magee use these terms to elucidate the relationship among Austen's own novels in contrast to traditional courtship novels, my study of aesthetic issues

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[13] See Wright for an interesting reading that contrasts a dominant sickness-cure metaphor of narrative progression with one of prevention. *Mansfield Park*, argues Wright, not only privileges prevention over cure, but also teaches readers to read cautiously and imagine alternatives to an idealized past or frightening future. Mandal argues persuasively that Austen productively and subtly uses conventional didactic elements, but nonetheless finds fault with "a somewhat awkward strapping together of a subjective, Fanny-centered novel in which she learns about the world around her, and an objective, didactic tale meant to exemplify an Evangelical ideology" (128).

[14] Miller's study of closure considers a related tension, what he calls "the equivocation of Jane Austen's form – its tendency to disown at an ideological level what it embraces at a constructional one" (54). I will return to Miller's argument in Chapter Seven.

[15] This group also includes Lodge, who argues that the novel persuades readers to "endorse a system of values with which we have no real sympathy at all" (94).

in *Mansfield Park* alone finds that the novel itself has much to say about realism, idealism, irony, and their relationships to aesthetic judgment.

Tandon attributes to Austen herself the idea of her novels as a kind of exercise for readers. His approach to these exercises emphasizes, like mine, relationships between reality and representation as well as between real and ideal. But, Tandon asks about the relationship between Austen's real, socio-political world and the worlds of her novels. I ask, instead, about what *Mansfield Park* itself says about how readers might relate the world of the novel to their own real worlds. Haggerty's formalist analysis of *Mansfield Park* shares with my own the methodological assumption that Fanny is meant to be how she is; a critic's role, therefore, is to ask why she is how she is. Though, in answering this question, Haggerty emphasizes, as do I, the centrality of Fanny's perspective, he does not draw out the implications of *Mansfield Park*'s plot structure for how it has been and could be judged. These implications, I argue, offer insights not only into the novel itself, but also into the nature of aesthetic judgment, how novels might provide an opportunity for readers to develop such judgment, and to exercise it in considering the relationship between their judgments about art and their judgments about life.

III. The Position Plot of *Mansfield Park*

The plot summary of *Mansfield Park* as a marriage comedy with which this chapter began emphasizes the overlapping love triangles of Fanny-Edmund-Mary and Henry-Fanny-Edmund. The novel itself, however, emphasizes not primarily how Fanny avoids Henry and wins Edmund, but rather how she perceives and judges herself and the people around her. This emphasis on Fanny's perception and judgment contrasts her low opinion of her own worth and her lack of ambition with her central importance to the narrative and its promise of a marriage comedy's happy ending. The hopes for Fanny's happy ending encouraged by

the novel's focus on her and the love triangles that it sets up are complicated by the narrator's sympathetic but not uncritical portrayal of Fanny's struggles to be happy where she is.[16]

In order to clarify how *Mansfield Park* complicates its structure as a marriage comedy by focusing on how Fanny's position in the fictional world affects her judgment, I will look at Phelan's identification, in *Experiencing Fiction*, of the common characteristics of Austen's use of narrative comedy. He articulates these characteristics in order to distinguish *Persuasion* from the rest of Austen's novels as her "most radical experiment with the form of narrative comedy" (27). Phelan supports this claim with an elegant and compelling interpretation of the novel's unusual progression, a progression in which both the introduction of the hero and the assurance to readers that a marriage between the heroine and the hero will indeed take place are delayed. I largely agree with Phelan's interpretation of *Persuasion*, but I do not believe that its success rests on distinguishing Austen's last novel so sharply from her others. *Mansfield Park*, like *Persuasion*, experiments with the form of narrative comedy, for unique reasons and to unique effects.

According to Phelan, Austen's marriage comedies share three main characteristics (except for *Persuasion*, which only conforms to the first). First, "Austen asks her audience to make an interpretive judgment that the engagement of the female protagonist to the male hero is the best outcome available within the world of the novel;" second,

> the instabilities faced by the protagonists that drive the progression of the action are both internal and external; that is, the successful resolution depends on the protagonist

[16] M. Clark's discussion of how narratives elaborate different conceptions of the self (in *Narrative Structures*) has influenced my thinking about the plot geometries of *Mansfield Park*. Especially pertinent are Chapter Five's analyses of romantic triangles as Freudian thirds.

> recognizing and overcoming deficiencies in her own character even as she negotiates or endures various external obstacles;

and third,

> throughout the progression of instabilities…Austen guides her audience's interpretive judgment so that we expect the engagement will occur, and she guides our ethical judgment so that we desire it to occur. Consequently, our interest is focused less on *whether* the engagement will occur and more on *how* it will come about. (28-9)

Mansfield Park's instantiation of any of these characteristics is, at best, debatable. The novel both encourages and challenges the expectations outlined by Phelan. The internal and external obstacles to Fanny's marriage with Edmund challenge how readers arrive at the interpretive judgment that their marriage is the best possible outcome within the fictional world. Because the desirability of their union is an issue, an uncertainty about whether the union will take place competes with the question of how it might come about. Although readers are ultimately asked to evaluate Fanny's marriage to Edmund as the best possible outcome within the fictional world, the novel complicates how they arrive at such a judgment in order, I claim, to challenge them to consider the grounds of their judgments of the characters as well as of the novel.

The novel complicates readers' interpretive judgment that Fanny's marriage to Edmund is the best outcome possible within the fictional world in several ways. First, the expectation that Fanny will marry Edmund challenges readers to hope something for Fanny that she is not capable of hoping for herself. Her denial of her feelings for Edmund corresponds to her attempts to conform to her lowly position in the Bertram household and to live up to ideal moral standards that only she and Edmund take seriously, and that they both fail to embody perfectly. The novel's characterization of Fanny thus contrasts with the

expectations encouraged by a marriage comedy in a way that undercuts readers' abilities to sympathize with her and hope for her happy ending.

Second, Edmund's feelings for Mary Crawford are a complex obstacle to his marriage with Fanny. Mary has all the strength and vivacity that Fanny lacks, though she herself lacks the values that Fanny and Edmund share. The novel contrasts Fanny and Mary in ways that show both characters' strengths and weaknesses, a contrast to which I will return in the next chapter. An internal obstacle to Fanny's marriage to Edmund that inhibits some readers' sympathy with Fanny – her own belief in the union's impossibility – is thus complemented by an external obstacle that similarly complicates readers' sympathy – his feelings for Mary, a woman some readers prefer to Fanny.

Third, Henry's pursuit of Fanny is also a complex external obstacle to Fanny's eventual marriage with Henry. I argue that, though the novel characterizes Henry as a less desirable option for Fanny, it does pose the question of whether Henry is to be considered a viable option rather than merely an obstacle to her eventual marriage to Edmund. Henry's pursuit of Fanny develops the issues of education and improvement first raised by Edmund's role as mentor to Fanny and the improvement in Mary he hopes her feelings for him will effect. With Henry's courtship of Fanny, the novel presents a possible alternative ending in which both Mary and Henry would be improved by their respective marriages to Edmund and Fanny. I will return to the novel's presentation of this alternative ending in Chapters Five and Six, and to some readers' preference for it below.

In addition to the external obstacles of other potential matches for both Edmund and Fanny, two additional external obstacles complement the internal obstacle of Fanny's refusal to acknowledge her feelings for Edmund. Within the fictional world, a marriage between Fanny and Edmund is considered impossible on two counts: the fact of their

kinship and the fact of their different social statuses. The second of these obstacles is more likely to encourage than dispel expectations that Fanny and Edmund will marry as it conforms to the pattern of a Cinderella plot wherein a young woman wrongly placed in a low position is eventually recognized as intrinsically worthy and raised to her rightful position through marriage.[17] The first obstacle can be read in a similar light.[18]

In *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*, Peter Rabinowitz reads the first mention of this obstacle in such a light. When Sir Thomas Bertram hesitates to agree to Mrs. Norris's plan to bring their niece to Mansfield Park, Mrs. Norris dispels his reluctance in part by saying:

> "You are thinking of your sons—but do not you know that, of all things upon earth, *that* is the least likely to happen, brought up as they would be, always together like brothers and sisters? It is morally impossible. I never knew an instance of it. It is, in fact, the only sure way of providing against the connexion." (7)

According to Rabinowitz, Mrs. Norris's claim illustrates a specific type of rule of configuration, the rule of chutzpah, one of the rules governing the kinds of expectations raised by particular elements in given literary contexts (111). Rabinowitz's aptly named rule says: "When a character states with assurance that which he or she has no good reason to

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[17] Many critics mention the fairytale elements of *Mansfield Park*. Harding's reading of Austen's novels as an outlet for her criticism of those she loved discusses her use of what he calls the Cinderella theme. He finds Fanny and *Mansfield Park* priggish due to the "curiously abortive attempt at humility that the novel represents" (175). See Huang for a feminist and historical study of how women writers, including Austen, in *Mansfield Park*, use the Cinderella plot subversively. Huang identifies this plot's central paradox as that between the heroine's praised humility and the deviousness suggested by her rise in status (5). Simpson sees Austen's use of multiple fairytale elements in *Mansfield Park* as complementing her realism. Toymentsev's ideological reading moves from casting Fanny as the upwardly mobile Cinderella to "a *scapegoat* supposed to atone for the crisis of the aristocratic family" (27). Garson argues that Austen's characterization of Fanny reveals the limits she places on social mobility and rationalizes the elevation of a select few.

[18] Cleere and Cohen both discuss incest in their explorations of family relationships in *Mansfield Park*. For a socio-historical analysis of incest in Austen, see Hudson.

believe to be the case, we can expect that he or she will turn out to be wrong, especially if the claim is important to the outcome of the plot" (121). Rabinowitz accordingly reads Mrs. Norris's typically bombastic claim that bringing Fanny to Mansfield Park will actually prevent, rather than precipitate, a romance between cousins as giving readers a reason to expect that Fanny will in fact marry Tom or Edmund Bertram (122).

This reading is based on Rabinowitz's focus on how "Western readers' prior knowledge of conventions of reading shapes their experiences and evaluations of the narratives they confront" (3). Readers use their knowledge of conventions to identify *Mansfield Park* as a marriage comedy and, accordingly, are on the lookout for a heroine and a hero who, after overcoming obstacles, will happily marry. *Mansfield Park*, in presenting readers with a heroine in a low position who lives in a world in which marriage is the primary concern, conforms to the conventions of a marriage comedy and raises the concomitant expectations in readers. The rule of chutzpah can be applied to Mrs. Norris's statement because readers are on the lookout for potential heroes.

The different aspects of reading on which Rabinowitz and Phelan respectively focus in the two works mentioned result in emphases on different aspects of readers' formation of expectations, aspects that I claim *Mansfield Park* intentionally sets against one another.[19] On the one hand, Rabinowitz's concern with how readers' previous reading experiences affect their expectations of any new narratives which they encounter emphasizes how examples of specific genres conform to conventions and meet the expectations they raise. On the other hand, Phelan's concern with how the reading process involves forming and revising

[19] See Lowe's discussion of the power of plot as derived from the tension created in the reading experience between becoming involved in the fictional world and the immediate situations of the characters and considering these details in relation to the story as a whole and its resolution (24-5 and passim).

expectations emphasizes how single narratives, for example *Persuasion*, progress in ways that thwart readers' expectations.

Accordingly, Phelan reads the first three chapters of *Persuasion* as deviating from the conventions of narrative comedy by failing to indicate clearly the fate of the heroine, Anne. "If you confidently conclude," he claims, "upon reading the end of Chapter III, that 'he' will be Anne's future husband, you are relying less on the progression of the first three chapters and more on your sense of what Austen's other novels have done, and thus, what her novels are supposed to do" (37). Phelan's analysis emphasizes the specific details of *Persuasion* over the conventional expectations that Rabinowitz shows readers systematically bring to Austen's novels. Both Rabinowitz's and Phelan's focuses are important, I claim, to the aesthetic project of *Mansfield Park*.

Mansfield Park conforms to the conventions of a marriage comedy to raise expectations that its deviations from a marriage comedy can then complicate. By complicating readers' expectations for and judgments of the characters, the novel challenges readers to consider the extent to which their judgments of the characters and of the novel should be grounded in their expectations for a marriage comedy and the extent to which they should be informed by the novel's portrayal of how one's position affects one's judgment. The novel manipulates readers' expectations as well as their distance from the characters in order to clarify the limits and possibilities of both disinterested and aesthetic judgment.

How and why the novel asks readers to sympathize with and judge Fanny (and the other characters) can be clarified by looking at how the novel dramatizes the effects of her social, geographical, and psychological position on her perception and judgment. To show how the novel does so, let me revise the plot summary with which I began. The story of

Fanny's changing positions and perceptions is that of a poor relative's earnest efforts to understand and conform to the peripheral position expected in her munificent new family. Only two members of this family concern themselves with clarifying Fanny's position, one, her aunt Norris, insisting on its lowliness, and the other, her cousin Edmund, asserting Fanny's merit. Fanny's own forbidden and unwanted feelings for her cousin first shape how she conforms to her position. Then, the surprising and unwanted attentions of one of his friends makes clear that Fanny's social inferiority is not as certain as everyone, including Fanny herself, has insisted. Becoming increasingly central at Mansfield Park would make Fanny uncomfortable under any circumstances because of her shyness. Being pursued by Henry, however, is also uncomfortable because Fanny cannot communicate her assessment of his character without revealing her cousins', particularly the then-engaged and now-married Maria's, earlier susceptibility to Henry's charms. Refusing Henry on the basis of what she has seen of him from her peripheral position, Fanny appears stubborn and ungrateful to Sir Thomas, who sends her back to her poor parents' home to learn a lesson. But Fanny understands what Sir Thomas intends as a punishment to be in fact the fulfillment of her long-standing wish to visit to her parents. The move from Mansfield to Portsmouth, however, makes Fanny realize that she is more at home in the former than the latter. Henry's continued attentions impress Fanny in Portsmouth, and she waits anxiously for news of Edmund's engagement to Mary. Instead of this eventuality, she learns of Henry and Maria's adultery. After Henry and Mary show themselves to have the faults Fanny has long seen in them, Fanny is returned to Mansfield Park where she now knows that she belongs. The Bertrams, having lost one daughter and almost a son to the Crawfords, welcome Fanny both as the kind of daughter that Sir Thomas thought he had been raising his own daughters to be and as a suitable wife for Edmund.

Fanny's return to Mansfield Park to become the daughter and wife she had not dared aspire to be concludes the marriage comedy and the story of Fanny's perspective. She ends up with the man she loves, and she as well as those around her have learned her true value. The narrator's impatience in the final chapter, however, "to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest," (312) highlights the fictional qualities of the union between Fanny and Edmund and the static happiness achieved at Mansfield Park. The different narrative voice used in the final chapter imposes new distances among itself, characters, and readers. Instead of continuing to let readers into the minds of the characters, the narrator leaves the final stage of the marriage comedy (Edmund's transfer of affection to Fanny and the happiness of each upon learning of the other's love) for readers to imagine for themselves. The narrator's insistence on the fictional qualities of the novel's conclusion resolves the tension created by the novel's use of the structure of a marriage comedy. The new narrative stance of the final chapter completes the exchange with readers offered by the implied author's presentation of Fanny's perspective within the structure of a marriage comedy by inviting readers to compare the kind of judgments appropriate in and about fiction with the kind appropriate in and about life.

In making explicit its ability to reward the good with happy marriages and punish the bad with loneliness, the novel highlights the difference between fiction and reality. People cannot be placed in static positions that reflect their worth in the same way that *Mansfield Park* finally situates its characters. But the novel's depiction of the limits and possibilities of the kinds of judgments ultimately reached by the characters, and of disinterested judgment in general, undermines the finality of the situation achieved at Mansfield Park. The novel, in other words, has created a fictional world that refuses to conform to the kind of fictional

closure imposed on it.[20] This judgment about the insufficiency of the closure achieved within the fictional world goes hand in hand, however, with a judgment about the sufficiency of the completeness of the reading experience.[21] Questioning the acceptability or finality of Fanny's happiness does not necessitate a negative judgment of the novel or its conclusion. The artificiality of the novel's conclusion can be evaluated instead as a successful ending to the experience that it has offered readers. The final chapter of *Mansfield Park* concludes the novel's two stories by pointing out the limitations of fiction, on the one hand, and its potential to affect how real people live, on the other, by showing them, for example, a set of different but related influences on judgments in and of fiction as well as on judgments in and of life.

Mansfield Park thus tells a story about Fanny's perspective within the structure of a marriage comedy in a manner that asks readers to consider and compare the grounds of judgments in and about fiction and life. Within the fictional world, Fanny's observations and judgments are conditioned by her ideas of social distance. The narrative, in turn, places different kinds of distances between readers and characters. The story of Fanny's perspective lets readers into her mind. This proximity, however, is complicated by the difference between how Fanny perceives the world and what the marriage comedy promises for her. The narrative positions readers in relation to Fanny so that their judgments of her are complicated in ways not dissimilar to how her judgments are complicated within the fictional world. Both sets of judgments are dependent on the position of the judge and the kind of distance thought to obtain between judge and judged.

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[20] This claim relates to Miller's work (*Narrative and its Discontents*) on problems of closure in general, the "unnarratable" elements of *Mansfield Park*, and its final imposition of closure. I will return to this issue when I deal with the conclusion of the novel in Chapter Seven.
[21] See Phelan for the distinction between closure, the narrative's end, and completion, the conclusion of the reader's judgments about the narrative (*Experiencing Fiction* 20-21, 95 and passim).

IV. The Opening of the Novel: Fanny's Setting

I have characterized *Mansfield Park* as a marriage comedy that complicates the expectations it raises by focusing primarily not on how Fanny will happily marry, but instead on how her position affects her judgment. For the sake of simplicity, I will henceforward refer to the novel as having two plots, a marriage plot and a position plot. The opening of the novel introduces both plots together.

The opening sentences of the novel describe the very different marriages of the three Ward sisters: Lady Bertram's "elevation," Mrs. Norris's finding herself finally "obliged to be attached to the Rev. Mr. Norris, a friend of her brother-in-law, with scarcely any private fortune," and Mrs. Price's "untoward choice" of "a lieutenant of marines, without education, fortune, or connexions" (5). This description not only introduces marriage as a socio-economic matter of the utmost importance, but also sets the stage for Fanny's move from her poor home to Mansfield Park. As I mentioned above, this introduction characterizes Fanny as a Cinderella-type heroine.[22] The usual obstacle faced by such a heroine is her devaluation by the other characters. Once her true value is recognized by the rest of the cast in the fictional world, her marriage can take place. *Mansfield Park*'s happy ending does depend on a change in the way other characters, especially Sir Thomas and Edmund, see Fanny. Fanny's eventual marriage also depends, however, on a change in the way she thinks of herself. Her low self-esteem is as much of an obstacle to her eventual marriage as is the low opinion of her worth that the others have.

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[22] Simpson identifies the Cinderella elements in the opening paragraph's description of Lady Bertram, elements which, she claims, Austen introduces "only to temper them with realism and point to the fallacies of the expectations they set up" (26).

The early part of the novel, however, does not primarily develop either a tension about how the Bertrams might come to think differently about Fanny or a tension about how Fanny might come to think differently about herself. What, then, does the early part of the novel do? The opening chapters of the novel establish the ambiguity and fluidity of different sets of values within the fictional world. They also depict how the different characters talk about and apply these values, that is, how they make different kinds of judgments. The novel's characters represent a range of social and ethical positions, and a range of attitudes towards what type of interests may be properly pursued. The novel's early chapters display how superficially many of its characters hold values, as well as the kinds of superficial agreements this attitude towards values allows. A change in the way the characters relate to and share values is thus as central to the novel as the change in how the other characters value Fanny suggested by the novel's marriage plot, and the change in how Fanny values herself suggested by the novel's position plot.[23]

The ambiguity and fluidity of values at Mansfield Park contribute to Fanny's overly severe understanding of the lowliness of her position there. Though Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris agree that bringing Fanny to Mansfield Park is tantamount to committing themselves to securing for her "'the provision of a gentlewoman'" (8), they also agree on the difficulty of establishing "'the distinction proper to be made between the girls as they grow up.'" Sir Thomas worries about "'how to preserve in the minds of [his] *daughters* the consciousness of

[23] M. Clark distinguishes five common "hypotheses" (events that upset a novel's early equilibrium and thus constitute its beginning): Arrival, Departure, Meeting, Need, and Birth (49). Fanny's Arrival at Mansfield Park temporarily upsets two equilibriums: the normal routine of Mansfield Park is affected in a minor way by her addition, while Fanny's psychological equilibrium is deeply affected by her move. Fanny's presence at Mansfield Park is, however, accepted by both her and the others by the end of the third chapter. Only the discrepancy between how the various characters relate to the values espoused at Mansfield Park remains a problem, a problem addressed differently, and largely indirectly, by each of the novel's plots until it becomes central to the resolution of both at the end of the novel.

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*;'" he insists that "'they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations will always be different'" (10); and he leaves the actual establishment and maintenance of this distinction entirely up to Mrs. Norris.[24]

While Sir Thomas's formulation of the proper distinction to be made between Fanny and the Miss Bertrams problematically describes a difference that is at once meaningful and insignificant, Mrs. Norris's enforcement of the distinction is less ambiguous, but no less problematic. She lacks Sir Thomas's theoretical subtlety and concerns herself only with the first and last parts of his distinction: that his daughters think highly of themselves and that Fanny remembers that she does not have the same value as her cousins. Fanny thus learns to think of her position as less valued than Sir Thomas intends it to be. Her timid character, furthermore, inclines her to belittle herself and to fear being presumptuous above all.

Readers, by contrast, understand that Sir Thomas's intentions in bringing Fanny to Mansfield Park were not to make her into the near-servant that she becomes under Mrs. Norris's stern watch. Though Mrs. Norris and the Miss Bertrams would surely resent any claims Fanny made for herself, she would be justified even within the fictional world for asserting more importance than they give her. The marriage plot's promise of Fanny's elevation, moreover, encourages readers to think of her position as more fluid than she does. The combination of Fanny's low and readers' high expectations for her make it easy for readers to forget that, though Fanny might reasonably think more highly of herself than she does, she has no reason to think that a marriage to one of her cousins is possible.

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[24] See Cleere for a socio-economic reading of the establishment and maintenance of this distinction.

V. Fanny's Distance from her Cousins

Mansfield Park's two plots each encourage readers to take different kinds of interest in the characters, to regard them from different distances. On the one hand, the marriage plot suggests idealized characters who clearly differ from real people and who should thus be judged by different standards. The difference between idealized characters and real people emphasizes the distance between fictional and real worlds. The position plot, on the other hand, invites readers into the characters' minds, presents the characters as more realistic than two-dimensional idealizations, and obscures the difference between fictional and real worlds. While idealized characters can be judged against ideals, the standards for judging realistic characters are less straightforward; they can be judged according to their own standards, the standards of the world in which they are found, or readers' personal standards. Novels such as *Mansfield Park* require readers to keep all three sets of standards in mind as they form judgments.

The expectations encouraged by the marriage plot and the focus of the position plot thus challenge the grounds of readers' judgments of the characters, particularly Fanny. How should the aesthetic distance separating readers from Fanny inform and affect their judgments of her? The narrative's portrayal of Fanny's judgment, moreover, emphasizes her difficulties in understanding the kind of distance that obtains between her and her cousins. Fanny regards her cousins from a problematic distance. In her struggles to occupy her lowly position in the household, Fanny observes her cousins almost as if she and they do not share a world and affect one another. From this distance, Fanny seems to take pleasure in observing them, a pleasure that is more like the aesthetic pleasure of reading a book than the interested, personal pleasure of people sharing a world. The narrative's depiction of how Fanny misplaces aesthetic distance calls attention to the challenge it offers readers to clarify

both the aesthetic distance between themselves and Fanny and the relationship between judging real and represented worlds.

In addition to indicating the problematic nature of how the Bertrams and Mrs. Norris conceive of Fanny's position at Mansfield Park, the narrative portrays the problems with Fanny's attempts to occupy this position and how they affect her perception and judgment of the world of Mansfield Park. By the novel's second chapter, Fanny is "fixed at Mansfield Park" and readers learn that she grows up there "not unhappily" (17). When Fanny's cousins enter society and start attending balls, Lady Bertram, who is too lazy to accompany them, relies on Fanny in their absences. Fanny attends happily to Lady Bertram, and welcomes the unusual tranquility of being alone with her aunt rather than feeling any wish to go out herself. Not desiring to enter the world of her cousins, however, does not mean that Fanny does not enjoy hearing about it. After describing Fanny's pleasure in her quiet evenings with Lady Bertram, the narrator details how she

> loved to hear an account of [her cousins' gaieties], especially of the balls, and whom Edmund had danced with; but thought too lowly of her own situation to imagine she should ever be admitted to the same, and listened, therefore, without an idea of any nearer concern in them. (27)

The narrator's description subtly contrasts Fanny's particular interest in Edmund with her detachment from the social world he inhabits. The strangeness hinted at here of Fanny's apparently innocent pleasure in hearing about her cousins' experiences at balls becomes clearer when compared to the need Fanny feels, later in the novel, to share stories of her own experience at a ball. But before introducing the later occasion, I will examine how the narrator suggests the attitudes and assumptions behind Fanny's pleasure, a pleasure without concern, in hearing her cousins' accounts.

The narrator first indicates the part of her cousins' stories most enjoyable to Fanny, and then her understanding of her relationship to the world they depict. The narrator's use of "but" to connect these ideas suggests that Fanny's enjoyment will be negatively affected by her understanding of her situation; the consequence, however, of her belief that she will never attend a ball, the narrator next specifies, is a lack of "nearer concern" in her cousins' accounts that seems to coexist with her enjoyment of hearing them. How can Fanny's enjoyment of her cousins' accounts, her belief that they are about an inaccessible world, and her lack of nearer concern or strategic interest in them, be compatible? The narrator's description suggests, I submit, that Fanny's enjoyment of her cousins' accounts rests problematically both on her personal interest in them, and on an aesthetisized distance from them, since distance and disinterestedness seemingly provide the conditions that permit Fanny's particular enjoyment of their stories.

The detail about Fanny's particular interest in Edmund's dancing partners indicates, however, that her enjoyment of her cousins' accounts is based on her personal relationship to her cousins, rather than on the satisfaction of a desire to hear about balls generally or on any quality of the accounts themselves. Fanny takes pleasure in hearing about the gaieties of people she knows and cares about, and more pleasure in hearing about those of the person about whom she cares the most. If Fanny were not listening to her cousins as someone who cares about what happens to them, she would not take more interest in one or another of them. Readers may or may not already suspect that Fanny has developed the romantic feelings for Edmund that will become explicit only when Mary Crawford arrives at the end of the same chapter in which Fanny listens to her cousins' accounts. Whether Fanny's feelings for Edmund at this moment are purely cousinly, however, affects only the kind of personal concern Fanny might have in hearing about his dance partners, not the personal

quality of her concern. Fanny's special pleasure in hearing about Edmund has to do with her affection for him, regardless of its type or extent. This pleasure is based on the assumption that Fanny and Edmund share a world and affect one another.

The reminder of Fanny's social distance from Edmund that immediately follows the detail about her interest in his dancing partners shifts from characterizing her cousins' accounts as enjoyable stories of people Fanny cares about to characterizing them as accounts of inaccessible gaieties. Pleasure is not the only way someone in Fanny's position might respond to hearing about a happy world from which she is excluded. The understanding that her position prevents her from joining her cousins would, for a different type of character, also prevent her from enjoying accounts of their gaieties. Not only does Fanny have no jealousy of her cousins or wish to be included, her understanding of her exclusion, the narrator specifies, prevents her from listening with "an idea of any nearer concern" in her cousins' accounts.[25]

What type of "nearer concern" is the narrator describing and how does it compare with Fanny's affectionate enjoyment of the specifics about Edmund's dance-partners? If she thought she might one day attend a ball, Fanny might listen to her cousins in order to gather information and prepare herself for the anticipated experiences. She might listen, in other words, with personal and practical interest. She might even imagine how she would behave in the situations described by her cousins. This kind of imaginative act would be pleasant for someone anticipating actual participation in the events described, for example, if the audience were a younger Bertram sister, not yet old enough to attend balls. It would not be

[25] In general, the Cinderella theme plays with the relationship between the heroine's humility and her desires for inclusion and betterment. Huang discusses the connection between virtue and social mobility in various Cinderella stories. Garson analyses the discourse of natural taste in similar terms, characterizing Fanny as a natural aristocrat (16), and likening her not only to Cinderella, but also a swan in the midst of ugly ducklings (126), and a delicate princess like that bothered by the pea (128).

so pleasant for someone who wanted to, but could not, attend balls, for example, a different kind of person in Fanny's position. Fanny's unassuming nature and understanding of her situation seemingly prevents her from wanting to belong to the world of her cousins. This lack of nearer concern, this type of un-appetitive and unselfish disinterested attitude does not, however, sit comfortably with the personal interest that Fanny has in her cousins as real people with whom she shares a world.

Fanny's detachment rests on different assumptions than the pleasure with which she listened to details about Edmund. The detachment involves a belief in an insurmountable distance between the world depicted and Fanny's world, a distance that automatically relieves her, the listener, from practical interest in the account. The pleasure, in contrast, rests on a belief that the listener inhabits the same world that is depicted, and therefore has practical interest in this world that can figure more or less in how she listens. Fanny responds to her cousins' accounts, in other words, both as if she shares their world and as if she does not. On the one hand, she relates to her cousins with an unselfish, but personal and emotional, interest that appears entirely appropriate among cousins. On the other, she listens to their accounts as if to stories of characters in a fictional world. Placing this distance between herself and her cousins provides the illusion that she simply cannot have the kind of practical or selfish interests in them that she wants to avoid.

Although one can certainly take various attitudes towards accounts of real, fictional, and historical worlds, historical and fictional worlds do not threaten to interfere in one's day-to-day life in the same way that parts of one's real world can. Regardless of how impossible it is for Fanny to imagine going to a ball with her cousins, that she might do so is possible in a way that her entering one of Cowper's poems or Lord Macartney's journals is not. Perhaps more importantly, the events befalling her cousins at balls can affect Fanny in ways that what

happens to her favorite fictional and historical personages cannot, regardless of how strongly she feels for the latter.[26] Some of my central questions surround the construction and consequences of this difference, and one of my central contentions is that this difference is a subject about which *Mansfield Park* has much to say.

Fanny listens to accounts of her cousins' gaieties almost as if listening to accounts of a fictional or historical world unquestionably distinct from her own. This attitude stems from her desire to conform to expectations and protect herself from wanting anything beyond what her situation merits. Placing this kind of distance between herself and her cousins makes wanting to enter their world seem as ridiculous as trying to intervene in the action of a play. Fanny's particular interest in Edmund, however, indicates the impossibility of freeing herself from the kind of nearer concern in her cousins that living in the same world as them makes possible and necessary. While putting the world of her cousins at an aesthetic remove helps Fanny accept the limitations of her situation, it also makes her susceptible to mistakes of judgment and complicates how she interacts with others. Aesthetisizing the distance between herself and her cousins removes Fanny from the action of the novel differently than does her inferior position in the household. The narrative raises the question of whether Fanny's inaction is due to her dependent position and meek nature or another kind of imposed distance between herself and the world in which she actually lives. The novel also, I claim, invites readers to explore how and why they may or may not be sympathetic to Fanny's attempts to conform to her position and employ good judgment from that position.

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[26] Stolnitz ("On the Origins") locates the origin of aesthetic disinterestedness in eighteenth-century British thought and traces its development from an ethical idea to a way of perceiving. Especially pertinent here is Stolnitz's attention to the different kinds of interest to which disinterestedness is opposed. See also Ortega y Gasset's image of four people at a deathbed (wife, doctor, reporter, painter) and the different kinds of interest each takes in the scene (14-19). I will have more to say about disinterestedness and distance in what follows, especially in Chapters Two and Six.

In the passage above, Fanny easily takes pleasure in hearing about Edmund enjoying himself at balls. The narrator introduces her particular interest in him subtly, by embedding it in a description of her comfortable position in the Bertram household as attendant to Lady Bertram and observer of, rather than participant in, the family activities. When the Crawford's acquaintance brings society to the Park, Fanny does not find it so easy to witness Edmund's growing affection for Mary. The narrator, accordingly, makes her discomfort slightly more explicit. After emphasizing Edmund's influence on Fanny, the narrator ironically understates the challenge Edmund's feelings for Mary pose to Fanny:

> Having formed her mind and gained her affections, he had a good chance of her thinking like him; though at this period, and on this subject, there began now to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration of Miss Crawford, which might lead him where Fanny could not follow. (47)

Even if Fanny's judgment of Mary agreed as usual with Edmund's, her admiration of a potential match for him would be of a different nature than his own. Fanny's inability to follow Edmund in his admiration of Mary, however, has as much to do, the narrator suggests, with Fanny's feelings for Edmund as with their different evaluations of Mary. Even in his admiration, Edmund does not find Mary flawless, and he values discussing his qualms with Fanny. As the novel progresses, Fanny becomes a more and more important (and less and less comfortable) observer of Edmund and Mary's relationship. In this role as observer and confidant Fanny is confronted with her feelings for Edmund, if only insofar as she must suppress her jealousy of Mary. Her ability to feel the right kind of interest in Edmund's romance is further tested as she and Edmund are shown very different views of Mary as the novel continues.

Fanny's understanding of her situation is also challenged when, after a number of important events to which I will return, Henry Crawford turns his attentions to Fanny. Sir Thomas decides to hold a ball at Mansfield Park to encourage Henry and gratify the wishes of Fanny's brother, who is visiting. Though Fanny cannot but feel nervous in her central position at the ball, she is able to enjoy some of the excitement such an event usually produces.

Fanny's experience of the kind of social pleasure she formerly considered inaccessible to her changes the way she evaluates such pleasures. When, seeing her before the ball, Edmund engages Fanny for two dances, "she had hardly ever been in a state so nearly approaching high spirits in her life. Her cousins' former gaiety on the day of a ball was no longer surprizing to her; she felt it to be indeed very charming" (187). This description of Fanny's revised perspective reveals that while Fanny could, as discussed above, enjoy accounts of her cousins' experiences at balls after the fact, she did not understand their joyful anticipation of such events. Fanny could enjoy her cousins' accounts without connecting them to their anticipation of balls only by listening to these accounts as if they were entertaining pieces of fiction. If she considered their accounts descriptions of a real world, she should either understand their excitement before a ball or have decided based on their accounts that balls do not merit anticipation, in which case, hearing about them should not be enjoyable either.[27] The fact that she enjoys hearing about her cousins' experiences at balls, but does not understand her cousins' anticipation of them until she experiences such anticipation herself, exposes Fanny's inconsistent emotional detachment from both their stories and their world.

[27] Consider also the different ways Sir Thomas and Henry listen to William's well-told stories of his travels and experiences in the navy.

The contrast between Fanny's complicated pleasure in hearing accounts of her cousins' attendance at balls and her own desire to discuss the ball she opens at Mansfield Park[28] reinforces one's impression of the strangeness of her response to those stories. Fanny's feeling that "she must talk to somebody of the ball" (193) cannot be satisfied the next day because Lady Bertram does not remember enough of the event's details. Two days after the ball, however, Fanny has

> the opportunity of talking over [the] night with Mrs. Grant and Miss Crawford, in a very handsome style, with all the heightenings of imagination and all the laughs of playfulness which are so essential to the shade of a departed ball. (194)

Readers are given more information about the qualities and effects of this interactive discussion than they were about the Bertrams' accounts of balls that Fanny used to enjoy hearing. The narrator details that, after talking about the ball with Mrs. Grant and Mary, Fanny "could…bring her mind without much effort into its everyday state, and easily conform to the tranquillity of the present quiet week" (194). In the past, Fanny took pleasure in hearing about an aesthetisized social world she believed inaccessible to her. She listened to accounts of this world after evenings alone with Lady Bertram, the "tranquillity" of which was characterized as "unspeakably welcome" (27) to the easily upset Fanny. Now, after undeniably entering that social world by opening a ball, the imaginative and playful rehashing of the experience helps Fanny make the transition from the unusual excitement of the ball to the calm of her everyday life. But what distance does the discussion of the ball allow Fanny to place between her normal life and the unprecedented experience? Does Fanny's participation in the ball convince her that she is an actor in the world she is used to contemplating from a distance? Or, does Fanny's discussion of the ball place it at an

[28] There is an impromptu ball in Volume One that Fanny attends, but the ball she opens is the first at which she is important.

aesthetisized distance similar to that she believes exists between her cousins' lives and her own, thus serving instead to fortify her problematic understanding of her situation and her potential?

Chapter Two: *Mansfield Park*'s Heroine: Creating and Upsetting Expectations

I. The Novel's Challenging Heroine and her Problematic Rivalry

In Chapter One, I argued that the plot of *Mansfield Park* follows, yet complicates, the genre of marriage comedy in order to challenge readers to consider the grounds of their judgments of the characters and the novel. Central to this challenge is the novel's portrayal of Fanny. Fanny falls short of the standards both of a Cinderella-type heroine and of the ideal self she strives to be. Chapter One detailed how Fanny's struggles to conform to her position in the Bertram household not only conflict with readers' expectations for her happy marriage, but also lead her to impose an untenable, aesthetisized distance between herself and her cousins. Although Fanny is the primary focalizer of the novel, her position as peripheral observer situates readers at a critical distance from both the Bertrams and Fanny herself. While the narrator shows the Bertrams in a harsher light than that in which Fanny is willing to see them, the narrator's depiction of how Fanny observes the Bertrams shows her flaws in a light that prevents some readers from liking her enough to hope for her happy marriage.

In this chapter, I will develop my discussion of the challenge created by the novel's sympathetic yet critical treatment of Fanny by examining the establishment of the love triangle among Fanny, Edmund, and Mary. I argue that, although the narrative clearly prefers Fanny to Mary, Fanny's perception and judgment are not impeccable. The novel thus challenges readers to consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of Fanny and Mary as well as to distinguish between their different kinds of mistakes of judgment and perception. In order to hope for Fanny's happy marriage to Edmund, readers must be more sympathetic to her (and his) mistakes of perception and judgment than they are to those of Mary (and of

the other characters). But, as I will show below in an analysis of three examples, the narrative does not permit any uncritical preferences and sympathies.

Before turning to these examples, however, I want to review briefly how and why readers and critics respond so differently and vehemently to Fanny. In Chapter One, I discussed this issue in terms of *Mansfield Park*'s plot structure. Here, I will focus on Fanny as a heroine, doing so specifically in terms of the issues of aesthetic distance developed by Hans Robert Jauss. In "Levels of Identification of Hero and Audience," he lays out an aesthetics of reception meant to complement the aesthetics of presentation proposed by Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*. Jauss's aesthetics of reception addresses readers' identification with literary characters in terms of aesthetic distance and disinterestedness. For Jauss, distance and identification are inextricably, but not uniformly, related to each other in aesthetic reception. Because the aesthetic object is imaginary, Jauss argues, one's experience of it is fundamentally ambiguous. Aesthetic experience can be positive or negative. That is, it can involve either the enlightenment celebrated by Aristotelians or the unthinking enjoyment of questionable sensual pleasures feared by Platonists. Jauss's descriptions of this ambiguity at different levels of reception help clarify my larger, Bakhtin-inspired claim about *Mansfield Park* as an exercise in judgment, as an invitation to readers to make art and life answerable to each other.

According to Jauss, distance or disinterestedness is the ontological condition of relating to the aesthetic object, which is necessarily imaginary, and thus at the root of the ambiguity of aesthetic experience. The ambiguity of this experience expresses itself specifically via the divergent potentialities for which one might be freed, that is, via what one does in and with the freedom from practical concerns that aesthetic disinterestedness affords. As Jauss says: "aesthetic enjoyment is always a liberation *from* something as well as a

liberation *for* something" (286). Liberation from one's personal interests and quotidian concerns, i.e., disinterestedness, can be for the sake either of a critical perspective on the world or an absorption in a pleasurable distraction. In other words, the positive potential of aesthetic experience happens when a reader makes the transition from aesthetic to moral judgment, that is, when a pre-reflective or unreflective reader becomes a self-reflective reader who relates in a critical way her identification with a fictional hero to her own life; the negative potential results when this transition does not occur.[1]

This description of the positive and negative potential of aesthetic experience aligns with what I have been calling *Mansfield Park*'s challenge to readers, and accordingly I want to utilize Jauss's analysis of modes of readers' identifications with different types of fictional heroes to develop my argument. More specifically, with the help of his analysis, I want to advance my discussion from Chapter One about the various ways in which Fanny may or may not represent an ideal by connecting it to questions of aesthetic distance and disinterestedness, for, as the examples I analyze below will show, these terms are also important within the fictional world. Jauss, in short, provides me with a convenient way to link directly the question about the type of heroine which Fanny is with the question of how readers might identify with her. Is she admirable or sympathetic? Likable or unlikable? Right or wrong?

As I address these questions, and therewith explicate further the aesthetic challenge at the heart of *Mansfield Park*, three of Jauss's five modalities of identification are particularly relevant: admiring, sympathetic, and ironic. Admiring and ironic modes of identification emphasize aesthetic distance, whereas the sympathetic mode usually associated with realism

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[1] Jauss clarifies these positive and negative possibilities for five distinct modalities of identification. Here, I emphasize the aspects most important to the modalities most pertinent to readers of *Mansfield Park*.

stresses overcoming aesthetic distance to put oneself in the hero's position. Generally speaking, Fanny is taken by some critics as a moral ideal; by others as a realistically fallible heroine worthy of sympathy; and by a third group as ironic in one way or another. These modes obviously can overlap in multiple ways, and their possible permutations, too, are a subject of critical disagreement. What kinds of aesthetic distance and disinterestedness do these various critical stances invoke?

With this question in mind, let me briefly review the literature. Many critics of *Mansfield Park* use the terms "admiration," "sympathy," "irony," "pity," and "identification" to discuss how readers do and should relate to Fanny. While some define these terms clearly, others use them loosely. My goal here is not to detail how different critics use these slippery terms in the contexts of their own arguments, but rather to show how different critics use these terms to describe issues of aesthetic distance.

For Marilyn Butler, Fanny is the aesthetic problem with *Mansfield Park*. "Fanny's real task," she claims, "is to excite emulation rather than sympathy – and for this reason the modern reader is justified in rejecting her as the fallible individual she looks like at first sight" (250). Butler here employs ideas of emulation and sympathy to argue that Austen's didactic goals and conservative message got the better of her aesthetic goals of representing society and consciousness in *Mansfield Park*. On this reading, Fanny fails as an ideal to be emulated specifically because she is presented realistically as a fallible individual without becoming, especially for the modern reader, sympathetic as a fallible individual. Interestingly, Butler finds Fanny successful in the early parts of the novel, where, as an observer, she functions to "cast the reader as a moral arbiter" (228). According to Butler, this success in the first part of the novel, where readers are asked to identify with her role rather than with her per se, is forfeited in the second part, when she becomes more central to the narrative

action. (I will return below to aesthetic distance and Fanny's role as an observer.) Butler's analysis thus suggests that Fanny is most successful aesthetically when readers identify with her role while distanced ironically (and, possibly, with a sense of superiority) from her personally and least successful aesthetically when readers are distanced from her as an admirable example while simultaneously being asked to sympathize with her.

In *Jane Austen and the Art of Clarity*, Roger Gard links the proper judgment of Fanny to sympathy rather than identification. Austen's masterful use of free indirect speech, according to Gard, lets readers into Fanny's thoughts while at the same time maintaining a distance from them to allow for reflection (129). So, despite their terminological differences, Gard and Butler agree that readers are meant to put themselves in Fanny's position, not in order to feel how she feels, but rather in order to sympathize with her struggles. But, whereas Butler insists that Fanny fails because Austen's ideological goals trump her artistic ones, Gard contends that Fanny's success as a character requires sacrifices that make *Mansfield Park*'s shortcomings "not so much bad art as art limited by its ambitions" (141).

Both Howard Babb and Joseph Duffy regard Fanny as an infallible moral ideal. But unlike Babb, who finds her unsuccessful,[2] Duffy, who evaluates *Mansfield Park* as a novel negatively,[3] judges her successful as a heroine to be admired rather than liked.[4] Fleishman, by contrast, finds Fanny's unlikeability problematic and the novel itself successful, claiming that readers are meant to sympathize with the weak and flawed Fanny as they would with a child

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[2] Tony Tanner and Kingsley Amis both also see Fanny as unsuccessfully presented as infallible (though the former judges *Mansfield Park* to be great and the latter finds the novel defective by aesthetic standards (141)). Burdan disagrees, arguing that the novel is Austen's most ironic, especially towards Fanny who is shown to be self-deceived.

[3] Duffy's reason for this negative evaluation is the novel's didacticism. In my opinion, he relies on an overly-narrow conception of realism that I believe cannot do justice to *Mansfield Park*.

[4] This characterization fits with Jauss's description of admiring identification, and serves as a valuable reminder that likability is not necessarily an important quality for a heroine.

(44). Thomas Edwards, proposing yet another judgment of the heroine, deems Fanny both admirable and imperfect, a combination that he considers successful in part because of the distancing irony with which Fanny is treated.

Critics, one sees, vary widely regarding what the proper distance between readers and Fanny is as well as whether that distance is achieved. The reason for that variance, I suggest, lies in the novel's deliberate complications of this distance. In the analyses of the three instances that follow, therefore, I focus on how *Mansfield Park* positions readers in relation to its characters and how ideas of distance and interest are important to this positioning. By positioning readers at different, and even conflicting, distances from Fanny, the novel encourages what Jauss defines as ironic identification. For Jauss, just as the possible remoteness of admiring identification leads naturally to sympathetic identification, the unreflective pleasure that can result from sympathetic identification leads naturally to the need for irony to disrupt this possibility and encourage reflection on the aesthetic experience. In the chapters that follow I will have more to say about Austen's irony. For now, Jauss's broad characterization of the reflective dimension in ironic identification allows me to clarify my argument about how *Mansfield Park*'s positioning of Fanny challenges readers to reflect on their aesthetic experiences and on aesthetic experience as such.

II. Fanny vs. Mary

The Crawfords do not arrive at Mansfield Park until the novel's fourth chapter. Fanny's affection for Edmund has been established, but the nature of these feelings has not been made explicit to readers or to Fanny herself. Readers expecting her to marry one of her cousins easily infer that her feelings are romantic, but the narrative describes them as

familial. Fanny, won over by Edmund's kindness and his role in her education,[5] "loved him better than any body in the world except [her brother] William; her heart was divided between the two" (18).[6] Fanny certainly has no aspirations to marry up, and it is not clear at this point whether her feelings for Edmund are romantic at all.

The jealousy Fanny feels when confronted by Edmund's obvious attraction to Mary Crawford, however, suggests that her feelings for Edmund are more than familial, feelings that she struggles not to acknowledge. The merely superficial agreement of Edmund's and Fanny's initial judgments of Mary betrays the influences of their respective emotional involvements. Edmund's affection for Mary encourages him to minimize her faults, while Fanny's affection for Edmund makes her especially quick to perceive Mary's unworthiness and reticent in expressing this judgment. The novel will eventually prove Edmund's judgment to have been both interested and inaccurate, and Fanny's to have been accurate despite being interested.

Although Edmund admits Mary's indecorousness and Fanny acknowledges her attractiveness, they do not reach the agreement about Mary that Edmund insists they do when he concludes an early conversation about Mary by saying: "'She is perfectly feminine, except in the instances we have been speaking of. *There* she cannot be justified. I am glad you

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[5] "Kept back as she was by every body else, his single support could not bring her forward, but his attentions were otherwise of the highest importance in assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures. 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" (18). Gardiner argues that Fanny uses the education she receives from Edmund to achieve autonomy and critical authority. Gardiner's focus on Austen's rejection and subversion of the eighteenth century's gendered standards of critical authority, however, causes her to simplify the complexity of *Mansfield Park*'s depiction of judgment and education.

[6] See Brissenden and M. Anderson for readings of Fanny's love for William as incestuous. The latter argues that Fanny's love for William is sublimated as love for Edmund (171).

saw it all as I did'" (47). But the conversation, particularly Fanny's quickly softened charge of ungratefulness, betrays the difference between how she and Edmund regard Mary. Fanny perceives her faults to be of a greater seriousness than does Edmund, and while he is quick to excuse them, her caution in asserting them does not mean that she excuses them as easily.

The narrator explains this caution in a way that raises suspicions about the nature of Fanny's feelings for Edmund. Though she "could not wonder" at Edmund's desire to pass as much time with Mary as he does, she is

> a little surprised that he could spend so many hours with Miss Crawford, and not see more of the sort of fault which he had already observed, and of which *she* was almost always reminded by a something of the same nature whenever she was in her company; but so it was. Edmund was fond of speaking to her of Miss Crawford, but he seemed to think it enough that the Admiral had since been spared; and she scrupled to point out her own remarks to him, lest it should appear like ill-nature. (48)

Fanny's hesitation to communicate her judgment of Mary to Edmund betrays her precarious position in relation to the two of them. Her devotion to Edmund legitimately interests her in his romantic prospects. As a cousin and a friend she wants the best for him. Why, then, should expressing her doubts about Mary appear ill-natured? The fear that it would suggests that a less legitimate, more selfish, kind of interest threatens her judgments of Mary: romantic feelings for Edmund. Fanny does not, however, acknowledge either her jealousy of Mary or the feelings that cause it. Fanny's denial of having such feelings thus strengthens readers' suspicions that she does have them.

Fanny's unwillingness to see herself as Mary's rival for Edmund's affection follows from her peripheral position within the fictional world. Though Fanny is the heroine of the novel, the other characters consider her, just as she does herself, a minor player in their

world. Mary, by contrast, is considered by everyone, including herself, to be central to any social circle in which she finds herself.[7] Furthermore, while Mary has the strength, wit and liveliness of a heroine such as Emma Woodhouse, Fanny's weakness together with her timid and unassuming nature make her a heroine who must be liked for other, less exciting qualities, such as the virtue and idealism that she strives for, but does not always reach.

The possibility of matches between the Crawfords and the Bertrams is at the forefront of the characters' as well as of readers' minds. Mary's twenty thousand pounds and ambition to marry well matches up with Tom Bertram's situation, and Maria Bertram's engagement to Mr. Rushworth makes Henry Crawford "in equity the property of Julia, of which Julia was fully aware, and before he had been at Mansfield a week, she was quite ready to be fallen in love with" (33). Henry, however, has no intention of falling in love or marrying. His attitude that "'all is safe with a lady engaged; no harm can be done'" (34), and Maria's complementary belief that "'there could be no harm in her liking an agreeable man'" (33) suggests that much harm will likely come to pass. Henry's presence at Mansfield Park, therefore, immediately promises to create problems between the Bertram sisters as well as between Maria and her fiancé.

Mary's "early presentiment that she *should* like the eldest [Bertram son] best" (35) lines up with Mrs. Grant's even earlier plans for the match.[8] When Tom Bertram leaves for the races, however, Mary is surprised "that, without [Edmund's] being a man of the world or an elder brother, without any of the arts of flattery or the gaieties of small talk, he began to

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[7] Garson characterizes Mary as the heroine of her own drama, and interestingly contrasts her with Fanny in terms of their relative abilities to display their conversely relative inner resources (131 and passim).

[8] Miller focuses on this passage (and its continuation: "She knew it was her way") in his analysis of Mary's language. Mary, he argues convincingly, "disqualifies the indirect discourse practiced on her in what may be the only possible way: by practicing it on herself" (29). The ironic distance with which Mary treats her shortcomings is a "way of staying unknown, impermeable to the categories of right knowledge" (31).

be agreeable to her" (47). Henry and Maria think her ineligibility will prevent their flirtation from becoming a meaningful attachment, while Mary unthinkingly allows herself to become attached to someone whom she does not find eligible. Edmund's obvious interest in Mary confronts Fanny not only with their differing judgments of her, but also with her own jealousy. A timid and weak, yet morally demanding, heroine who refuses to acknowledge her feelings stands opposed to a selfish and ambitious, but lively and charming rival.

In addition to placing Fanny and Mary at opposing points of a love triangle, the narrative explicitly contrasts Fanny and Mary in a way that tests readers' judgments of them. Instead of simply encouraging readers to hope for Fanny and dislike Mary as a threat, the narrative changes the perspective readers have on the two, inviting them to make different (and conflicting) kinds of judgments at different times.[9] Three examples will give a sense of the different ways the narrative positions readers in relation to Fanny and Mary. In the first example, the narrator's representation of Fanny's thoughts as she watches Edmund teach Mary to ride shows Fanny's jealousy and her inability to face her feelings for Edmund. Do these shortcomings preclude sympathy with Fanny? How do Fanny's shortcomings, seen from the inside, compare with those of Mary, seen from Fanny's perspective? The second example, a passage contrasting Fanny and Mary as they share a carriage on the way to

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[9] See Davidson's explanation: "*Mansfield Park* redistributes the psychological traits of the female characters in Austen's earlier novels in surprising new combinations, a practice that has consistently challenged readers' expectations. If Mary Crawford gets the charm and liveliness of Elizabeth Bennet (and is punished for possessing these qualities), Fanny Price, at least in respect of her social class, has as much in common with Lucy Steele as with the reticent heroine of *Sense and Sensibility*" (252). E. Auerbach gives another account of the contrast between Fanny and Mary, arguing that "although Austen presents Fanny Price as the indisupatable heroine of this novel, she goes to great lengths to make Mary Crawford seem a more appealing character in many ways – and one whose voice, at times, sounds remarkably like Austen's" (179). "[T]he narrative voice," she continues "offers readers an alternative combining the best of both women" (183). It is important to note not only the contrast between Mary and Fanny, but also the differences in the way each is presented at different times.

Sotherton, unequivocally prefers Fanny's ability to interest herself in the world around her over Mary's limited ability to attend to that which does not directly concern her. The final example, which takes place at Sotherton, contrasts Fanny's pity for Mary with the disinterested amusement of a hypothetical observer in a way that raises the question of the proper relationship between readers and characters.

III. Jealousy and Standards of Judgment

Readers are asked to judge Fanny by two conflicting sets of standards. On the one hand, they are invited to judge Fanny as the heroine of a marriage comedy. Judging such a heroine involves, in the most general terms, assessing her worthiness of the happy ending promised for her. But, in the more specific terms of *Mansfield Park*, it involves deeming her preferable to or more worthy than her rival. On the other hand, readers are invited to judge Fanny's attempts, first, to conform to her lowly position, and, then, to adjust to the elevation in her status. Judging Fanny's perception and judgment, in contrast to judging her worthiness to marry, demands understanding her perspective within the fictional world. By focusing on how they can hope for Fanny's happy marriage, readers can overlook the parameters within which Fanny perceives and judges. In order to sympathize with Fanny, readers must judge her denial of her feelings for Edmund according to her reasonable conviction that cousins in their situations are forbidden from marrying. Readers who judge her denial of her feelings as hypocritical or prudish on the basis of their (also, of course, reasonable) conviction that she will end up with Edmund are prevented from sympathizing with her and hoping for that marriage. The novel challenges readers to judge Fanny's failure to place the right kind of distance between herself and others, and her inability to recognize the kind of interest involved in her perception of Edmund and Mary, according to what

Fanny knows about her situation rather than according to what readers know about what will happen to her.

The narrative shows readers Fanny's thoughts in different ways at different times. Exposing Fanny's mind to readers has the potential either to collapse or to emphasize the distance between her and readers. Readers might be encouraged to think, feel, and judge along with Fanny; or they might be encouraged to focus instead on how differently from Fanny they think, feel, and judge. In the scene in which Fanny watches Edmund teach Mary to ride, the narrator lets readers into Fanny's mind in a way that exposes both the jealousy that influences her perception and the objective difficulties of her social station. Fanny's judgment of Mary is not disinterested. At the same time, the ambiguities of her situation are emphasized when Edmund invites Mary to use the horse that he has designated for Fanny. Fanny is expected to ride for exercise, but her station precludes her from making any claims on her own behalf. In this situation, she cannot fulfill her role without either failing to meet expectations or acting presumptuously.

As I have mentioned, because Fanny is unable to acknowledge her feelings for Edmund, she is equally unable to acknowledge her conflict with Mary over Edmund. Mary's desire to learn to ride, however, puts her interests into a different, and more direct, conflict with Fanny's. Mary's use of the horse that Edmund procured for Fanny comprises "the first actual pain which Miss Crawford occasioned her" (48). The narrator describes Mary's offence in terms that highlight her best and worst attributes. She is "active and fearless," capable of enjoying "the pure genuine pleasure of the exercise" (48). The purity of this enjoyment is, however, mixed with the less pure enjoyment of Edmund's attentions and the still less pure enjoyment of her "conviction of very much surpassing her sex in general by her early progress" (48). While Mary's vitality allows her an innocent enjoyment of exercise

that Fanny's poor constitution prevents, Fanny's principles prevent her from the type of selfishness that allows Mary to indulge in the less innocent pleasures of reckless flirtation and self-congratulation at the expense of other people.[10]

The narrator exposes how Fanny's inability or unwillingness to acknowledge feelings and interests that she considers impossible makes these interests more, rather than less, likely to influence her perception and judgment. Not acknowledging her feelings for Edmund or her jealousy of Mary does not necessarily make Fanny's judgments wrong, but it does mean that her judgments are not disinterested. When Fanny goes outside to look for Edmund and the horse for which she has been waiting she walks until she can "look down the park, and command a view of the parsonage and all its demesnes, gently rising beyond the village road" (49). From this distance she sees Edmund and Mary "both on horseback, riding side by side" (49), attended by the Grants, Henry, and a few grooms.[11] From her distance, Fanny cannot make out the details of the scene, but "a happy party it appeared to her, all interested in one object" (49). Fanny's exclusion from the group, and particularly from Edmund's attention, contributes to her perception that Mary's centrality goes hand in hand with a happiness that she cannot share. Though Fanny is not close enough to the party in the meadow to see the expressions on their faces, "the sound of merriment ascended even to her" (49), proving their cheerfulness and precipitating her own pain. "It was a sound," the narrator specifies, "which did not make *her* cheerful; she wondered that Edmund should forget her, and felt a pang. She could not turn her eyes from the meadow, she could not help watching all that passed" (49). Fanny cannot ignore the scene that causes her pain; instead,

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[10] K. Anderson develops this contrast in terms of feminine ideals of strength and weakness.
[11] Valihora reads Fanny as a picturesque tourist, arguing that in this scene, Fanny is situated in the foreground of the picturesque view she observes and is interested and absorbed in it rather than separated from it by the kind of distance that would afford disinterestedness (279-80).

she interprets what she sees in ways that both emphasize her pain and obscure its effect on her perception.

As Fanny watches Edmund and Mary, she imagines, the narrator says, an intimacy that her physical distance from the scene prevents her from actually seeing and that she fears in a way she is unable to acknowledge. She watches Edmund "evidently directing [Mary's] management of the bridle, he had hold of her hand; she saw it, or the imagination supplied what the eye could not reach" (49). Fanny's imagination crosses the distance that her eye cannot span. This imaginative seeing also makes use of information that Fanny will not consciously consider: her jealousy.

In Chapter One, I discussed the imaginative retelling that is central to Fanny's ability to make the transition from the unusual excitement of opening a ball to the tranquility of her everyday life. This imaginative act seems to place a distance between Fanny and her own experiences that resembles the distance she had earlier placed between herself and the world of her cousins as she listened to their stories about attending balls. In talking about the ball, however, Fanny uses her imagination to recast her own real experience as distant and foreign, while in listening to her cousins' stories, the aesthetisized distance she places between herself and them prevents her from being able to imagine what it would be like to be in their position. In one case an imaginative retelling enables an aesthetisized distance from a real experience, while in the other listening from an enforced aesthetisized distance prevents the imaginative act that would allow the listener to put herself into the position about which she hears. The imaginative seeing precipitated by Fanny's jealousy of Mary, by contrast, nullifies the physical distance that prevents her from actually seeing the intimacy between Edmund and Mary that she fears.

Jealousy is not generally an appealing trait. Fanny's jealousy is additionally offensive because it affects her judgment; it interferes with the ideal she sets for herself; and, it displays her inability to be honest with herself about her feelings. The narrator's exposure of these shortcomings is tempered, however, by indications of the real difficulties of Fanny's situation.[12] Edmund himself points out the difference between Mary's and Fanny's claims on the mare, and, in the same breath, proves himself guilty of the very lack of consideration for Fanny of which he insists Mary is free. The latter longs to take the mare for a whole morning and Edmund arranges this with Fanny, maintaining that "'any morning will do for this. She would be extremely sorry to interfere with you. It would be very wrong if she did. –*She* rides only for pleasure, *you* for health'" (50-1). Fanny assures Edmund that neither her health nor her inclination runs contrary to Mary's desires, saying "'I have been out very often lately, and would rather stay at home. You know I am strong enough now to walk very well'" (51). Fanny does not assert her health as more important than Mary's pleasure, but when Edmund also fails to consider the claims of her health and indulges Mary's wishes to ride four days in a row, the effect on Fanny's emotions is greater than that on her health. "[T]he pain of her mind had been much beyond that in her head" (54) after having caught "'the heachach'" (52) walking in the heat to compensate for her lack of riding. Whether readers think Fanny can and should assert her claim to the horse or to Edmund's affection determines their evaluation of her failure to do both.

The narrator's exposure of Fanny's shortcomings is also complemented by exposing those of Mary. While the scene showing Fanny watch as Edmund teaches Mary to ride emphasizes Mary's assertiveness and vivacity in contrast to Fanny's jealousy, passivity and

[12] Wainwright emphasizes Fanny's jealousy of Mary, as well as her "unwarranted hostility towards Henry Crawford" in her analysis of the significance of these attitudes in Lockean terms, according to which Fanny fails to reason properly, and instead "succumbs to, a defense mechanism" (60).

the weakness of her constitution, the continuation gestures towards the strength of Fanny's good intentions in contrast to Mary's flippant selfishness. When Fanny sees "the party in the meadow disperse," she begins "to be afraid of appearing rude and impatient; and walk[s] to meet them with a great anxiety to avoid the suspicion" (49). Mary greets her by wittily managing to make no excuses for herself at the same time as requiring complete absolution. She declares:

> "I am come to make my own apologies for keeping you waiting–but I have nothing in the world to say for myself–I knew it was very late, and that I was behaving extremely ill; and, therefore, if you please, you must forgive me. Selfishness must always be forgiven you know, because there is no hope of a cure." (49)[13]

The leeway Mary gives herself in indulging her own interests is in direct proportion to the restraint Fanny attempts to place on feeling self-interest at all: both err gravely on the side of excess. The novel, however, challenges readers to distinguish these errors and their consequences before reaching its own final judgments.

How readers distinguish Mary's and Fanny's errors depends on the standards by which they judge the characters. The marriage plot encourages evaluating their worthiness to marry Edmund, while the position plot invites imaginative participation in Fanny's perspective. This imaginative act is the basis for more sympathetic judgments of Fanny's failures to live up to her own ideal self as well as to the standards of a heroine of a marriage comedy. By putting themselves in Fanny's shoes, readers reduce the distance between themselves and Fanny. And by judging along with Fanny, readers form judgments of her that take her perspective into account and see the good intentions at the base of her

[13] K. Anderson condemns Mary for attracting Edmund "by displaying her physical vitality and fearlessness while pretending to rely on his guidance, and by parading as witty modesty her admission of selfishness" (347).

shortcomings. The narrative both encourages and complicates this imaginative act by its readers.

The narrative's complex ways of showing readers Fanny's thoughts does not necessarily aid them in imagining the perspective in which these thoughts are couched. Fanny's conception of her position and her belief in the inappropriateness of her feelings for Edmund as well as the jealousy they cause are obscured rather than emphasized by the narrator's depiction of her thoughts upon seeing Edmund teach Mary to ride. In order to put themselves in Fanny's position, readers must engage in an imaginative act that is complicated by both the novel's structure and the insight into Fanny's mind that the scene provides. Below, I will argue that the novel encourages such an imaginative act by depicting it in an unexpected way. The acts of imagination depicted before the later example, however, emphasize the complex relationships among imagination, interest, and distance instead of the kind of relatively disinterested imagination necessary to put oneself in another's shoes. In her imaginative rehashing of the ball she opens, Fanny distances herself from experiences that raise questions about her conception of her position in the world, while in her imaginative seeing of an intimacy between Edmund and Mary her jealousy ignores physical distance and brings her face to face with the fears she still refuses to acknowledge directly. The scene in which Fanny watches Edmund teach Mary to ride shows readers Fanny's thoughts in a way that encourages evaluative judgments while only hinting at a perspective from which her thoughts might be judged differently: her own.

IV. Character as Inner Resources vs. External Stimuli

In describing Fanny watching Edmund and Mary, the narrative pits an internal view of Fanny's shortcomings against an external view of Mary's. These views of Fanny's

thoughts and Mary's words align some readers more with the former and others with the latter. The narrative's explicit contrast between Fanny and Mary as they share a carriage on the way to Sotherton shows them both from the same external perspective. The narrator's knowledge of the characters' interiority, however, reveals the very different qualities behind their superficial similarity in exclaiming upon seeing Edmund on horseback behind them.

The comparison privileges Fanny's ability to observe over Mary's inability to pay attention to anything other than what directly affects her. I cite the paragraph describing how Mary and Fanny differ in everything except their attention to Edmund in its entirety for reasons that will become clear.

> Their road was through a pleasant country; and Fanny, whose rides had never been extensive, was soon beyond her knowledge, and was very happy in observing all that was new, and admiring all that was pretty. She was not often invited to join in the conversation of the others, nor did she desire it. Her own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions; and, in observing the appearance of the country, the bearings of the roads, the difference of soil, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children, she found entertainment that could only have been heightened by having Edmund to speak to of what she felt. That was the only point of resemblance between her and the lady who sat by her; in every thing but a value for Edmund, Miss Crawford was very unlike her. She had none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling; she saw nature, inanimate nature, with little observation; her attention was all for men and women, her talents for the light and lively. In looking back after Edmund, however, when there was any stretch of road behind them, or

> when he gained on them in ascending a considerable hill, they were united, and a 'there he is' broke at the same moment from them both, more than once. (58)[14]

The narrator begins the paragraph by contextualizing Fanny's enjoyment in a way that implicitly contrasts Fanny's inexperience with Mary's worldliness and relative independence, and reminds readers of Mary's recent usurpation of the only horse available for Fanny's limited rides. Fanny is in a position to enjoy the view from the barouche because she has been taught to appreciate scenery but has not had the opportunity to see much. Both what Fanny sees and its newness are pleasant; she enjoys both "observing" and "admiring" (58). Before detailing the things that Fanny sees, the narrator gives another reason she is able to enjoy the scenery: she is not distracted from it by being invited to talk with the others. Fanny's habitual place on the periphery of the group has encouraged habits of reflection. Her reflections on the scenery are not fraught with the same interests as was her observation of Edmund and Mary.

Fanny's ability to appreciate the scenery is twice characterized as predicated on her relative privations: limited opportunities to go out to enjoy nature and limited company. Fanny's thoughts and reflections are her "best companions" (58) at Mansfield, and except for Edmund, they are indeed her only real companions. This characterization of Fanny's response to her lowly situation emphasizes her inner resources[15] rather than the shortcomings emphasized by the depiction of her observation of Edmund and Mary riding. While Fanny appears in a better light in this triangulation of perspectives (Fanny and Mary watching Edmund), Mary is seen at a disadvantage.

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[14] DeRose reads this scene in terms of Johnsonian morality and the importance of memory to moral character (266).

[15] See Garson for a detailed analysis the inconsistencies of the discourse of inner resources, not the least of which is how to convey such resources without undermining them. Garson points to the carriage ride to Sotherton as the single time Fanny's inner resources are portrayed as effective (128).

Though Mary, like Fanny, places a high value on Edmund, she lacks Fanny's "delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling" (58). This succinct description of what Fanny has and what Mary lacks marks the paragraph's shift in focus from Fanny to Mary. Whereas Fanny observes and admires, Mary sees with little observation. The narrator's distinctions between seeing and observing and "inanimate nature" and "men and women" (58) clarify the differences between Mary and Fanny.[16] Neither lacks sight, the sense on which observation depends. But, while for Fanny seeing provides an opportunity to exercise her powers of observation, Mary attends only to what is alive to her, to what engages her. Mary has few qualms about attending only to what is interesting to her and doing only what she likes. In the context of showing herself a natural horsewoman, Mary exclaims: '"nothing ever fatigues me, but what I do not like"' (50) betraying her attitude towards physical as well as mental exercise: she is as strong as can be as long as she enjoys herself.

Mary's exclamation of selfishness follows directly upon the narrative's depiction of Fanny's suppressed jealousy when watching Edmund and Mary. Readers un-inclined to sympathize with Fanny's shortcomings might go so far as to find Mary honest and refreshing. In the carriage on the way to Sotherton, on the other hand, the only positive thing the narrator includes about Mary, her "talents for the light and lively" (58), appears at the end of a list of desirable qualities that she lacks. The only other trait with which the sentence credits her, that her "attention was all for men and women" (58) is a negative characteristic in the paragraph's contrast with Fanny's explicit ability to observe "inanimate nature" (58). This contrast might remind readers that even Fanny's recent shortcomings in observing men and women displayed a general attitude towards others quite different from

[16] Duffy cites this comparison as an example of excessive and inept criticism of Mary (89, note 11) because it interrupts the illusion of reality created by the novel. I argue that the narrator's explicit judgments on the characters work together with the realistic portrayal of them and their world to challenge readers to examine the grounds of their own judgments.

Mary's self-centered attitude. Here, Mary's need to be entertained makes her desire to see Edmund less appealing than Fanny's desire to share with him an experience that she is able to enjoy by herself.

On the ride to Sotherton, Mary, like Fanny, is interested in Edmund. The paragraph contrasting them, however, is constructed to develop the falseness of the appearance of similarity between Fanny and Mary with which it ends. Though Mary and Fanny are "united" (58) in their simultaneous exclamations upon catching sight of Edmund, Fanny's perception of him is qualified by her ability to observe her surroundings, while Mary's ability to perceive her surroundings is qualified.

This contrast between Fanny and Mary recontextualizes the shortcomings of Fanny's perspective that the narrator exposed in depicting Fanny watching Edmund and Mary. There, the narrator emphasized Fanny's suppression of her jealousy in contrast to Mary's forthright self-regard. On the way to Sotherton, Mary's talents are said to be limited in contrast to the abilities Fanny has developed in the absence of social opportunities beyond Edmund's company. Readers will weigh these scenes differently depending on whether they judge Fanny's faults and strengths according to her beliefs about the world she inhabits or according to their beliefs about what the novel promises for her. Readers are shown that Fanny does not perceive her world disinterestedly. While she should be held accountable for these failures, she cannot be reasonably expected to behave according to the rules of marriage comedies that readers are encouraged to invoke. The different sets of standards according to which readers are invited to judge Fanny challenge them not only to distinguish her mistakes from Mary's, but also to sort out her biases from their own.

V. The Significance of Disinterested Observation within the Fictional World

We have seen that the narrator of *Mansfield Park* does not shy away from making explicit contrasts between Fanny and Mary, contrasts emphasized by their one similarity: love for Edmund. The narrator's comparisons between the two women encourage readers to infer the different ways Fanny and Mary might behave if their social and romantic situations were reversed. Such a difference between Fanny and Mary is implied during a moment on the tour of Sotherton in which the latter embarrasses herself. The narrator's explicit contrast between Fanny's reaction to seeing Mary's distress and that of a hypothetical "disinterested observer" (64) raises, furthermore, the question of the proper relationship between readers and the world of *Mansfield Park*.

When the group of young people reaches Sotherton's chapel and learns that the current inhabitants have not maintained the habit of daily prayers, Mary quips to Edmund that "'every generation has its improvements'" (62). In fact, when Fanny expresses the opposite view, Mary, not knowing that Edmund is bound for the clergy, continues to mock the custom of household prayer. Mary acquires the vital information about Edmund's vocation that she has lacked in her attempts to be agreeable to him from Julia, who jokes that Maria and Mr. Rushworth could be married on the spot if only Edmund had already taken his orders. The narrator comments: "Miss Crawford's countenance, as Julia spoke, might have amused a disinterested observer. She looked almost aghast under the new idea she was receiving. Fanny pitied her" (63-4).[17] The narrator explicitly contrasts two responses to Mary's distress: amusement and pity. By aligning amusement with disinterestedness, the narrator implies that Fanny's pity is an interested response. Pity for Mary, however, is not the only, or even necessarily the most obvious, interested response for someone in Fanny's

[17] Interestingly, this line seems to be overlooked in the critical literature on the novel.

position to have. The reader has enough information to infer that Mary, in a comparable situation, might take self-interested pleasure in a rival's blunder.

But how are these different kinds of interest and disinterestedness related and who could the hypothetical disinterested observer be? Does the observer occupy a position inside the world of *Mansfield Park* or one outside of this fictional world? Is the distance separating the hypothetical observer from Mary, and allowing for amusement, a distance separating two people who share a world, or the distance separating the real from the represented? Before exploring the possibilities of the latter perspective, and asking how this hypothetical disinterested observer could be related to a hypothetical reader (which I will postpone until section six), I will consider the possibilities of a disinterested inhabitant of the world of *Mansfield Park*.

We might imagine a guest at Sotherton who knows neither the Bertrams nor the Crawfords joining the tour of the house. Such an individual with no personal connection to or interest in Mary or Edmund might be in a position to find funny Mary's "almost aghast" expression as she realizes her mistake with Edmund. According to this reading, not knowing Mary personally provides enough distance from her for someone to be entertained by her expression of embarrassment and regret. If Mary were in the position of this hypothetical disinterested observer would she be amused in this way? How does this disinterested response compare to the interested response someone like Mary might have to a rival's distress? Does Mary's hypothetical capacity to take personal and selfish pleasure in a rival's embarrassment correspond to the capacity to laugh at, rather than pity, a stranger's embarrassment?

Readers are left to answer these questions for themselves, but Fanny's response is given explicitly. The narrator shows Fanny, not actively picturing how Mary must feel, but

rather passively receiving an impression: "'How distressed [Mary] will be at what she said just now,' passed across [Fanny's] mind" (64). The empathy Fanny so effortlessly feels contrasts sharply with the shortage of human feeling exhibited by my hypothetical stranger's disinterested amusement.[18]

Fanny's pity for Mary is emotionally interested;[19] it is not practically, or selfishly interested. Is it personally interested? To what extent is Fanny's almost automatic response to Mary's expression due to a personal connection with Mary, and to what extent is it an emotional response that Fanny would feel for anyone? Readers know that Fanny does not think highly of Mary, and that she is jealous of Mary in a way that affects how she perceives her. This personal connection with Mary could cause a selfish pleasure in the correspondence between Mary's blunder and Fanny's interests as her rival. Fanny's response to Mary's distress displays neither this selfishness nor these interests. Instead, her pity for Mary seems to come from an empathy that overrides both Fanny's suppressed jealousy and her negative evaluation of Mary's character. Fanny's pity displays an emotional interest in Mary as a person that takes precedence over any selfish interests that her personal relationship with Mary might inspire.

Readers who judge harshly Fanny's jealous and imaginative perception of Edmund's attending to Mary may have trouble believing that she can sincerely feel pity for her rival's blunder with the hero. Those giving more weight to Fanny's attempts to feel how she believes she ought to are less likely to find her pity for Mary insincere, hypocritical, or out of character.

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[18] Hart comments on Fanny's often involuntary sympathy for others in the context of an argument about the dependence of privacy on social place in Austen's novels (327-8).
[19] See Stokes on Austen's use of "interesting" and "disinterested:" "A person or subject found *interesting* is one that 'comes home to the feelings,' that precludes disinterestedness" (168-9).

The interaction between *Mansfield Park*'s two plots also complicates readers' judgments of Fanny and Mary in this situation. In terms of the marriage comedy, Mary's blunder should correspond to an opportunity for Fanny. This opportunity does not materialize. Mary acknowledges her mistake and changes the subject. Edmund excuses her unflattering portrait of chapel prayers as the product of a '"lively mind"' (62). Fanny, in turn, does not acknowledge Mary's blunder as an opportunity even to bring Edmund's judgment of Mary closer to her own, let alone put herself forward as an alternative to Mary. Mary's mockery of Edmund's vocation angers Fanny, but Mary's subsequent embarrassment due to this mockery arouses Fanny's pity as easily as her irreverence aroused her anger. We saw above that Fanny was not able to keep her feelings for Edmund from affecting her perception of him and Mary riding together. Here, she appears to be free from the self-interest a rival for Edmund's attention might have in relation to Mary. The narrative presents an opportunity for Fanny's romantic interests to be furthered at Mary's expense, but uses it instead to explore Fanny's perception.

I have already claimed that Fanny's perceptions and judgments should not be evaluated according to what the marriage comedy promises for her, but rather in terms of what the fictional world affords her. Fanny should not be held accountable for the romantic interests that the marriage comedy promises to fulfill, though she should be held accountable for her response to her prohibited romantic feelings. Her failure to speak with Edmund about her negative judgment of Mary confuses how readers both construe and evaluate Fanny's motives. A decision to speak with Edmund about Mary's attitude towards his vocation could be motivated by laudable personal interest in his well-being just as reasonably as by selfish romantic interests in him. Fanny generally ignores the possibility of the latter and concentrates explicitly on the former. Because these different motives result in the same

action, for the most part only people not worried about being suspected of having selfish romantic interests[20] comfortably point out the negative characteristics of the object of another's affection. The narrator has already noted Fanny's fear of appearing ill-natured as her reason for not mentioning to Edmund the faults she notices in Mary. Her timidity and reluctance to disagree with him about anything might also be blamed. Readers know, however, that Fanny is not free of the romantic feelings that would cast suspicion on her motives were she to express her doubts about Mary to Edmund. This knowledge might cause them to suspect that a fear of appearing jealous, rather than ill-natured, motivates Fanny's silence. Fanny's failure to speak to Edmund about Mary's attitude towards his vocation, then, might be deemed suspicious based on two types of information readers have about Fanny: her romantic feelings for Edmund and the marriage comedy's promise that she will end up with him. Fanny is responsible for how she handles her feelings for Edmund, but not for how she fails to take advantage of the marriage comedy's opportunities.

VI. Universalizing vs. Individualizing Perspectives

Fanny's empathetic response to Mary's distress arises from a universalizing perspective that sees human beings in terms of universal capacities, e.g., the ability to feel pleasure and pain, rather than in terms of their individual particularities and situations. Fanny directs her attention towards Mary as another feeling human being like herself, imagining, moreover, that every human being is, ideally, capable of this empathetic attentiveness. The self-interest a character like Mary might take in her rival's embarrassment, on the other hand, focuses on others as individuals that might harm or benefit oneself. Self-interest coincides with an individuating perspective in contrast to the universalizing perspective that

[20] Mothers come to mind, though of course they might be suspected of a whole different set of selfish interests.

accompanies an empathetic interest in others.[21] Mary, in contrast to Fanny, is often motivated by self-interest. She is like Fanny, however, in assuming that most people think of others as she herself does. In other words, each universalizes her perspective, but Fanny universalizes the compassion she feels, whereas Mary universalizes her self-centered and individuating outlook.[22]

One example of Mary's assumptions about what generally motivates people appears later in the novel when she takes leave of Fanny for friends in London, and describes the effect that Henry's devotion to Fanny will have there. Mary thinks Fanny will be happy to learn of "'…the envyings and heartburnings of dozens and dozens! the wonder, the incredulity that will be felt'" (244) in the Crawfords' circle in town. Fanny, however, still does not take Henry's proposal seriously. In accounting for her response to Henry's "'gallantries'" (246), Fanny explains that she assumed his attentions to her, like those he had paid to Julia and Maria, meant nothing. Mary acknowledges that Henry has been a "'sad flirt,'" but quickly moves from this, his "'only fault'" (246), to the advantage which it affords Fanny: "'the glory of fixing one who has been shot at by so many; of having it in one's power to pay off the debts of one's sex! Oh, I am sure it is not in woman's nature to refuse such a triumph'" (246). Mary's idea of woman's nature is not Fanny's (nor, as both Mary and

[21] Arendt's conception of political thought as representative relies on a Kantian act of imagining other perspectives. Arendt interestingly distinguishes imagining oneself in another situation from imagining how someone else might feel in that situation, as well as from empathizing. Representative thought, "being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not" ("Some Questions" 241), takes into account other perspectives in order to work towards an impartial opinion, and its only condition is disinterestedness ("Some Questions" 242). I will have more to say about the various kinds of interested imaginative acts depicted in and encouraged by *Mansfield Park* in Chapter Six.

[22] See Babb for an interesting discussion of Mary's language and the way in which two types of generalizations she makes throughout the novel display her inability to achieve objective judgments: "one type is the axiom that codifies self-interest" and "her second type of generalization expresses her personal feelings more openly, and, typically, it projects them as a standard, something valid for everyone" (156 and passim). Sturrock also notes Mary's tendency to universalize her own standards, particularly about money (181).

he will discover, is it Edmund's). Mary's woman is motivated by self-interest not only in her single-minded effort to secure the husband with the highest status and largest fortune possible, but, more significantly, in her ability to triumph and glory over those who have failed where she has succeeded. Fanny, on the other hand, while not insensible to the socio-economic aspects of marriage, considers compatibility between partners a higher concern. She hopes, if not naively assumes, that other good people think like her, as evidenced by her mistaken optimism in telling Sir Thomas that she intends to refuse Henry. Fanny "had hoped that to a man like her uncle, so discerning, so honourable, so good, the simple acknowledgment of settled *dislike* on her side, would have been sufficient. To her infinite grief she found it was not" (215).

Readers who are hostile to Fanny interpret this mistake about how Sir Thomas understands Henry's proposal as a sort of self-interested blindness, not unrelated to her suppression of her feelings for Edmund, and her refusal to acknowledge the possibility of her own importance. Readers willing to sympathize with Fanny's mistakes of perception, on the other hand, do not judge her so harshly for assuming that Sir Thomas will act according to his ideals, or for not observing the other ways in which he does not uphold them.[23]

Fanny and Mary have different ideas of human nature, ideas centered, I submit, around the different kinds of interest and disinterestedness they are capable of having in relation to other people as well as to nature and art. I discussed above how Mary and Fanny each universalizes her own characteristics. Mary's assumption that everyone else is as self-centered and socially ambitious as she is describes better the type of observer within the

[23] His allowing of Maria's marriage to Rushworth is one example to which readers are made privy. Though it seems unreasonable to think Fanny would be aware of how he bent his ideals to accommodate his personal, practical, and selfish interests, it also seems unreasonable to think that Fanny would not have seen other examples of his shortcomings, especially in the raising of his daughters.

fictional world – one who might be disinterestedly amused at the kind of embarrassment she suffers – than does Fanny's assumption that others are, like she tries to be, selflessly empathetic.

VII. The Hypothetical Disinterested Observer as Hypothetical Reader

What happens when the disinterested observer is placed at a reader's distance from the characters? Does this distance help explain amusement at Mary's distress as a disinterested response? The interested amusement with which a character like Mary might react to her rival's blunder is not possible from the distance of a reader who cannot benefit from Mary's distress. A reader might, however, be in a position similar to the stranger within the fictional world, who does not know Fanny, Mary, or Edmund, and who observes Mary's attempts to be agreeable to Edmund and then her realization of her blunder. How does moving the hypothetical observer from inside to outside the fictional world affect amusement as a response to Mary's blunder? The narrator's mention of a disinterestedly amused response to Mary's blunder encourages readers to feel amused as well, but only in order to then contrast this amusement with Fanny's pity and highlight the lack of empathy necessary to the former.

Though readers are like the hypothetical disinterested stranger within the fictional world insofar as they have no practical interest in its characters, they are not strangers to the characters. The impossibility of practical interest in the characters does not mean that readers are otherwise disinterested in them. *Mansfield Park* not only interests readers in its characters (as all novels must), but also challenges readers to examine their interests, and to consider the possibilities and limitations of ideals of disinterested judgment in relation to both real and represented worlds. The introduction of a disinterested observer to the group

at Sotherton reminds readers of the variety of ways in which they might be interested in Mary's embarrassment.

The order in which the narrator presents Mary's expression and the possible responses to it is important and worth repeating: "Miss Crawford's countenance, as Julia spoke, might have amused a disinterested observer. She looked almost aghast under the new idea she was receiving. Fanny pitied her. 'How distressed she will be at what she said just now,' passed across her mind" (63-4). Readers sympathetic to Fanny are likely to involve themselves in the fictional world by being interested on her behalf. Such a reader is likely to share the amusement that the narrator says a disinterested observer might feel watching Mary. This reader's amusement would not, however, be disinterested, but instead akin to the self-interested response that, as we have already seen, a character such as Mary might have inside the fictional world. The narrator, in other words, invites the reader who aligns herself with Fanny to feel an interest in Mary's embarrassment that is much closer to what Mary might feel than what Fanny does. The narrator's description of Mary's "almost aghast" (64) expression could alert an amused reader to the discrepancy between amusement and what Fanny might feel upon seeing this expression. If not, the empathy and pity Fanny is next shown to experience make the contrast explicit. The narrator's mention of an amused response to Mary's distress momentarily encourages readers sympathetic to Fanny to be interested on her behalf in a manner that Fanny herself would not condone. A reader's interested amusement in Mary's embarrassment thus compares even more poorly with Fanny's interested pity than does the disinterested amusement of a hypothetical stranger inside the fictional world that was explored above. Fanny's pity, therefore, confronts readers sympathetic to her with the possible consequences of this partiality: a lack of empathy for

Mary. These readers might appreciate the insight Fanny's response offers, or find it obnoxious, and Fanny annoyingly virtuous.

Readers already annoyed by Fanny's naively virtuous assumptions and emotional volatility, as I have already mentioned, are unlikely to respond well to her selfless pity for Mary's distress. These readers might, on the one hand, pity Mary. This episode thus challengingly aligns readers who are sympathetic to Fanny with Mary, and readers who are sympathetic to Mary with Fanny. The latter reader's pity would, like the amusement of the reader in the previous example, express an emotional and personal interest, but on Mary's, rather than Fanny's, behalf. This pity would not, however, be at Fanny's expense, as the amusement on Fanny's behalf is at Mary's. On the other hand, readers unsympathetic to Fanny might not sympathize with Mary either, and instead take the narrator's hint to be amused at her expense as conforming to expectations about a marriage comedy's treatment of the heroine's rival. This reading might highlight Fanny's inabilities to desire or forward the marriage promised for the heroine of such a marriage comedy.

The narrator's contrast between the possibility of disinterested amusement at Mary's expense and the interested pity Fanny feels on her behalf confronts readers with their interests in Fanny and Mary, regardless of what those interests are. The contrast also points to the question of the difference between interested- and disinterested-ness in relation to real and represented worlds. The disinterest of an amused observer within the fictional world is of a different sort than the disinterest afforded by a reader's removal from this world. The practical disinterestedness of a reader in relation to fictional characters allows for a unique sort of emotional and personal involvement with them. This practical disinterestedness means that readers cannot selfishly put their own interests above those of the characters; it does not, however, preclude readers from indulging their own interests in their judgments of

characters or from adopting the selfish interests of the characters with whom they sympathize.

Mansfield Park's two plots and its various ways of contrasting Fanny and Mary encourage readers to develop conflicting kinds of interests in relation to its characters. The encouragement of these conflicting interests alerts readers to different standards of disinterestedness operating in relation to real and represented worlds, and to the idea that the standards of the latter might afford experiences that are relevant to the former. More specifically, *Mansfield Park*'s examples of being interested and disinterested portray the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. The novel's manner of interesting readers in its characters, furthermore, offers them the opportunity to consider their own approaches as they evaluate those of the different characters.

This chapter's focus on the relationship between, on the one hand, *Mansfield Park*'s contrasts of Fanny and Mary and, on the other, its management of the distance between readers and characters, sheds light on a particular meaning of interestedness: partiality. I discussed above the different ways Mary and Fanny both universalize partial perspectives. Mary is partial to her own interests, and she assumes that everyone is similarly partial. Fanny is empathetic, attempts to be impartial, and assumes that others strive similarly. Fanny's universalization of empathetic impartiality leads her into as many mistakes about other people's motives as does Mary's universalization of selfish partiality. Both of their universalizations paint an inaccurate and partial picture of the world they inhabit because they both fail to take into account the different attitudes possible within that world.[24]

[24] They both also have strengths as readers of their world. Mary's charm depends on her ability to understand other people. She sees how Fanny is treated at Mansfield Park as well as Edmund's regard for her, and is able to use both to her advantage in making herself pleasing to Edmund. Fanny sees clearly the interactions among Henry, Maria, and Julia and those between Susan and Betsey in Portsmouth.

Fanny and Mary are both able to put themselves in other positions and imagine what they might do if they found themselves there. Imagining oneself in different positions does not, however, necessarily reveal much about the specific experiences of others in these positions. Instead, it forms a partial picture, a picture of what a certain type of person might feel or do in various situations. Impartiality requires a more complete picture of what various types of people might feel or do in various situations.

The novel's depiction of the different partial perspectives of its characters gives readers a relatively complete view. Even the relative completeness of a reader's perspective, however, does not afford impartiality. Although the narrative shows readers a more complete picture of the characters and their motives than any of the characters have, it also encourages, as I have explored in this chapter, various types of biases in relation to the characters. The narrative thus clarifies two different ways of defining, and attempting to achieve, impartiality: as completeness and as lack of bias.

These two definitions of impartiality are at work both in the novel's management of the distance between readers and characters and among the characters within the fictional world. Readers are shown the different ways in which the characters try to and fail to achieve impartiality. Both Fanny and Mary are shown to have incomplete and biased perspectives. *Mansfield Park* asks readers to distinguish between Mary's and Fanny's different types of partialities. The novel's two plots complicatedly oppose Mary's bias in favor of her own interests to the bias caused by Fanny's feelings for Edmund, and the incompleteness of Mary's worldview caused by her self-centered attitude to the incompleteness of Fanny's worldview caused by her selfless attitude.

Fanny and Mary both need to read their situations accurately in order to achieve their goals. They have, however, very different goals. Fanny tries to be virtuous; Mary is ambitious. Fanny's attempts to be disinterested and impartial blind her to the interests and partialities of others as well as to the influence of her feelings for Edmund on her own perception. Her perspective is thus both incomplete and biased. Mary's attempts to forward her socio-economic interests blind her to the more idealistic motives of others. Her perspective is thus both biased and incomplete.

Because Fanny's attempts to be virtuous mean ignoring the possibility that the marriage comedy promises for her and that readers know accords with her feelings, some readers cannot sympathize with these attempts. These readers are more likely to sympathize with Mary's attempts to ignore her ambition in allowing herself to become attached to Edmund. The marriage comedy's fulfillment of Fanny's unacknowledged wishes and punishment of Mary's ambitious demands declares its preference for Fanny's type of partiality over Mary's and for Fanny's failed attempts at impartiality over Mary's biased ability to imagine other people's perspectives. Whether readers accept this ending and agree with this preference depends on how they respond to the novel's challenging way of interesting them in and distancing them from the characters.

Chapter Three: Reality and Representation in (and of) *Mansfield Park*

I. Confusing Reality and Representation: The Private Theatricals

In this chapter, I clarify the similarities and differences between social and theatrical roles, especially by comparing the characters' behavior during the episode of the private theatricals. In the last chapter, I argued that *Mansfield Park* challenges readers to distinguish the kinds of mistakes of perception and judgment made by Fanny from those made by Mary. The episode of the private theatricals, I argue below, contrasts the characters' different kinds of mistakes on the basis of their different senses of propriety and capacities for judgment. None of the characters behaves blamelessly, but neither are they all guilty of the same mistakes. The consequences of these various mistakes within the fictional world differ from their possible consequences for readers' judgments of the characters. The novel, I claim, uses the private theatricals to dramatize the moral and aesthetic consequences for both characters and readers of confusing real and represented worlds.

The episode of the private theatricals at Mansfield Park is the source of much critical discussion and disagreement for a number of reasons. Most importantly for this study, the activity of putting on a play explicitly raises a number of aesthetic and moral issues of representation and reality, art and life, and the nature of role-playing. In addition, the choice of play, *Lovers' Vows*, Elizabeth Inchbald's free translation of Kotzebue's *Das Kind der Liebe*, invites criticism about the morals, politics, and reception of this play in Austen's time.[1] And,

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[1] Jordan argues that in *Mansfield Park*, Austen "tacitly but actively" debates with Inchbald about the moral effects of theatre (140), as well as the pulpit and the novel, characterizing Austen as taking the mentor-mentee theme "further in a feminist direction than either Mrs. Inchbald or Mary Wollstonecraft" (142). Greenfield also gives a feminist reading of the play and novel, arguing that they are ideologically similar in promoting the internal merits of women. Nachumi, like Jordan, argues that Austen participates in contemporary debates about the theatre. But Nachumi claims that Austen suggests a rational distance from the emotions possible in aesthetic experience. Nachumi's suggestive analysis cites historical debates about the dangers of theatre and links formal features of Austen's style, e.g., free

because it focuses all the characters on a single project, the theatricals provide a unique opportunity for comparing their behavior and attitudes.[2]

Criticism is divided along the familiar lines of criticism of Austen generally and *Mansfield Park* more specifically: is Austen a conservative who condemns both *Lovers' Vows* and the practice of private theatricals on moral and/or political grounds or a radical feminist and/or liberal who criticizes the immorality of society by comparing it to the superior, sentimental morality prevailing in *Lovers' Vows*? How do the values expressed in *Lovers' Vows* and *Mansfield Park* compare? Is "*Mansfield Park*…nothing more nor less than *Lovers' Vows* translated into terms of real life with the moral standard subverted by Kotzebue neatly re-inverted" (326), as E.M. Butler would have it?[3] Or, following Paula Byrne in *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, are the plots of novel and play parallel, suggesting not the dangers of theatre but instead the necessity of playing roles?

Mansfield Park's attitude towards theatricality and role-playing has been taken up by many critics in various ways, from Trilling's focus on a fear of impersonation to Daniel O'Quinn's discussion of *Mansfield Park* as inviting readers to participate in theatre as autoethnography. These discussions emphasize various aspects of role-playing to make different kinds of claims. Penny Gay's historical study, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (not to be

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indirect speech, with her approach to aesthetic distance. However, I think she overlooks the importance of emotion and imagination in Austen's approach to aesthetic distance, and I find myself in disagreement with her reading that the end of the novel shows Fanny accepting values the novel condemns (see Chapter Seven for my own reading of how the novel's conclusion successfully points to the difference, as well as connection, between judgments of real and represented). Lott also discusses *Mansfield Park*'s depiction of the private theatricals in terms of contemporary debates about theatre as socially disruptive or stabilizing.

[2] The play also suggests comparison between its characters and those of the novel. Greenfield, E.M. Butler, Jordan, Bevan, and Conger all link characters in the novel with characters in the play.

[3] In E.M. Butler's reading, Austen reworks the preposterous characters and licentiousness of *Lovers' Vows* into the realistic characters getting their just moral deserts of *Mansfield Park*.

confused with Byrne's, also historical, book by the same title, published in the same year) emphasizes the moral ambiguity of theatricality. Joseph Litvak uses the metaphor of infection to describe the inescapability of theatricality in the world of *Mansfield Park*, as well as in contemporary debates about the moral effects of theatre on audiences (for example, by Evangelicals like Thomas Gisborne and Hannah More). David Marshall links the necessity of role-playing with the inescapability of signification in his discussion of the possibility of real feeling and sincerity in *Mansfield Park*. I agree that social role-playing is inescapable. My focus on judgment contributes to critical discussions by clarifying how the episode of the private theatricals clarifies different modes of judgment appropriate to different levels of reality and representation and sets up the consequences of different ways of confusing them.

The social role-playing demanded in the world of the novel affords opportunities in which appearances, the feelings behind them, and the meanings they are meant to have for various observers can be confused with one another both intentionally and unintentionally. Taking up theatrical roles as social entertainment introduces new kinds of representation and levels of reality available for manipulation in the world of *Mansfield Park*, and therefore new possibilities for misunderstandings among the characters. The novel's portrayal of the characters' self-representations and misrepresentations during the episode of the private theatricals highlights the problems of negotiating the relationship between one's inner reality and one's social self.[4] In giving the characters the opportunity to manipulate the difference between their theatrical roles, their social roles, and their inner selves, the private theatricals

[4] Altieri describes realism as the representation of a shareable reality, as, at its best, offering "self-reflexive explorations of what is involved in leading a recognizable life in society, sharing its pleasures and its pains, and especially, its principles of evaluation, even if this sharing also means criticizing…" (79). Frye links the Cinderella archetype and domestic comedy with the integration of a reader-like hero into society (*Anatomy* 44). Canuel reads *Mansfield Park* as delineating the relationship between individual and society through a focus on pain and punishment, linking this interest to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reforms of the British system of punishment.

expose the weaknesses of their various strategies and the consequences of their compromised judgments. The private theatricals put all of the characters in difficult social and moral situations, in which their social behavior and moral judgments are influenced by emotion and self-interest.

The different characters have very different attitudes towards private theatricals and towards the roles they take in *Lovers' Vows*. Their attitudes towards their theatrical roles are related to their attitudes towards social roles in complicated ways. In general, however, a willingness to manipulate social appearances self-interestedly corresponds to a willingness to use one's theatrical role to further one's personal interests, while placing a value on frankness in social interaction makes characters susceptible to inconsistencies of judgment and behavior during the private theatricals.[5]

Readers, like the characters, respond very differently to the private theatricals, as well as to how the characters behave during this episode. Those who do not accept the objections to private theatricals expressed by Edmund, Fanny, and Sir Thomas are more likely to judge these characters harshly and forgive the behavior of Henry and Maria. But readers who do not judge harshly the behavior of Henry and Maria begin to find themselves at odds with judgments expressed within the fictional world leading up to the plot's eventual condemnation of them both. Readers willing to accept the dangers posed by the private

[5] Bevan argues that in *Mansfield Park*, "acting is used both as an illustration of, and as a metaphor for, invalid attempts to express and define the self" (595). Accordingly, while Fanny, who is grounded in her emotions and strives for harmony between herself and her world, cannot act, the Crawfords, who are unfixed and seek to create their own realities, constantly create and perform fictions. See Edwards for a reading of the theatricals' blurring of art and life in terms of the characters' desires to impose their wills upon one another. He argues that Mary and Henry do not distinguish between art and life, that their interactions with Edmund and Fanny ask everything of them without committing anything themselves (61).

theatricals, on the other hand, tend to judge Fanny's behavior more sympathetically and convict Henry and Maria of the grave errors for which the novel ultimately punishes them.[6]

These judgments about the characters' behavior are also judgments about different ways of confusing and manipulating the relationship between the real and the represented. Readers frustrated by disapproval of the private theatricals resist the novel's claim about the dangers of blurring the boundary between real and represented, while those dismayed by how Henry and Maria use their theatrical roles to further their flirtation accept the novel's depiction of the possible dangers of confusing the real and the represented. The different relationships between the real and the represented depicted during the episode of the private theatricals raises the question of the consequences of the sort of distance from which a reader might regard the fictional world.

II. Social vs. Theatrical Role-playing

The central claims of this chapter have to do with the private theatricals' importance to the characters of the novel, the progression of the plot, and the judgments readers make about both the characters and the novel. In order to make these specific claims about the importance of the private theatricals, I must clarify a number of more general issues about social and theatrical roles. In this section, I first explain the differences and similarities between theatrical and social roles, as well as the relationship between the real and the

[6] These judgments are related to judgments about how the novel presents the private theatricals. See Zelicovici for a distinction between disapproving of the private theatricals or play and disapproving of the players. She is often credited with being the first to make a case for Austen condemning the players, not the play. I. Armstrong identifies the private theatricals as objectionable within the text because they subvert Sir Thomas's authority and threaten his property (58 and passim). She also discusses the political questions raised by the novel's use of *Lovers' Vows* (67 and passim); and the relationship between the novel's characters and the inappropriate roles they choose to play in *Lovers' Vows* (70 and passim).

represented involved in each. I then discuss the general attitudes at Mansfield Park and in London towards social role-playing.

Theatrical roles, when confined to the theatre, generally form a straightforward contrast with social roles, where the former are representations and the latter reality. Theatrical roles exist in a fictional realm, one separated from the world of their actors and audience by the same kind of aesthetic distance separating the characters in a novel from its readers. Social roles, in contrast, belong to the real world of their actors. The reality of social roles, however, does not mitigate their nature as roles. As such, they imply a distinction between the appearance maintained in playing the role and the feelings, beliefs, and intentions connected to this appearance. While the appearance maintained in the performance of a social role is easily characterized as a kind of representation, whatever might contradict or lie behind this performance is less easily characterized as reality.

Though I am investigating what *Mansfield Park* has to say about the relationship between representation and reality, I am more interested in clarifying how different kinds of representation function than in defining the "realness" of any reality that might be related to these representations. My discussion of how the characters of *Mansfield Park* approach the relationship between the real and the represented involved in social role-playing relies on Erving Goffman's analysis of social performances in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. I follow Goffman in considering crucial not "which is the more real, the fostered impression or the one the performer attempts to prevent the audience from receiving" (65-6), but rather "merely that impressions fostered in everyday performances are subject to disruption" (66). The crucial literary and aesthetic considerations for this dissertation are not whether

Mansfield Park depicts the existence of a real self behind one's social performances,[7] but rather how and why characters and readers interpret and judge differently the various kinds of social role-playing in the novel.

Although social roles appear to have the same structure of depicter and depicted characteristic of theatrical roles, there is no coherent "real person" that can be defined in contrast to the social roles one plays. The depicter and the depicted might be indistinguishable or contradictory. Social roles, furthermore, confine their actors to a typical code of behavior, but not to a set script. In order to distinguish different kinds of social role-playing, therefore, we need to consider not the contrast between an actor and a role, but instead how social roles can be manipulated and misinterpreted. How one appears in a social role can be different from what one believes, what one feels, and what one intends. One can knowingly or unknowingly misrepresent one's beliefs, feelings, and intentions for various more or less selfish reasons. As I have already indicated, the characters of *Mansfield Park* can be compared according to the extent to which they allow themselves to act out of self-interest as well as according to the extent to which they know themselves to be doing so.

One of the many differences between Goffman's investigation of social role-playing in twentieth-century Anglo-American society and my investigation of the depiction of social and theatrical role-playing in *Mansfield Park* is important at this point. The reality of whatever lies behind the social performances studied by Goffman is unimportant to his investigation because it is expressed, and therefore can be studied by his methods, only insofar as it empirically contradicts a social performance, or affects the performance in another way that can be determined by its audience. In contrast to actual social performances, literary

[7] See Urda for a claim that in *Mansfield Park*, Austen chooses not to represent any actual performances in order to protect the idea of coherent moral subjectivity against theatrical ideas of inescapable performance.

depictions of social performances often include information about what lies behind the performance, information about which, furthermore, the performing characters may be more or less aware.[8] Accordingly, I compare the characters in *Mansfield Park* with regard to how knowingly they play social roles, how willingly they misrepresent themselves in these roles, and how effectively they justify their misrepresentations.[9]

Mansfield Park provides a complex and challenging picture of how the different characters perform socially, their different abilities to predict the consequences of their performances, and how aware they are of what motivates their performances. The plot of the novel evaluates the behavior of the characters in one way in its ultimately uniting Fanny and Edmund at Mansfield Park and banishing Maria and the Crawfords from it. The insight that the novel gives readers into the social performances of the characters as it depicts these performances, in contrast, encourages different types of interest in and judgments of the characters at different moments. These varied evaluations are important also because they challenge readers to examine the reasons behind their own interests in, involvements with, and judgments of the different characters. *Mansfield Park*'s use of the private theatricals is one of the ways in which the novel emphasizes the relationship between the distance between readers and characters, on the one hand, and readers' judgments of characters, on the other.

I first examine the characters' general attitudes towards their social and theatrical roles. Then, as I discuss the specific behavior and judgment of the characters, I address how this behavior is presented. Before I turn to how the various characters perform socially,

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[8] Goffman makes use of this advantage of literature by using the occasional literary example to illustrate his claims.

[9] Conger uses Jauss's scheme of reception to characterize the Crawfords' and Miss Bertrams' interaction with the theatre as cultic participation in contrast to Edmund and Fanny, for whom the episode is a spur to ethical action, a much higher form of aesthetic experience (93-4). Lodge also characterizes the episode of the private theatricals as a test.

however, it is important to note the inescapability of playing social roles. Judgment is not to be passed on the fact that the characters play social roles, but rather on how they play them. This reminder is important because of the ease with which both readers and characters understate the dramatic nature of social interaction and associate role-playing with dishonesty. Goffman attributes this tendency to the "two common-sense models according to which we formulate our conceptions of behavior: the real, sincere, or honest performance; and the false one that thorough fabricators assemble for us" (70).[10] The "honest" performance is thought to be transparent and "real," not much of a performance at all. Contrived behavior, conversely, is assumed to be dishonest as well. These associations are not accurate, argues Goffman, as "there is a statistical relation between appearances and reality, not an intrinsic or necessary one" (71). These common, yet mistaken associations between honesty, goodness, and spontaneity, on the one hand, and dishonesty, selfishness, and contrivance, on the other, not only inform how readers judge characters and characters interpret one another's behavior, but also form the basis of an inaccurate conception of social life.[11]

While *Mansfield Park* contrasts the society of Mansfield Park and that of the Crawfords' London,[12] it also suggests that the two societies share this misconception about

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[10] The "we" of Goffman's sentence is "Anglo-American culture" defined broadly. That something similar to these models is at work in the world of *Mansfield Park* is evidenced not only by the characters' interactions, but also its use of the word "artless" to describe a manner that appears honest and uncontrived.

[11] Bevan and Marshall both discuss these assumptions tangentially.

[12] Many critics look at the novel in terms of this contrast, for example Mudrick and Fleishman. Banfield, in her discussion of how the novel equates aesthetic and moral standards, argues that while the contrast between country and city is important, the novel actually characterizes Mansfield Park as the "just mean" ("Moral Landscape" 5) between the extremes of Sotherton, on the one hand, and Portsmouth, on the other. According to Banfield, Mansfield Park exhibits the harmony prized by neoclassical aesthetics, while Sotherton is characterized by an overly rigid and empty formality and Portsmouth by chaos

social behavior. All of the characters in the novel play social roles; they all associate transparency in these roles with honesty and good intentions. They do not, however, place the same value on honesty or share a definition of acceptable intentions. The London society exemplified by the Crawfords pays lip service to values similar to those espoused at Mansfield Park, but assumes that everyone actually pursues her own interests.[13] The inhabitants of Mansfield Park, in contrast, tend to believe that people actually hold the values they espouse.

Goffman's distinction between sincere and cynical social performances helps clarify the different attitudes towards social role-playing prevalent at Mansfield Park and in London. "When an individual has no belief in his own act…" explains Goffman, "we may call him cynical, reserving the term 'sincere' for individuals who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance" (18). Goffman uses this contrast between sincerity and cynicism to talk only about the extent to which a performer is "taken in" (17) by his performance, not as an indication of the quality of a performer's intentions. A sincere performance, in other words, does not have any necessary relationship with admirable intentions. Conversely, a cynical performance does not necessarily correspond to ignoble intentions.[14]

Mansfield Park values sincere performances, while London society assumes that people normally perform cynically. The assumption that people do not believe in their social

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and impropriety. Ryle sees London as a "convenient sink" for vice that Austen prefers not to explore in detail (295-6).

[13] See Gordon for discussions of Mandevillian assumptions of universal self-interest in seventeenth-century England and of Richardson's explorations of this problem in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*.

[14] See Davidson for an argument that *Mansfield Park* defends a particular type of hypocrisy as necessary, forgivable, and a successful social strategy, especially for dependents such as Fanny. Davidson discusses eighteenth-century manners and patronage, and associates Fanny's hypocrisy with her lack of transparency to the other characters. Fanny's "good" hypocrisy and lack of transparency is contrasted with the more predictable pursuit of self-interest that characterizes London's society as well as Maria, Julia, and Tom.

performances goes hand in hand with the assumption that people are generally motivated by self-interest, which in London is defined as the pursuit of social standing, wealth, and fleeting pleasures. These pursuits may sometimes be acknowledged, but the "veneer of consensus" (Goffman 10) operating in London also often demands that they be obscured by performances of selflessness. Because London society continues to pay lip service to values such as honesty and selflessness in spite of assuming that few actually act on them, the pursuit of social status, wealth, or fleeting pleasure is often furthered by an appearance of honesty and selflessness. In London society, therefore, there is often reason to hide one's pursuit of self-interest from others, but there is no reason to hide it from oneself.

At Mansfield Park, by contrast, it is in one's interest to hide one's less than virtuous inclinations from oneself. Only by ignoring these inclinations can one conform both to the expectation of sincerity in performances and to the demand to be virtuous. Ironically, then, the value Mansfield Park places on sincere performances discourages the kind of self-reflection and self-awareness associated with sincerity in its everyday sense. The faulty association of sincere social performances with goodness conspires with Mansfield Park's insistence on these kinds of performances to encourage a degree of self-deception. The two societies pay lip service to similar notions of virtue and many of their members actually behave according to similar types of self-interest. London's assumption that people behave cynically, however, encourages an awareness of this discrepancy between appearance and behavior, while Mansfield Park's belief in sincere performances discourages any such self-awareness.

III. Social-Role Playing and Knowledge of Oneself and Others

The preceding generalizations about the attitudes towards social roles prevalent at Mansfield Park and in London will help me frame the specific attitudes of the different characters. These comparisons, however, will also involve generalizations and simplifications, as the behavior of each character is both complex and various. I cannot bring out the importance of the characters' behavior during the private theatricals, however, without first providing a general schema of the characters' different attitudes towards social roles.

When discussing, in Chapter One, the importance to the novel's plot of a change in the way the characters hold values, I indicated that the novel's initial situation encouraged both misunderstandings among the characters and characters' misunderstandings of themselves. I can now be more specific about how these misunderstandings work, their functions in the plot, and their implications for judgments of the real and the represented. I will focus in this section on the attitudes towards social role-playing of the Miss Bertrams, the Crawfords, and Edmund. Chapter Four is dedicated to Fanny. I will have more to say about Sir Thomas in Chapter Five, and I will address the other characters along the way.

The Miss Bertrams enter society with sincere social performances, while the Crawfords arrive at Mansfield Park ready to perform cynically in order to achieve their respective romantic objectives. This contrast, however, has more to do with the different societies in which the Crawfords and Miss Bertrams have been raised than with their values. The Miss Bertrams' sincerity in their social performances does not mean that they act out of self-interest any less than do the Crawfords; it means only that they do so with less self-awareness.

The narrator of *Mansfield Park* efficiently depicts the sincerity with which the Miss Bertrams appear to have values that they do not understand. Their vanity, readers are told as

the young women enter society, "was in such good order, that they seemed to be quite free from it, and gave themselves no airs; while the praises attending such behaviour, secured, and brought round by their aunt, served to strengthen them in believing they had no faults" (26). The Miss Bertrams believe that they are as praiseworthy as the appearances they put on for society. But the sincerity of this belief does not affect its falseness, as the novel will go on to emphasize. The Miss Bertrams have learned that they should not appear vain or self-interested. Their upbringing's focus on appearances has prevented them from gaining a deeper understanding of the possible value associated with such appearances. Though "they joined to beauty and brilliant acquirements, a manner naturally easy, and carefully formed to general civility and obligingness" (26),[15] the Miss Bertrams are "entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility" (16).[16] These young women do not live up to the roles they play because they are ignorant of the values to which they pretend. They know only the appearances their society rewards. The sincerity of the Miss Bertrams' performances relies upon this ignorance of its deficiencies. By not examining the motives for their behavior, the Miss Bertrams remain taken in by their performances as admirable young women. I will discuss below challenges to the Miss Bertrams' sincerity as well as their more cynical performances, e.g., as dutiful daughters and in their vying for Henry.

The Crawfords' respective attitudes towards marriage display their cynical attitudes towards social performances. Henry, characterized by Mary as "'the most horrible flirt that can be imagined'" (32) proclaims himself "'unwilling to risk [his] happiness in a hurry'" (32).

[15] This description agrees with Goffman's analysis of the "veneer of consensus" (10) marking social interaction.

[16] See Garson's discussion of how *Mansfield Park* participates in an anti-accomplishment discourse, contrasting the Miss Bertrams' empty accomplishments with Fanny's natural taste (125 and passim). Mandal examines the distinction between empty accomplishments and principle as Evangelical (106).

This reluctance to commit does not prevent Henry from engaging the affection of young women explicitly looking to be married.[17] While his sister numbers among this type of young woman, she considers her cynical view of marriage a kind of protection against the heartbreak that her friends have suffered from Henry. Her general attitude that "'every body is taken in at some period or other'" (34) applies particularly to marriage, which she considers "'of all transactions, the one in which people expect most from others, and are least honest themselves'" (34). In Mary's description of marriage, people behave cynically while expecting others to be sincere.

Mary's attitude towards marriage does not prevent her from expecting too much from Edmund. But Edmund also expects too much from Mary though he has a more positive and less ambitious attitude towards marriage. He quickly falls in love "without studying the business… or knowing what he was about" (47), while she "might be equal to feel, though not equal to discuss with herself" (48) the charm of qualities, e.g., "his sincerity, his steadiness, his integrity" (47), that she is not used to valuing at all – let alone valuing above – the social status, "the arts of flattery," and "the gaieties of small talk" (47) in which Edmund is deficient. The high expectations and lack of self-interrogation fueled by their mutual attraction enable them to misinterpret the significance of their differences.

Edmund and Mary do not, however, shy away from clearly stating their very different values. As their attraction grows, so too does the need to address Edmund's commitment to a profession that Mary disdains. In their first disagreement, at Sotherton, she

[17] The narrator comments on Henry's attitude towards the Miss Bertrams: "the Miss Bertrams were worth pleasing, and were ready to be pleased; and he began with no object but of making them like him. He did not want them to die of love; but with sense and temper which ought to have made him judge and feel better, he allowed himself great latitude on such points" (33). Note the parallels between sense and judgment, as well as temper and feeling. I will have more to say about Henry's potential and his failings in Chapter Five. Miller cites the same passage in characterizing Henry as incurably unnarratable, unwilling to fix meaning or be fixed by marriage (20-27).

asserts that "'a clergyman is nothing'" (66) and flirtatiously, if pointlessly, attempts to convince him to choose another profession. He, in turn, solemnly tries to convince her of the value of the clergy. Mary's judgment of the clergy is based on the impossibility of gaining "'distinction…in the church'" (66). In his defense of the clergy, Edmund differentiates between a clergyman and his office as well as between manners and conduct.[18] Both these differences clarify his commitment to sincere social performances. Edmund understands the office of clergyman as a type of social role that demands sincere performance. The man must live up to this role or he will "'appear what he ought not to appear'" (66). The force of this "ought" is lost on Mary, who both assumes that people generally perform cynically and does so herself. She continues to consider the clergy in terms of particular examples[19] because she does not acknowledge the possibility of sincere social performances or the importance of the office as Edmund defines it. The social performance of the clergyman could not have the importance that Edmund attributes to it, she argues, as two sermons are hardly sufficient to "'govern the conduct and fashion the manners of a large congregation for the rest of the week'" (66). Edmund has already defined the office of the clergy as consisting in more than two sermons a week, and he attempts to clarify his understanding of

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[18] Zimmerman notes this distinction in his reading of *Mansfield Park* as the novel that initiates Austen's later period of pervasive irony, a discrepancy between individual and society. Fanny, he argues, represents an ideal in which there should be no ironic discrepancy between conduct and manners (351), but, in the ironic vision of the novel, she eventually prefers a flawed society in which such a distinction exists (353). Mandal sees the distinction as an Evangelical one that emphasizes the importance of the clergyman's role in the community (104).

[19] In a later conversation she defends her view with the example of her brother-in-law: "'… I am not entirely without the means of seeing what clergymen are, being at this present time the guest of my own brother, Dr. Grant. And though Dr. Grant is most kind and obliging to me, and though he is really a gentleman, and I dare say, a good scholar and clever, and often preaches good sermons, and is very respectable, *I* see him to be an indolent selfish bon vivant, who must have his palate consulted in every thing, who will not stir a finger for the convenience of any one, and who, moreover, if the cook makes a blunder, is out of humour with his excellent wife'" (79).

it by distinguishing the influence Mary doubts – manners demanded in good society – from that which he defends – conduct demanded by good religious and moral principles.[20]

Edmund is at pains to make this distinction because of the ease with which manners and conduct are confused. Though he describes two different types of behavior, namely, public manners and conduct resulting from good principles, the two often look similar. The politeness and courtesy demanded by society can overlap or conflict with the conduct demanded by good principles. When politeness, courtesy, and refinement stem from good principles, they overlap with what Edmund calls conduct. When politeness, courtesy, and refinement stem merely from a desire to conform to social expectations or to win social favor, they differ from what Edmund calls conduct. London's assumption that people behave cynically suggests that politeness, courtesy, and refinement often disguise the kind of self-interest considered impolite to pursue openly. Mansfield Park's insistence on sincere performances privileges conduct over mere manners, but it does not always differentiate clearly between them.[21]

The confusion of manners with conduct contributes to the trouble that the characters of *Mansfield Park* have clarifying their own motives as well as those of others. Society does not always demand behavior that conforms to good principles, but there is enough overlap between the demands of society and those of good principles to cause

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[20] He says: "'And with regard to their influencing public manners, Miss Crawford must not misunderstand me, or suppose I mean to call them the arbiters of good breeding, the regulators of refinement and courtesy, the masters of the ceremonies of life. 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; and it will, I believe, be every where found, that as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation'" (67).

[21] See the narrator's description of Julia at Sotherton, stuck with Mrs. Rushworth and Mrs. Norris: "The politeness which she had been brought up to practise as a duty, made it impossible for her to escape; while the 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" (65).

confusion. The Miss Bertrams, for example, do not distinguish between public manners and principled conduct. As I explained above, they think that they have good principles because they have been taught that these are important without having learned what they are. The good manners that they have learned trick their parents and themselves (but not Mary and Henry) into thinking that they have qualities such as selflessness and humility, which they in actuality lack.

Mary has been taught to value public manners as a means to and expression of wealth and status. Unlike the Miss Bertrams, she does not feel compelled to disguise the value she places on wealth and status. Her disagreements with Edmund about the value of the clergy raise the question of whether she understands the kind of religious and moral principles and concomitant conduct described by Edmund. Either she does not understand it, or she does not value it. Mary flirtatiously dashes Edmund's hope to convince her of the importance of the clergy, saying, "with an arch smile," "'I do not think you ever will…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. Come, do change your mind. It is not too late. Go into the law'" (67). She values Edmund, but she does not share his values. While she does not believe his assertions that he is nothing other than his values, he, in turn, does not believe that she actually holds the contradictory values she asserts.

IV. Confusing the Real and the Represented: The Injudiciousness of the Private Theatricals

I have discussed some of the ways that social role-playing involves the manipulation of both other peoples' and one's own opinions of oneself. The constant shifting of the feelings and beliefs behind social performances contributes to the ease with which sincere performers are, and cynical performers can be, taken in by their own acts. Now, I turn to the

feelings and beliefs of the person who performs a theatrical role. The clear difference between oneself and a theatrical role that one takes up should prevent confusion between them. The principal characters of *Mansfield Park*, however, take up theatrical roles in order to escape the confines of their social roles. Their theatrical roles are thus confused with both their social roles and their real intentions. While their different attitudes towards social role-playing make it easy for them to misinterpret one another, the different ways they use their theatrical roles raise the stakes of these misinterpretations, the consequences of which were kept in check by the constraints of social life.

The private theatricals could not have been undertaken if Sir Thomas had been at home to enforce his sense of propriety and oversee the social role-playing of his children. The proposal to hold private theatricals makes explicit the importance of Sir Thomas's absence during his daughters' "most interesting time of life" (25). His leaving, in Chapter Three, to oversee his estate in Antigua[22] relieved the Miss Bertrams "from all restraint; and

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[22] Critics have long noted the Bertrams' connection to colonialism and slave holding. Said's attention to Austen in *Culture and Imperialism* initiated a wave of postcolonial criticism of *Mansfield Park* seeking to show the text's failure to fully repress the slavery and colonialism on which the lives of its characters and author depended. Ferguson and Fraimen are among those who read Mansfield Park as governed by the same principles as Sir Thomas's Antiguan estate, comparing the plight of women to that of slaves. Southam and Lew also link Sir Thomas's slave-holding to his management of his family, but the former argues that Austen does not share Sir Thomas's attitudes, as Said would have it, but rather Fanny's position as "'a friend to abolition'" (498). See also *The Postcolonial Jane Austen*, edited by Sunderrajan and Park. Voskuil reads Austen's challenge to imperialism not in relation to Sir Thomas's Antiguan estate, but rather in her ideologically charged treatment of landscape, particularly in the Sotherton episode. While Voskuil proposes this reading to counter postcolonialist tendencies to look at what the text does not say, Boulukos discusses the problematic association between silence and complicity at work in many postcolonial approaches to *Mansfield Park*. This assumption not only leads to a misreading of the silence in the drawing room after Fanny asks Sir Thomas about the slave trade, but also, argues Boulukos, to an overlooking of the multiple contemporary fictional and non-fictional debates about slavery. Boulukos claims that these debates show amelioration as the most likely position held by Austen and her characters. Wiltshire goes further, arguing that postcolonial misreadings of *Mansfield Park* "colonise" the novel itself. These critiques point to the pitfalls of reading outside-in rather than inside-out.

without aiming at one gratification that would probably have been forbidden by Sir Thomas, they felt themselves immediately at their own disposal, and to have every indulgence within their reach" (25). Sir Thomas's strict sense of propriety restricts his daughters' ability to pursue their own interests. As they establish themselves in society free from his scrutiny, they need only consider their own desires for material comfort and passing pleasures.

A private theatrical promises much pleasant entertainment, and it is on this basis that Tom and his sisters argue for staging a play. All the Bertram children know, however, that Sir Thomas would disapprove of such an endeavor. Although Tom and his sisters argue to the contrary, their reaction to their father's unexpected return proves that they are aware of their transgression. They have engaged in an activity that, as Edmund argued before they began, is

> "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 any thing of the kind. It would show 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." (89)

I will return shortly to what Edmund and Sir Thomas consider the impropriety of private theatricals in general. I want first to look more closely at the specific situation that makes them so inappropriate for the party at Mansfield Park. According to Edmund, Sir Thomas's dangerous situation abroad intensifies the inappropriateness of disregarding his certain disapproval. Edmund characterizes this disregard for their father as lacking both judgment

and feeling.[23] To ignore Maria's delicate situation, furthermore, lacks prudence. Though Sir Thomas has approved of her engagement with Mr. Rushworth, "he only conditioned that the marriage should not take place before his return" (30). This conditional engagement makes Maria's situation delicate because she is neither available for courting nor safely married.

Why does this situation make private theatricals imprudent? Maria's delicate situation adds force to the objections to which private theatricals are generally open.[24] These objections involve the propriety of ladies and gentleman acting out scenes that may not conform to their own society's rules of conduct. To Edmund's arguments, Tom retorts that he "'can conceive no greater harm or danger to any of us in conversing in the elegant written language of some respectable author than in chattering in words of our own'" (89). His comparison reveals the ease with which he equates, as entertainment, regular social interaction with conversing in the language of a playwright. But the misunderstanding resulting from Henry and Maria's use of their roles in the play to indulge in a real, though forbidden, flirtation, contradicts this contention. It makes no difference, Tom contends, whether the young people at Mansfield Park use their own words or someone else's to interact. Private theatricals are objectionable precisely because they blur the boundaries between the real and the represented.

The ease with which Tom equates staging a play with regular social interaction stems from the primary goal of private theatricals: the entertainment of the actors themselves.

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[23] Graham sees the private theatricals as posing a moral problem that the Bertrams fail, first, by disrespecting Sir Thomas in his absence. He characterizes this failing as "loosely biblical" (877) before turning to the second failing, that of confusing two senses of acting: knowingly pretending and "translating one's true feelings and character into words or deeds" (878).
[24] See E.M. Butler, Litvak, Conger, and Jordan for discussions of contemporary attitudes towards private theatricals and femininity (especially Thomas Gisborne and Hannah More) and the dangers they pose for undue intimacy between the sexes.

Acting in a play is one among a limited number of activities available for the entertainment of young people living in the country. They take up acting, in other words, not primarily for the sake of any artistic aspirations, but rather for the same reason they hunt, ride, attend balls, and play cards: to pass their time pleasantly. Acting in a play, however, is different from these other activities in an essential way. Whereas the social performances involved in everyday activities are connected by both the performers and the audience to the real feelings and desires of the performers, theatrical performances ostensibly have nothing to do with the reality of their performers. Tom's argument in favor of holding private theatricals not only ignores this difference between social and theatrical performances, but also suggests that a playwright's represented world can be no worse than his own social reality. The extramarital sex and illegitimate child central to *Lovers' Vows* contradict this suggestion.

The less than proper situations a play might represent do not, however, pose the greatest danger of private theatricals. When the world of a play and the world of its actors are clearly distinguished, as would normally be the case at a theatre, anything dangerous represented in the play can be confronted by both actors and audience. Private theatricals, however, allow the concerns of the casual actors to intermingle with the roles they play. Edmund emphasizes the difference between public and private theatricals when Julia tries to sway him by reminding him of his love of the theatre. He distinguishes between "'real acting, good hardened real acting'" and "'the raw efforts of those who have not been bred to the trade, - a set of gentlemen and ladies, who have all the disadvantages of education and decorum to struggle through'" (88).[25] According to Edmund, the social roles demanded of

[25] Canuel mentions this distinction in discussing the problem with the private theatricals as how the players use the characters to express personal desires (137-8). Ford also interprets this line as expressing concern about the relationships between casual actors and roles, contextualizing the issue with a discussion of how eighteenth-century theatre-goers were

gentleman and ladies interfere with their ability to play theatrical roles. They are, or ought to be, confined by the rules of their social roles, rules from which real acting departs. The ladies and gentlemen of Mansfield Park, however, do not intend to leave their social concerns behind as they take up their theatrical roles. These concerns range from relatively innocent desires for pleasant entertainment to less innocent pursuits of self-interest that take advantage of the distance between real and represented in order to mask their impropriety and its possible consequences.

The most innocent participants in the scheme are Mr. Yates and Mr. Rushworth. Neither man, however, meets the standards of Mansfield Park. Their innocence is due in part to their ignorance of these standards, or more specifically of Sir Thomas's sense of decorum and his certain disapproval of the private theatricals. But neither do Mr. Yates or Mr. Rushworth have ulterior motives in participating in the play. Mr. Yates, having just suffered the sudden interruption of a theatrical party at Ecclesford, wants to display his talents as an actor and entertain himself with the business of staging a play. Mr. Rushworth thinks less of his acting skills, but appears quite happy with his two-and forty speeches and several changes of costume. They participate, in other words, to gratify their vanity and need to be entertained, but without the consciousness of doing something inappropriate.

Tom, master of the house in his father's absence, knows that his father would not allow the private theatricals. His pursuit of the scheme, therefore, is guilty where the participation of Mr. Yates and Mr. Rushworth is innocent. Though Tom knowingly contravenes his father's decorum, he, like Mr. Yates and Mr. Rushworth, does so to gratify

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interested in the lives of professional actors, and the convergence and divergence of actors and characters.

the relatively innocent personal desire to be pleasantly entertained.[26] The Miss Bertrams, like Tom, disregard their father's rules in favor of their own interests. But unlike Tom, Mr. Yates, and Mr. Rushworth, the Miss Betrams pursue more than mere entertainment.

Both Julia and Maria pursue romantic relationships with Henry, and they know that the private theatricals offer opportunities to interact with him that are more intimate than those allowed in everyday life. The scene in which the novel's characters choose parts in *Lovers' Vows* highlights the social roles that the Miss Bertrams and Henry Crawford play with one another; the way they try to disguise their personal interests as selflessness; and how they intend to use their roles in the play to further their romantic interests. Mr. Yates first offers to play the Baron, the role he had most wanted at Ecclesford, but "remembering that there was some very good ranting ground in Frederick, he professed an equal willingness for that" (94). Henry also professes himself willing to take either part, which motivates "Miss Bertram feeling all the interest of an Agatha in the question…to decide it" (94).[27] She encourages Mr. Yates to play the Baron by appealing to his vanity and proclaiming him fit for the part because of his height. Julia also disguises her self-interest as consideration for others, when she "meaning like her sister to be Agatha, began to be scrupulous on Miss Crawford's account" (94). Here, the Miss Bertrams know that their appearances of concern for others hide their pursuit of their own interests. Their competition for Henry's attention outweighs the demand that they perform sincerely, but not the demand that they appear selfless.

I mentioned in Chapter Two that Henry admits to preferring engaged women because their attachment supposedly gives them the freedom to flirt without consequences.

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[26] Graham's emphasis on the moral problem of disrespecting Sir Thomas causes him to pardon the Crawfords, and, somewhat strangely, fault Tom and Mr. Yates with giving "the project a less-than-worthy feel from the start" (877).

[27] The narrator's formulation makes it clear that the "interest" Miss Bertram feels is her own as she imagines playing the role of Agatha.

An even more radical divide between behavior and consequences is promised to Henry in the kind of play-acting involved in private theatricals. Play-acting offers not only to mask his flirtation, but also to render it somehow unreal. This attitude causes his failure to grasp the real expectations his behavior raises in Maria. Maria's engagement encourages him to initiate the flirtation; the private theatricals, he thinks, provide an opportunity to develop the flirtation without it being taken seriously.

Henry, after looking over the play with "seeming carelessness" (94) decides which sister will play Agatha by pleasantly entreating Julia not to play the tragic part on the grounds that seeing her "'countenance dressed up in woe and paleness'" would "'be the ruin of all [his] solemnity'" (94). The pleasantness of his entreaty hides his real motives only from those uninterested in the issue. Julia sees "a glance at Maria, which confirmed the 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" (95). Both sisters clearly see the romantic intentions behind Henry's superficially innocent entreaty. But while this slight teaches Julia that he has been toying with her, it strengthens Maria's misunderstanding of his motives.

Maria thinks that Henry, like her, acts out of real feeling. While Henry uses his theatrical role to play the social role of a philanderer, Maria puts her real feelings into her theatrical performances.[28] Like Henry, she plays a social role meant to hide this use of her theatrical role. Fortunately for her, her fiancé, though matching her in vanity, lacks her awareness of how she appears to others. Maria "very kindly took his part in hand," and Mr. Rushworth

[28] Though Maria and Henry play mother and son rather than lovers, the first scene, which their desire to rehearse is, in Mary's words, "'indefatigable'" (118), gives them ample opportunity to express their romantic love as familial.

> liked the idea of his finery very well, though affecting to despise it, and was too much engaged with what his own appearance would be, to think of the others, or draw any of those conclusions, or feel any of that displeasure, which Maria had been half prepared for. (97)

With typical economy, the narrator here indicates the different kinds of mistakes Maria and Mr. Rushworth make in their interpreting and playing of social roles. The other characters share the narrator's insight into Mr. Rushworth's affectation. His attempts to hide his vanity are less effective than those of the well-trained Miss Bertrams. Their sincere performances hide their vanity from themselves as well as others, while their cynical performances are more effective than Mr. Rushworth's at hiding their real feelings from others. In this case, however, Maria's awareness of her real motives in the casting of parts causes her to worry that Mr. Rushworth might be more adept at interpreting her behavior than he has shown himself capable of being.

Mary, like the Miss Bertrams, sees the private theatricals as an opportunity to pursue her romantic interests in ways beyond those that are part of normal social interaction. Though she is entitled to flirt with Edmund and can therefore do so more openly than Maria can with Henry, the private theatricals promise the increased intimacy of rehearsals as well as the performance of love scenes in which her own feelings might coincide with those of her character. After being selected to play Amelia, a forward young woman who professes her love and proposes to the clergyman, Anhalt, who is her tutor, Mary puts on a social performance calculated to gather information and engage Edmund. First, she feels out the situation by subtly determining whether Edmund has agreed to participate. Instead of raising the question explicitly, she compliments Lady Bertram and the other "'by-standers'" on a play having finally been chosen, "glancing half fearfully, half slily, beyond Fanny to

Edmund" (101).[29] The narrator further emphasizes Mary's intentions by making explicit the answer to her implicit query: "Edmund said nothing. His being only a by-stander was not disclaimed" (101).

After so determining that Edmund does not intend to participate in the play or join in any discussion of it, Mary uses a similar tactic to raise an issue that she hopes will interest him more. The narrator emphasizes the discrepancy between her intentions and her social performance:

> After continuing in chat with the party round the fire a few minutes, Miss Crawford returned to the party round the table; and standing by them, seemed to interest herself in their arrangements till, as if struck by a sudden recollection, she exclaimed, "My good friends, you are most composedly at work upon these cottages and ale-houses, inside and out - but pray let me know my fate in the meanwhile. Who is to be Anhalt? What gentleman among you am I to have the pleasure of making love to?" (101)

Mary's seeming interest in the conversation about the theatrical arrangements, the narrator implies, hides her real interest in determining the best way to engage Edmund and ascertain who will play opposite her without making explicit her desire that it be he. The question of who is to play Anhalt interests her, and her joking conflation of herself with her character makes explicit what is at stake in the answer. Her part requires her to express her love to Anhalt, an experience she hopes will be tempting to Edmund.

She replies to the answers that no one has undertaken the part "with a brightened look" (101) and continues the discussion by distancing herself from the character with whom she so easily identified above. "'Amelia,'" she says, "'deserves no better. Such a forward young lady may well frighten the men'" (101). Mary's queries about who will play

[29] See Edwards for a discussion of Mary's corruption in terms of conscience and consciousness, which he proposes as an alternative title for the novel (60).

Anhalt express both the opportunity she sees in the role of Amelia and the difference between herself and her character. Whereas she herself would never declare her love to someone who had not already offered himself to her, she is willing to use the role to pursue her flirtation with Edmund.[30]

Next, Mary tries a more direct approach with Edmund, appealing to him as "'a disinterested advisor'" (102) on the grounds that he does not act. Though Edmund does not have the interest of one of the actors in determining who should play what part, he does, she hopes, have the interest of a lover in determining who should play opposite her. Edmund's judgment against their holding private theatricals in general, and against their choice of *Lovers' Vows* in particular, however, trumps any interest he might feel in the question of who should play Anhalt, and he answers that his advice "'is that you change the play'" (102).

Edmund's unwillingness to enter into a discussion about the play does not deter Mary. Instead, her attempts to interest him in *Lovers' Vows* become even more direct. She has characterized him as a by-stander in the hopes that he would contradict her, tried to tempt him by asking with seeming innocence to whom she, as Amelia, will make love, and appealed to his interest in her by asking his disinterested advice about casting Anhalt. Finally, she directly raises the possibility that Edmund play Anhalt. She does so, however, without any explicit reference to herself or the relationship between Amelia and Anhalt. Instead, she expresses implicitly her hopes that playing opposite her would tempt Edmund to take the part by suggesting explicitly that Anhalt's profession should make the part appealing to Edmund: "'If *any* part could tempt *you* to act, I suppose it would be Anhalt,' observed the lady, archly, after a short pause— 'for he is a clergyman you know'" (102).

[30] Jordan regards Amelia's active courtship as "the vindication of woman as heroine" (146).

Mary's archness suggests her desire that she might tempt Edmund to take the part as well as her attitude towards his profession. On the one hand, she seems to be acknowledging that Edmund really intends to be a clergyman, an intention she hopes to change his mind about; on the other hand, however, her teasing observation reveals the lack of seriousness with which she regards his choice. Edmund's response indicates his different attitude towards both social and theatrical roles. "'*That* circumstance would by no means tempt me,'" Edmund answers, "'for I should be sorry to make the character ridiculous by bad acting. It must be very difficult to keep Anhalt from appearing a formal, solemn lecturer; and the man who chooses the profession itself, is, perhaps, one of the last who would wish to represent it on the stage'" (102). Unlike Tom and Mary, who easily conflate social and theatrical roles, Edmund insists not only on their difference, but also on the futility of ladies and gentleman attempting the latter. Edmund can take up the social role of a clergyman with dedication and seriousness because of his training, and this same training prevents him from taking up theatrical roles in an equally effective manner. Edmund's answer, however, implies more than distaste for misrepresenting Anhalt. The solemn decision to *be* a clergyman, in his opinion, makes it unlikely that one would want to *play* a clergyman. Edmund's attitude that a man should perform the social role of a clergyman sincerely makes the idea of representing this role theatrically distasteful. Because he distinguishes between social and theatrical roles, the similarity between the two in this case makes the theatrical role less, rather than more, appropriate.[31]

Although Mary's attempts to interest Edmund in playing Anhalt fall short, the threat that someone outside the group at Mansfield Park play the part proves effective. Edmund

[31] Jordan links the importance of a clergyman's sincere role in society with *Mansfield Park*'s implicit argument that Austen's realist novel, rather than Inchbald's theatre, "can supplement the pulpit" (143).

finally capitulates. Does he do so, as he asserts, in order to limit the evil of the private theatricals, which he cannot prevent, or, as everyone else believes, to keep a stranger from playing opposite Mary? And if the latter, do his feelings for Mary influence him merely to protect her from making love to a stranger? Or is he finally tempted to act opposite her himself? The narrator does not give readers obvious answers to these questions. Instead of indicating discrepancies between Edmund's behavior and his feelings, the narrator gives Edmund's own misgivings in his own words, as well as the, quite different, misgivings of his confidant, Fanny.

The narrator thus challenges readers to judge Edmund's behavior for themselves.[32] Edmund's feelings for Mary compromise his decision to join in the private theatricals. Readers who find Edmund (and Fanny) priggish in his disapproval of the private theatricals can have little patience for his worries over whether to participate, and even less for how he lets his emotions influence the good judgment about which he claims to be so serious. Readers who accept his objections to the private theatricals are likely to be more sympathetic to the decisions faced by Edmund (and Fanny). These readers might also forgive whatever lapses in judgment they find Edmund to have committed as different in nature from those of the other characters. While Edmund fails to live up to the high standards he sets for himself, the other characters do not hold themselves to such standards. The novel finally condemns the latter failure, while readers put off by the former failure, or by the novel's portrayal of Edmund (and Fanny's) standards, condemn Edmund (and Fanny) as well as the novel.

After hearing Tom's plan to canvas the neighborhood for a suitable Anhalt, Edmund seeks Fanny's opinion on the decision he has already made to take the part himself. Instead

[32] This challenge is intensified regarding Fanny, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

of asking Fanny directly about this decision, however, he first seeks her acquiescence to the point that, in his mind, justifies the decision. The idea of including another person in the scheme, says Edmund, "'is the end of all the privacy and propriety which was talked about at first'" (107-8). The "'*more* than intimacy—the familiarity'" (108) that would result from such a solution appears to Edmund as "'an evil of such magnitude as must, *if possible*, be prevented'" (108). Edmund's emphasis on the objectionable intimacy and the necessity of finding any possible way of preventing it prefigure the explicit appeals on Mary's behalf to which he will soon turn. In asking Fanny, "'Do not you see it in the same light?'" (108), Edmund makes it more difficult for her to disagree, although he has not yet said anything to which she might object.

Fanny does agree completely with Edmund, but, convinced as she is of his refusal to participate, his solution to the problem has not occurred to her. She cannot answer when he offers it, and, though she does eventually succeed in formulating some objections, she cannot voice her real disappointment in his decision or in the influence of Mary she sees in it. Interestingly, both she and Edmund emphasize the appearance of his capitulation and the effect it will have on his siblings. "'No man,'" says Edmund,

> "can like being driven into the *appearance* of such inconsistency. After being known to oppose the scheme from the beginning, there is absurdity in the face of my joining them *now*, when they are exceeding their first plan in every respect; but I can think of no other alternative. Can you, Fanny?" (108)

Edmund implicitly distinguishes the appearance of his capitulation from the reality of his position, a position he implies is consistent. His opposition to the private theatricals, he suggests, has not changed. Instead, his siblings' plan to enlarge the players and the audience

forces his opposition to express itself differently.[33] While he first refused to join in an endeavor he judged to be wrong, he now sees his own participation as the only way to prevent the scheme from getting worse. He cannot prevent the others from rehearsing *Lovers' Vows*, but he can, by joining them, prevent the "'mischief,'" "'unpleasantness,'" lack of "'restraint,'" and "'license which every rehearsal must tend to create'" (108) if a "'young man very slightly known to any of us'" (107) is included in the scheme. Edmund first objected to the private theatricals because of his conviction that Sir Thomas would not like his "'grown up daughters to be acting plays'" (90), and then to the choice of *Lovers' Vows*, which he considers "unfit for private representation'" (98) because of the situations of its female characters. These reasons are consistent with his objection to a stranger's inclusion, but his concern is now more for Mary than for his sisters, or for his father.

When Edmund sees that Fanny does not approve of his decision, he urges her to "'put [her]self in Miss Crawford's place'" (108), an imaginative act that affects Fanny differently than it does Edmund. She and Edmund do not imagine Mary in the same way, and their different relationships to her also affect their consideration of what she might feel. Edmund's romantic feelings influence his imaginative act, while Fanny's jealous feelings influence hers. Edmund imagines that Fanny's empathy with Mary's situation will move her to approve his judgment. The effort to put herself in Mary's position is more likely, however, to inspire in Fanny thoughts of the joy Mary might feel at learning of her triumph over Edmund's principles, and of the greater influence Mary has on him than do his principles, his father's disapproval, or Fanny herself.[34]

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[33] Litvak likens Edmund's awkwardness in joining the theatricals to the instabilities he finds in contemporary Evangelical objections, such as those of Thomas Gisborne and Hannah More, to theatre's overstepping of boundaries (337-8).

[34] When Edmund asks Fanny to put herself in Mary's place, she cannot, as she spontaneously could at Sotherton in the episode I discussed in Chapter Two, imagine how

Fanny now must not only put herself in Mary's position, but also try to recall Edmund to his. Fanny's answer thus explicitly compares her empathy for Mary with her reaction to Edmund's decision: "'I am sorry for Miss Crawford; but I am more sorry to see you drawn in to do what you had resolved against, and what you are known to think will be disagreeable to my uncle. It will be such a triumph to the others!'" (108). The unpleasantness Miss Crawford would suffer acting opposite a stranger does not, to Fanny, justify either Edmund's inconsistency or his decision to disregard his father's disapproval, especially since it will validate the scheme in the eyes of the others. Like Edmund, Fanny worries about the effect his capitulation will have on his siblings. But while his conviction that his intentions to limit the scheme justify his decision help him "'brave'" (108) their triumph, Fanny's belief that "it was all Miss Crawford's doing" (110) coincides with Tom and the Miss Bertrams' interpretation of Edmund's behavior, and makes her suffer for the same reasons they triumph. His siblings, like Fanny, attribute Edmund's decision to his "jealous weakness" (110). Though Edmund's grave looks still express his disapproval, "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" (110). Fanny, on the other hand, is as much the worse as the unhappier. She has relied on Edmund's moral elevation to support her own. His descent is painful to her as a descent, because it is caused by his feelings for Mary, and because it weakens her own resolve.

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she herself or anyone like her would feel in such a position. Instead of considering Mary generally, as a person with feelings, Fanny here considers her individually, as a particular person with whom Fanny has a specific relationship. Edmund's obvious feelings for Mary and the effect they have on his judgment influence Fanny's ability to empathize with Mary. She now imagines what it would be like to be Mary rather than what it would be like to be in Mary's position.

How should readers judge the influence of Edmund's feelings for Mary on his decision to act? Why shouldn't his regard for her outweigh his opposition to the scheme? Edmund hopes not only to prevent the inclusion of a stranger, but also to limit the audience of the play. Does this attempt to mitigate the wrongdoing justify his participation? His duty to his father and his own sense of propriety make claims against his participation for any reason. When his father returns, both Edmund and Tom see their mistakes. Tom tries to mitigate the offence by comparing it to the reading that Sir Thomas encouraged in them as children (127), a comparison that he has already tried, unsuccessfully, with Edmund. Though he now understands that his behavior showed a lack of consideration for his father, he still does not fully understand the objectionable nature of private theatricals, the difference between reciting as children and staging a play as young people. Edmund, by contrast, goes to his father to

> give him a fair statement of the whole acting scheme, defending his own share in it as far only as he could then, in a soberer moment, feel his motives to deserve, and acknowledging with perfect ingenuousness that his concession had been attended with such partial good as to make his judgment in it very doubtful. (129)

This description makes certain Edmund's own, as well as Sir Thomas's, judgment that his decision to participate was ultimately wrong. It also makes clear that, to Sir Thomas and Edmund, Edmund's understanding of his mistake, as well as his intentions in making it, mitigate somewhat his lapse in judgment.

The description does not, however, entirely clarify Edmund's motives. Does his "soberer" (129) reflection on his decision admit of the "jealous weakness" and "selfishness" (110) of which his siblings condemned him? Or does Edmund still rely on the same justifications he initially voiced to Fanny, only regretting his decision to let these

justifications overrule his duty to his father? The narrator's comment on the "perfect ingenuousness" (129) of Edmund's acknowledgment of his lapse in judgment might be read as sincere, as ironically belying Edmund's ingenuousness, or as undermining his acknowledgment of his lapse in judgment. While the narrator often makes explicit the deception involved in the characters' social performances, readers are left to determine for themselves the extent of Edmund's self-deception regarding his decision to act. The difficulty of establishing and evaluating Edmund's motives highlights the narrative's claim about the relationship between social and theatrical performances.

Both social and theatrical performances involve a distinction between the real and the represented. But the reality connected to a social performance is much less easy to pin down than the actor behind a theatrical role. The reality behind social performances is susceptible to various and variable interpretations. The ease with which social performances obscure real motives from both performers and audiences, the novel suggests, demands that social performances be clearly differentiated from theatrical performances. Both the performance and whatever lies behind it must be considered real, must be acknowledged as a reality that affects oneself and others.[35]

The novel's portrayal of the different kinds of mistakes made by the characters during the private theatricals emphasizes the consequences of confusing representation with reality. This portrayal also distinguishes between misplacing the aesthetic distance separating the realm of an actor from that of the theatrical roles he plays in a social setting, on the one hand, and failing to understand the real motives behind one's social performance, on the other.

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[35] See Litvak's discussion of how contemporary Evangelicals feared the real effects of theatre on private lives, a fear he argues is based on the inescapable theatricality of everyday life (335-340).

The episode of the private theatricals emphasizes the consequences of the characters' failures to understand the real effects of their social and theatrical role-playing. Taking up theatrical roles exaggerates their tendencies to ignore the real consequences of both their unexpressed feelings and their deceptive social performances. I have already discussed the importance of Henry and Maria's misunderstandings of the real consequences of their social and theatrical performances. The various ways Edmund's decision to act might be interpreted show the different sort of danger of social performances.[36]

Edmund obscures his motives from himself in a way transparent to Fanny, his siblings, and readers. All see the influence of his feelings for Mary on a decision that he insists is based on the same principles that fuel his disapproval of the private theatricals. Edmund's capitulation cannot, however, be attributed to a temptation to blur or manipulate the boundaries between the socially real and the theatrically represented, but instead to a blurring and manipulation of social expectations and real emotions. Henry and Maria can both insist, though with different beliefs in this insistence, that their flirtatious behavior is part of their theatrical performance. This insistence relies on a common-sense distinction between theatrical and social roles, the former understood as mere representation having nothing to do with the reality of the latter. Edmund's insistence that his decision to act is consistent with his principles, by contrast, relies on a reinterpretation of what these principles demand and a failure to acknowledge the influence of emotion on his understanding of these demands.

[36] The narrator's treatment of Edmund's mistake can also be compared to the depiction of the Miss Bertrams' sincere social performances that I discussed earlier. While they are so focused on appearances that it never occurs to them to examine themselves and their motives, Edmund engages differently with the standards of his father's household and attempts, if not succeeding, to match his inner self with the ideal these standards suggest.

The narrator makes explicit the different ways Maria and Henry understand their manipulations of the relationship between social and theatrical roles, but does not give a precise picture of exactly how Edmund's emotions influence his decision or of how aware he eventually becomes of this influence. This lack of detail corresponds to the difficulty of establishing the emotional reality behind social performances. On the one hand, only Edmund has the vantage point to decipher his own motives; on the other, his social performances show his audience influences he does not acknowledge.[37] The reality behind social performances can be obscured from the performer by his conception of and expectations for himself, while it can be obscured from audience members by the performance as well as by their own assumptions about how people behave.

Readers must decide for themselves the extent to which Edmund lets his feelings for Mary influence his decision, as well as how aware he becomes of this influence. How they fill in the gaps left by the narrator affects readers' judgments of Edmund's mistake, of how his mistakes compare to those of the others, and of the novel itself. The plot of the novel condemns the mistakes of Henry and Maria, which lead directly to their eventual adultery and punishments. Edmund's decision to join the private theatricals leads to the, rather momentary, disapproval of his father. His capitulation also upsets Fanny, but her disappointment does not change her judgment of or feelings for him.[38] The narrative thus treats Edmund's mistake in a way that suggests that his failure to judge rightly his motives is

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[37] See Goffman on impression management and unmeant gestures (51 and passim).
[38] See her complicated reaction to Sir Thomas's reproachful look upon discovering their theatre: "Such a look of reproach at Edmund from his father she could never have expected to witness; and to feel that it was in any degree deserved, was an aggravation indeed. Sir Thomas's look implied, 'On your judgment, Edmund, I depended; what have you been about?' – She knelt in spirit to her uncle, and her bosom swelled to utter, 'Oh, not to *him*. Look so to all the others, but not to *him*!'" (128). She both acknowledges that he is blameworthy and jumps to his defense.

less egregious than the failures of judgment involved in Maria and Henry's manipulation of aesthetic distance to indulge their romantic self-interests.

The private theatricals offer the characters an opportunity to manipulate the relationship between the real and the represented in a more radical way than those afforded by everyday life. The novel's condemnation of this kind of manipulation suggests that it is more problematic than Edmund's mistaking his real motives and compromising the ideal that his social performances strive to embody. Maria and Henry think only of themselves and their own pleasures. Their focus on the relationship between the theatrically represented and the socially represented obscures the question of the relationship between the real and the represented of their social performances. Though Edmund deceives himself, he does so as part of his engagement with the right issue: the slippery relationship between the real and the represented in social life.

In this section, I have compared the behavior of the various characters during the private theatricals in order to bring out some of the challenges the novel poses to readers' judgment with this episode. These challenges, I claim, revolve around the novel's suggestion that, though none of the characters behave blamelessly, their mistakes are of different sorts. The novel invites readers to compare the behavior of the various characters in order to fill in gaps left by the narrative and form judgments of the characters. The different kinds of mistakes made by the characters have to do with how they relate to the difference between the real and the represented in social interaction, on one hand, and in theatrical roles, on the other. In the next chapter, I will both clarify and complicate this picture with the novel's portrayal of Fanny's behavior during the private theatricals.

V. Reading the Private Theatricals: Distance and Aesthetic Pleasure

Mansfield Park's complex depiction of the various ways the characters behave during the private theatricals raises questions about the various kinds of distances readers might place between themselves and the characters of the novel, as well as about the influence of these distances on the judgments readers make about the characters and the novel. How involved in its characters does *Mansfield Park* ask its readers to be? What effect does the aesthetic distance that separates readers from characters have on the emotional and personal interests that readers take in the characters and the judgments readers make about them? The novel's portrayal of the characters' different attitudes towards the private theatricals encourages readers to consider their own attitudes not only towards social and theatrical performances, but also towards engaging with the fictional world of the novel.

A concluding perspective on distance and aesthetic pleasure is offered by the final "scene" enacted on the stage of Mansfield Park after Sir Thomas's unexpected return. Instead of merely showing readers Sir Thomas's discovery of the stage, the narrator shows readers Tom's experience as an audience of that discovery. During the episode of the private theatricals, I have argued in this chapter, the characters treat as social entertainment an object, the play, which is properly aesthetic. Here, Tom enjoys aesthetically a properly social object. This aesthetisization, quite different from Fanny's of her cousins' social world, arises not out of a problematic effort to prevent inappropriate interests in what is observed, but instead because Tom enters a space which has been made into a theatre and becomes the audience of what transpires on the stage. The action on the stage, however, is not a play, but a social performance made comic, if only momentarily and only for Tom, by its appearance on a stage as well as by the very different social roles forced upon each of its surprised participants.

Since I will discuss the aesthetic merit of the scene as well as the events it depicts, I quote it in full. It begins by following Sir Thomas's experience upon his entry into the study, which has been transformed into a greenroom during his long absence:

> Sir Thomas had been a good deal surprized to find candles burning in his room; and on casting his eye round it, to see other symptoms of recent habitation, and a general air of confusion in the furniture. The removal of the book-case from before the billiard room door struck him especially, but he had scarcely more than time to feel astonished at all this, before there were sounds from the billiard room to astonish him still further. Some one was talking there in a very loud accent – he did not know the voice – *more* than talking – almost hallooing. He stept to the door, rejoicing at that moment in having the means of immediate communication, and, opening it, found himself on the stage of a theatre, and opposed to a ranting young man, who appeared likely to knock him down backwards. At the very moment of Yates perceiving Sir Thomas, and giving perhaps the very best start he had ever given in the whole course of his rehearsals, Tom Bertram entered at the other end of the room; and never had he found greater difficulty in keeping his countenance. His father's looks of solemnity and amazement on this his first appearance on any stage, and the gradual metamorphosis of the impassioned Baron Wildenheim into the well-bred and easy Mr. Yates, making his bow and apology to Sir Thomas Bertram, was such an exhibition, such a piece of true acting as he would not have lost upon any account. It would be the last – in all probability the last scene on that stage; but he was sure there could not be a finer. The house would close with the greatest eclat. (126)[39]

[39] P. Byrne ("We Must Descend" 98) suggests that this scene blurs distinctions between theatricality and reality while Galperin ("Missed Opportunities" 130-1) links Tom's perspective of bemused reflection in this scene to the novel's perspective on the everyday.

The scene starts by giving readers the perspective on Sir Thomas that his children are, at the same time, imagining in their dread of his discovery of the extent of their scheme and of Mr. Yates on the stage. Readers are not surprised by Sir Thomas's astonishment; they can also anticipate its increase upon finding Yates. The difference between what readers know and what Sir Thomas knows distances them from him in a way that makes it easy to laugh at his experience. By giving readers Sir Thomas's thoughts as he hears the ranting of Mr. Yates, the narrator increases the comedy by contrasting readers' superior knowledge with Sir Thomas's confused attempts to decipher sounds he has never before heard in his house.

Sir Thomas's attempts to clarify the situation coincide with his entrance upon stage, a coincidence that makes Tom, as well as readers, into his audience. Sir Thomas's entrance also affects Yates, who, in dropping his theatrical role for a social one, gives a performance that Tom appreciates as a "piece of true acting" (126).[40] Before giving Tom's assessment of Yates's performance, the narrator indicates the weaknesses of Yates's theatrical acting. Although a successful ranter, he cannot feign surprise; the start given him by Sir Thomas outshines any he has attempted in rehearsal. The spontaneity and reality of this start is part of what threatens Tom's countenance. His difficulties in keeping a straight face increase the comical quality of the scene presented to readers.

Both readers and Tom are positioned to enjoy the very different kinds of surprise of Sir Thomas and Mr. Yates. They see that Sir Thomas does not know that he is making an entrance on a stage while Mr. Yates does not know that he is entering Sir Thomas's society. They also see that Sir Thomas tries unsuccessfully to hide his real surprise and confusion

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Tave finds the scene comic, but also having value because it shows Tom beginning to be aware of his offence (45).

[40] Marshall uses this phrase to describe the tricky kind of behavior he takes *Mansfield Park* to be about: "something between playing at feeling and real feeling, something between a theatrical part and a real part, something that might be called true acting" (76).

while Mr. Yates drops the emotional state of his theatrical role for the easiness of his social role. But, while readers can maintain their distance from this meeting, Tom must give up his position as audience member. The narrator immediately notes how "little time" Tom has "for the indulgence of any images of merriment. It was necessary for him to step forward too and assist the introduction, and with many awkward sensations he did his best" (126). The merriment with which Tom regards the finest scene he could have wanted for his stage must give way to the awkwardness of the discrepancy between the social role that his father requires and the one that he plays with his friend.

How does Tom's inclusion in the scene affect readers' appreciation of it? How does Tom's momentary appreciation of this scene compare with the appreciation of readers who do not have to give up their merriment in order to join the actors? I have already suggested that exposure to Tom's enjoyment of the scene increases the enjoyment readers have in it. Readers know not only more than Sir Thomas and Mr. Yates, but also something Tom momentarily forgets, namely, that he is part of the scene. Tom's spontaneous response and his positive evaluation of the scene also encourage similar, though not similarly restrained, reactions of laughter and appreciation in readers.

Tom's evaluation of what he sees as "a piece of true acting" (126) also raises questions about the relationship between social, theatrical, and fictional roles. Tom's response reflects his attitude that social performances are just as entertaining as theatrical ones, in addition to the ease with which he ignores the consequences of the former. The social performance he observes, however, is entertaining because it is spontaneous, because it is staged differently than the more calculated performances of everyday interaction, and because he brackets his involvement in it. Readers do not have to bracket their involvement with the scene Tom enjoys, or with the scene of which he is a part, in order to enjoy it. The

aesthetic distance from which they regard the characters allows them to engage emotionally with the characters in ways that do not have the same kind of consequences as those incurred by the characters' emotional involvement with one another. The novel's depiction of the characters' behavior, however, encourages readers to compare the responses for which aesthetic distance allows with those demanded by the kind of real world relationships portrayed in the novel.

Chapter Four: The Ideals of *Mansfield Park*

I. High Standards and Sincere Social Role Playing

This chapter examines Fanny's behavior during the private theatricals and how it might be judged, especially in comparison with the behavior of the other characters. The novel's focus on her struggles to behave as she ought to during the episode highlights her failures to live up to the standards typical of a heroine in a marriage comedy as well as those that she sets for herself. The episode of the private theatricals thus amplifies the tension between *Mansfield Park*'s two plots. As the heroine of a marriage comedy, Fanny is expected to become more central within the fictional world. The novel's characterization of Fanny as excessively humble and morally demanding suggests that this centrality could be achieved in two related ways. In order to be valued by others, she must learn to value herself, either by the others' standards or by her own.[1] The private theatricals and Fanny's refusal to participate in them bring these two sets of standards into direct conflict for the first time. While her refusal to participate indicates that her centrality will not be achieved by adopting the lower standards of the others, it also demonstrates her failures to live up to her own.

My analyses of how the narrative positions readers in relation to Fanny during the episode of the private theatricals allow me to clarify my contribution to discussions of Austen's use of irony and free indirect discourse.[2] *Mansfield Park*'s double plot structure, as I have explained, encourages readers to hope for and identify with Fanny in complicated,

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[1] Greenfield argues that by the end of the novel everyone but Fanny recognizes her internal values (307).

[2] For classic discussions of free indirect style, see Banfield (*Unspeakable*), who analyzes the unique linguistic features of free indirect discourse. Also see Cohn's still influential typology of ways of representing consciousness, *Transparent Minds*. This typology has been modified and challenged, especially by cognitive narratology. See Herman's collection for historical and cognitive approaches to representing consciousness which emphasize the similarities between approaches to fictional and real-world minds.

sometimes conflicting, ways. The narrative, furthermore, uses irony and free indirect discourse to position readers at various distances from its characters. Irony is often associated with distance and free indirect discourse with proximity. Austen uses both techniques in a variety of ways, often combining them to give readers insight into a character's mind while also indicating the character's shortcomings.[3]

My argument that *Mansfield Park* positions readers to be active is not, as I have shown, unique. The uniqueness of my claim resides instead, first, in the kinds of judgment I show at work within the world of the novel and, second, in my explanation of how the novel's plot structure and narrative techniques challenge readers to exercise their own judgment in relation not only to the novel, but also to its possible relevance to their own lives. Irony and free indirect discourse are central to this challenge. Because of how they manipulate the distance between readers and characters, these techniques potentially change the operative standards of judgments. *Mansfield Park*, I argue, not only asks readers to judge Fanny's judgments, but also complicates the grounds on which they might do so by offering different kinds of perspectives on Fanny's judgments.[4]

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[3] Booth's discussion of *Emma* in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* characterizes Austen's technique as a brilliant solution to the artistic problem that Austen set herself in this novel, namely, a faulty but sympathetic heroine (243). See also Fletcher and Monterosso for a cognitive approach to free indirect discourse that challenges recent associations between free indirect discourse and empathy and seeks to avoid scientific reduction of literary richness, instead showing how scientific reduction can describe literary variety. They identify a type of free indirect discourse used by Austen that shares Adam Smith's concepts of empathy, indirect writing, and self-restraint. Austen, they argue, often uses free indirect discourse not to promote empathy with her characters but instead to satirize them in a way that discourages readers from making the same mistakes. Spencer situations Austen in relation to preceding and contemporary women writers, characterizing free indirect discourse as women's writing.
[4] François's analyses of free indirect style and third person narration in *Mansfield Park* focus on free indirect style's elusiveness, on "reflective judgments that barely pause to distinguish themselves from the 'unconcerned' progress of narrative report" (225). François's focus on experiences that elude articulation emphasizes how the narrator exposes the limitations of both Fanny's self-knowledge and her virtue (see especially 224-227). Her subtle reading,

Fanny's feelings for Edmund compromise the impartiality of her judgment most explicitly during the private theatricals, and, after his capitulation, she abandons her attempts to judge rightly. Readers sympathetic to Fanny might not judge her more harshly at this point than they have previously; but they might, nevertheless, be influenced by several issues almost certain to affect the judgment of readers already unsympathetic to Fanny. I have already mentioned that readers who do not accept the objections raised to the private theatricals within the fictional world are likely to react negatively to Fanny's refusal to act. Fanny's motives in refusing to act are, furthermore, somewhat compromised. Her eventual participation on the periphery of rehearsals invites the question of how true to Sir Thomas's wishes her behavior actually is. While the narrator singles her out as the only person in a position to appreciate aesthetically the acting, her capacity to do so is complicated by the social nature of the private theatricals as well as by her emotional involvement with the actors. Finally, she gets credit within the fictional world for a refusal to act that she does not entirely maintain. Fanny's failures to live up to her ideals during the episode of the private theatricals thus challenge sympathetic and unsympathetic readers' judgments of her. How do Fanny's failures compare to those of Edmund? How do they compare to those of Mary, Henry, and Maria? Having high standards does not prevent Fanny from falling short of them, but it does, the novel suggests, mitigate rather than aggravate the severity of her mistakes. Though her insistence on high standards emphasizes her failures to meet them, the very attempt to live up to high standards, I argue, is favorable to eschewing them completely.

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however, is attentive to Austen's "relaxed tone" which "implies that, whatever the falseness of Fanny's excessively conscientious feelings, Austen is not going to disown her heroine for a hypocrisy she does not even recognize; she, unlike many critics to follow, takes Fanny's inconsistencies in stride" (227).

At the same time, standards might be so high that no one could ever live up to them, and such a morality could strike readers as insufferable precisely because impossible.

Before discussing in more detail how Fanny behaves during the episode of the private theatricals, I need to clarify her attitude towards social role-playing. Fanny shares Edmund's idea of conduct and takes seriously Mansfield Park's insistence on sincere social performances. Her eagerness to please together with her good sense and Edmund's guidance make Fanny's attitude toward sincere performances very different from that of the Miss Bertrams. The failures of their parents and Mrs. Norris to teach the latter the good principles that promise good conduct lead instead to their mistaking manners for conduct. In fact, their aunt's constant praise encourages their ignorance of their shortcomings. Fanny, by contrast, is often criticized by her aunt Norris, the Miss Bertrams, and herself.

Mrs. Norris first thought of bringing Fanny to Mansfield Park in order to appear generous, yet treats her as if she has no real right to be there. The Miss Bertrams, under the influence of their aunt, look down on Fanny for lacking their accomplishments and opportunities. Fanny accepts the low status her aunt and cousins impose, but this acceptance does not prevent her from holding herself to the high standards of Mansfield Park.[5] Unlike the Miss Bertrams, she constantly examines the feelings and motivations behind her behavior. The low opinion that the Miss Bertrams, Mrs. Norris, and Fanny herself have of her worth contributes to her willingness to find that she falls short of her own standards. Whereas the combination of Mansfield Park's high standards and high self-esteem discourages the Miss Bertrams' self-reflection, the combination of high standards and low self-esteem encourage Fanny to acknowledge, and attempt to correct, discrepancies between herself and those standards.

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[5] See Goffman's discussion of idealization (34-51 and passim).

In her social performances at Mansfield Park, Fanny tries to live up to the high standards that she knows she does not always embody.[6] Readers are shown not only Fanny's attempts to live up to these standards, but also ways in which she is sometimes unaware of her failures. The combination of her attempted sincerity and these failures to uncover her own motives turns some readers against her. Few prefer the Miss Bertrams' obliging ignorance to Fanny's imperfect sincerity, but many sympathize more easily with Mary's acknowledged cynicism than with what they judge to be Fanny's hypocrisy.[7]

II. Real vs. Aesthetic Distances in Social Positioning

The tendencies, discussed in the previous chapter, to read *Mansfield Park* in terms of theatricality stem in part from the parallels between Fanny's refusal to act in the play and her refusal, or inability, to act, or take responsibility for her inevitable actions, in the life of Mansfield Park. Fanny's refusal to act stems from various motives.[8] Though she begins to examine these motives, she abandons her self-examination in response to Edmund's decision to act in the play. When Fanny is urged to take the part in *Lovers' Vows* for which she is needed, Edmund, in his only active support, defends her right to "'choose for herself'" (103) and recommends her judgment, as such that "'may be quite as safely trusted'" (103) as any of the rest of theirs. Part of Fanny's abhorrence of acting has to do with her

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[6] Wainwright reads Fanny's failures of judgment as failures to meet a Lockean ideal of self-examination espoused by Austen.

[7] Positive judgments of Fanny in comparison with Mary are further challenged during the private theatricals by the narrative's presentation of Mary's selfless kindness to Fanny when the latter is urged to act, including her suggestion that Mrs. Grant take the part for which Fanny is wanted. Mary's befriending of Fanny will soon be exposed, however, as motivated by her desire to impress Edmund. I will discuss the narrative's treatment of their friendship in Chapter Five.

[8] Marshall discusses Fanny's preference for remaining a spectator, associating her perspective with the picturesque. This very perspective, claims Marshall, inscribes Fanny in theatrical relations and "may frame her own sentiments as theater" (75).

unwillingness to permit herself the same rights that the others take for granted and to rely as certainly on her judgment as Edmund does here. Fanny is overwhelmed by the requests that she participate because of her self-conception, especially the problematic aesthetic distance she places between herself and her cousins.

The narrator's description of Fanny's reaction to the "attack from her cousin Tom, so public and so persevered in" (105), emphasizes the similar discomfort caused by her being the center of attention in the drawing room and her possibly acting on stage. When Tom calls to Fanny that "'we want your services,'" she is "up in a moment, expecting some errand, for the habit of employing her in that way was not yet overcome, in spite of all that Edmund could do" (102). Fanny habitually hovers around the periphery of the household's action, observing and assisting. She would much rather be called upon to run an errand than be called to the attention of the others in the drawing room, let alone be asked to participate in the play. Although Tom wants "her services" (102) in the play in the same way that he would want her to run him an errand, the request to act in the play coincides for Fanny with being asked to participate in the activities of the household in a way to which she is unaccustomed. She is used to serving as an observer rather than as a participant, and she abhors attention. Though her acquiescence to their request would not change Fanny's status in her cousins' eyes, it would challenge Fanny's own conception of her position. Being forced onto a literal stage would require Fanny to acknowledge her participation on the figurative stage of her cousins' lives rather than on its sidelines. They see her as having a bit part on both stages, while she insists that she remains altogether offstage.[9]

[9] See Litvak, Marshall, and Lott for discussions of the impossibility of not acting. Garson links this impossibility not with the performativity of identity, but instead, the practical problem of displaying modesty (134).

The narrator gives Fanny's later reflections on what passed in the drawing room in an anaphora describing the successive reasons for Fanny's suffering:

> To be called into notice in such a manner, to hear that it was but the prelude to something 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…(105)

Tom's request makes Fanny uncomfortable because it simultaneously alters and reinforces her habitual position on the periphery. Although she is not used to being made the center of attention, she is used to obliging the wishes of her cousins. They ask her to participate in the play just as they would ask her to fetch something, but the request demands not only that she oblige their wishes, but also that she enter into a public and central sphere that she is uncomfortable sharing with them. To someone like Fanny who does not fully perceive herself as an actor in the world she inhabits, acting on stage is almost inconceivable.

Fanny's immediate response to the request that she act gives way to doubt and self-reflection, mental activities that Fanny performs in the seclusion of the East room.[10] The East room, formerly the schoolroom of the house, is a place of safety for Fanny, where she can physically and emotionally get away from "anything unpleasant below" (106). There she can "find immediate consolation in some pursuit, or some train of thought at hand" (106).

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[10] The East room figures prominently in many readings of the novel. For example, see I. Armstrong, whose interest in how the novel questions the dependence of servants and women leads her to interpret Fanny's "silent appropriation of this space" as a "standing demonstration of both the thoughtlessness and neglect with which she is treated by the Bertrams and her own vindication of her identity and worth" (51). Garson identifies the East room as a conventional representation of a heroine's sanctuary, but notes that it is never dramatized as the comforting place readers are told that it is. This discrepancy, argues Garson, is due to Austen's awareness of the limits of inner resources (129-30). Emsley associates the East room with Fanny's philosophical mind, as giving her a place to think (127).

The East room affords Fanny with both distance from her worries and ways to gain a different perspective on their causes. To Fanny, "everything [in the East room] was a friend, or bore her thoughts to a friend" (106). The memories and thoughts inspired by these objects combine suffering with consolation, "and the whole was now so blended together, so harmonized by distance, that every former affliction had its charm" (106).[11] From the perspective of the East room, the ups and downs of Fanny's daily life at Mansfield Park are resolved into a balanced picture. The temporal, spatial, and emotional distance from which Fanny composes this picture makes it possible, the narrator suggests, for Fanny's negative experiences to be balanced by positive ones.

The harmonious picture that Fanny creates from the removed vantage point of the East room is an aesthetisization of her past. This aesthetic distance, like that which Fanny places between herself and her cousins, is not disinterested: both kinds of aesthetic distance are influenced by Fanny's feelings for Edmund. Each, however, involves her high standards in a unique way. The harmonizing distance of the East room is a more productive perspective for Fanny than that bolstered by the aesthetic distance that she places between herself and her cousins. With the latter, her commitment to humility and selflessness amounts to a denial of Fanny's real relationship with and responsibilities to her cousins. The

[11] Valihora quotes this passage in characterizing the picturesque heroine, Fanny, as associated with memory. The harmonizing action of her memory, argues Valihora, suggests aesthetic distance. This aesthetic distance affords a perspective that "orders a whole" (295). This kind of aesthetic distance is not, however, disinterested. Bevan identifies "associative memory" as one of Fanny's most important qualities and argues that, in this scene, memory functions "to blend together events, people, possessions, and emotional experience into a totality of harmonious experience" (600). For Bevan, this harmonious blending is the basis of how Fanny defines herself in harmony with her world, and is contrasted to the Crawford's attempts to define themselves through the imposition of fictions onto reality. Lynch, in contrast, interprets Fanny's harmonizing perspective as a sad idealization, one Austen exposes in her intentionally challenging portrayal of interiority. Lynch also links Fanny's harmonizing perspective with a nostalgic reading of Austen that her 2016 annotated edition of *Mansfield Park* attempts to dispel (4-5).

former, by contrast, idealizes her past as a whole so that the times which she had been defended or encouraged, in particular, the times which "Edmund had been her champion and her friend…or had given her some proof of affection which made her tears delightful" (106), balance out the instances of her being "misunderstood," "disregarded," "under-valued," and the "pains of tyranny, of ridicule, and neglect" (106).

In listening to her cousins' stories about attending balls, Fanny attempts to occupy humbly her low position in the Bertram household by imposing an aesthetic distance between herself and her cousins that actually obscures her own dangerous feelings for Edmund and prevents any desire to join her cousins' gaieties. This aesthetic distance idealizes her cousins by denying any shared reality; they become characters instead of being real people who affect and can be affected by her. The harmonizing distance of the East room from which Fanny views her past idealizes in a different way. This distance deemphasizes the faults of others and how they have affected Fanny not in order to deny their shared reality, but instead to see this reality in its best, its ideal, light. Fanny remembers her suffering in the abstract, but recalls concrete instances of the kindness of particular people.[12] Her emphasis on the times when others have lived up to her ideals allows her to live up to them as well in constructing a harmonized picture of her past. In constructing this picture, she accepts her position with humility and forgiveness.

The contrast between the problematic aesthetic distance Fanny imposes between herself and her cousins and the more productive aesthetic distance she achieves in the East room is suggestive of the importance of distinguishing clearly between the real and the

[12] Duane reads this scene differently, interpreting Fanny as having learned that pleasure depends on pain (409). Canuel also emphasizes pain in his reading of Fanny's behavior in the East room, specifically her desire to take on the guilt of the participants in the play (139-40).

represented. Aesthetisization and idealization need not, and cannot, be limited to interactions with representations; but aesthetisization and idealization become dangerous if one ignores the conditions of reality, i.e., the effects that one's behavior has on others.[13] The idealized picture that Fanny creates of her past helps her to feel and behave as she believes she ought to. This idealization may cause her disappointment if her future does not conform to her harmonized picture of the past, but it will also help her overcome this disappointment as she moves forward. The aesthetic distance she places between herself and her cousins, by contrast, denies her real feelings and situation and exacerbates the difficulties she tries to avoid.[14]

III. Understanding One's Motives and Compromising One's Standards

How is Fanny's aesthetic idealization of her present and her past related to the idealization involved in her attitude towards social role-playing? When taken to Mansfield Park, Fanny is put in a new social setting with new rules. In learning these rules, Fanny has taken Sir Thomas and Edmund's high standards as seriously as she has taken Mrs. Norris's insistence on her lowly position. She strives to make her inner reality conform to an idealized self, a principled, selfless, and complaisant self. Fanny, like Edmund, does not always live up to the standards she espouses. The narrative exposes her failures, however, while at the same

[13] One might object that all aesthetisization and idealization involves representations rather than reality. Granting this objection, I am interested in the distinction between representations that have a fictional status and those that directly correspond to some reality.
[14] The stakes of ignoring the conditions of representation are not as high as those of ignoring the conditions of reality. Readers who disregard Fanny's status as a fictional character, however, are likely to miss the richness of the aesthetic experience afforded by the novel, an aesthetic experience created by a tension between realism and idealism. I will return to this claim below.

time privileging her idealization over the Miss Bertrams', Henry's, and ultimately, Mary's, pursuits of self-interest.

In Sir Thomas's absence, the difference between Fanny's conception of his high standards and his children's attitude (excepting Edmund's) towards them becomes clear. When she is urged to take part in the private theatricals, the standards that Fanny has internalized come into conflict with those acted upon by her cousins. This conflict is particularly difficult for Fanny because it pits her conception of her social position against the demands of her standards. The necessity of obliging her cousins conflicts with the compulsion of doing what she believes is right.

Fanny's reaction to the request that she act forms an interesting comparison with Edmund's justification of his capitulation. On the morning after having been urged to act, Fanny goes to the East room to calm her emotions and to examine her motives, as "she had begun to feel undecided as to what she *ought to do*" (107). Like Edmund, Fanny is torn among different sets of expectations. They both contend with the external pressure of the others, the high standards that they have internalized from Sir Thomas, and personal desires that they are more or less willing to acknowledge. Though both Fanny and Edmund consider themselves as thinking primarily of Sir Thomas and behaving according to his standards, the different ways that each weighs the available options deemphasizes the importance of his certain disapproval of any sort of private theatricals.

Edmund claims to choose a lesser evil without acknowledging the influence of his feelings for Mary on his interpretation of his options. When Edmund considers joining the scheme a possibility, he ignores that this option means going against his father's wishes. Even if he succeeds in limiting the scheme, he still does so by participating in something he considers wrong. Fanny also brackets Sir Thomas's certain disapproval in weighing the

claims of her cousins against her own decision not to act. Her guilt at "refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for" by "those to whom she owed the greatest complaisance" (107) momentarily overshadows her certainty that she is doing what Sir Thomas would want her to do. In weighing the claims of her cousins, she already pits their desires against her own. Because of the complaisance she feels that she owes them and her strong fear of acting, she questions whether her refusal is actually "ill-nature – selfishness – and a fear of exposing herself" (107). Though Fanny believes that her cousins are behaving badly, their pressure to join them makes her question the reasons behind her refusal.[15] Fanny is suspicious of the coincidence between her terror of acting and her judgment that it would be wrong to do so. This coincidence and her cousins' claims make it difficult for Fanny to clarify the reality behind the social performance she has given. "It would be so horrible to her to act," the narrator specifies, "that she was inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples" (107). Her personal preference is so strong that she questions the motives behind the refusal of which she is sure Sir Thomas would approve.[16]

Because Edmund does not acknowledge any personal benefit of his decision, he is not similarly suspicious of his motives. He makes a case for Mary's claims without ever – so far as readers know – suspecting that he acts selfishly. Though he is uncertain enough of his capitulation to "'want to consult'" (107) with Fanny about his decision to act, he tries to convince her of his position rather than listening to her objections. Edmund, on the one

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[15] Lott reads this line in terms of Fanny's dependent position and the struggle it causes between appearing as a subject and disappearing under social constraint (278).
[16] Duane reads this questioning as part of the "paradoxical logic of masochism" at work at Mansfield Park in which the pain caused by a demand justifies the demand (410). Miller notes the consequences of the coincidence between Fanny's moral judgment and her personal preference, asking whether Fanny's "suspicions merely prove that there is nothing to suspect in so scrupulous a mind? Or do they in fact invite us to suspect – to push our suspicions even beyond Fanny's?" (56).

hand, lets his feelings for Mary influence his decision in a way that he perhaps never entirely acknowledges. Fanny, on the other hand, knowingly lets her feelings for Edmund, her disappointment and jealousy when he decides to act, overwhelm her previous attempts to decipher her motives or to think about how to behave as her ideal self in the current situation. The narrator ends chapter sixteen with Fanny's inner response to Edmund's decision:

> To be acting! After all his objections—objections so just and so public! After all that she had 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. The doubts and alarms as to her own conduct, which had previously distressed her, and which had all slept while she listened to him, were become of little consequence now. This deeper anxiety swallowed them up. Things should take their course; she cared not how it ended. 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*. (110)

Fanny convicts Edmund of the inconsistency that he claims is only superficial. Does her certainty that Edmund is wrong come from her certainty of Mary's influence or her certainty that refusal is the correct course of action? Even before she explicitly gives up all pursuit of right and wrong, Fanny conflates a personal and emotional response with a moral judgment in the same way that she was trying to avoid before Edmund interrupted her. How readers judge Fanny depends upon whether and how they identify and sympathize with her, a

process the narrative complicates by presenting her thoughts from various distances, moving in and out of free indirect speech.[17]

The rhythm and tone of the beginning of this passage suggest Fanny's struggle, in her own thoughts, as she tries to fathom Edmund's decision. The exclamations "to be acting!" and "Alas!"; the repetition of "his objections-objections so just and so public;" and the fragments and questions leading up to the sticking point for Fanny: "it was all Miss Crawford's doing" indicate Fanny's own thoughts given in free indirect speech.[18] Then a calmer, more narratorial, voice steps in to describe the primary cause of Fanny's distress ("She [Fanny] had seen her [Mary's] influence in every speech, and was miserable"), and its effect: now that Edmund has capitulated, Fanny no longer cares about examining her own behavior. The narrator details how "the doubts and alarms as to her own conduct" are first overwhelmed by Edmund's announcement, and then "become of little consequence. This deeper anxiety swallowed them up." The narrator, not Fanny, clarifies the relationships among Fanny's worries about her own behavior, her jealousy of Mary, and her

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[17] Hough characterizes Austen's "mixed style" (particularly in *Emma*) as comprised of "continual slight shifts in the point of view" (210), differentiating mainly between what he calls objective narration, coloured narrative, and free indirect style. Moving among these styles, argues Hough, delineates a fixed value-system against which the characters' thoughts and actions may be evaluated. Though much of Hough's analysis of this changing point of view is compelling, he overstates, I think, the unambiguous nature of objective narration in Austen and its reliance on real-world values.

[18] Pollack-Pelzner cites this passage in arguing that many of Austen's techniques for "representing interior reflections" derive from the Lambs' prose translations of Shakespeare, *Tales of Shakespeare* (770-1). He makes this claim not to detract from Austen's reputation as an originator of free indirect speech, but to tell an interesting story about the novel's development of interiority, a development Pollack-Pelzner connects to drama. Pollack-Pelzner points to the same "questions and exclamations…fragments…intensifying adverbs and phrases that turn back on each other" that I specify above, claiming that they "situate us inside Fanny's upset and obsessive mind" (771). While Pollack-Pelzner emphasizes the dramatic intensity of Austen's use of free indirect speech here, I am interested in how readers might respond to this proximity to Fanny, a proximity that is complicated by the way the narrative moves in and out of free indirect speech as well as by the different expectations of Fanny encouraged by the novel's two plots.

disappointment in Edmund. The description of these relationships moves out of Fanny's head, giving readers a different perspective on her emotions, one with the potential to elicit more sympathy or harsher condemnation than Fanny's own shocked thoughts. Are readers sympathetic to Fanny's experience of this "deeper anxiety" or unsympathetic to how it "swallows up" her self-doubt, (self-doubt itself for which readers may be more or less sympathetic)?

Next, the passage lapses subtly back into Fanny's perspective: "Things should take their course" comes from her point of view rather than an external perspective which describes or comments. Indeed, it would be odd for the narrator to comment so vaguely on the course of events in this way. Only a semi-colon separates Fanny's expression of resignation from the third-person, "she cared not how it ended," which could be the narrator's description or Fanny's own "I care not" rendered in free indirect speech.[19]

The passage (and chapter) ends with what, surely by the last clause if not before, must be Fanny's own thoughts, resurrecting her just-abandoned concern about having to act only to dismiss it again as newly irrelevant: "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*." The strength of "attack;" the wavering between resignation ("she was beyond their reach" and the interjected, "no matter") and anxiety ("at last obliged to yield"); and the italics of "*now*" all suggest Fanny's own expression of misery, misery caused by her disappointment in Edmund as both moral and personal ideal.

[19] While I lean towards the latter reading, I do not venture to make a strong case for one or the other. Instead, what matters for my analysis are the passage's subtle changes of perspective, especially how they relate to the other ways in which the novel complicates readers' interest in and judgment of Fanny.

This movement in and out of characters' thoughts and perspectives is part of what characterizes Austen's use of free indirect speech. Here, readers are invited into the turbulence of Fanny's emotions, from disappointment in her ideal, Edmund, to blame and jealousy of her rival, Mary. But, the passage then shifts from the dramatic and internal description of Fanny's "miserable" state to a more measured, presumably external, view of Fanny's consequent shifting of priorities (from examining her own conduct to despairing over Edmund's). The final three sentences of the passage move back from description to expression of Fanny's state upon hearing of Edmund's decision to act. The effects on readers of this movement in and out of Fanny's thoughts as she responds to both moral and romantic disappointment depend on their willingness to feel along with her and the standards they invoke in judging her. Fanny is the only character who is shown to examine her motives in this way, who attempts to disentangle her emotional inner reality from the representation of an ideal self. Readers sympathetic to Fanny are likely to let her attempt outweigh her abandonment of it, while readers unsympathetic to her tend to find the very attempt annoying in its moralizing humility, or condemn her hypocritical abandonment of it as worse than not having tried at all.

Fanny's feeling that the "deeper anxiety" caused by Edmund's capitulation puts her "beyond [her cousins'] reach" (110) imposes a new kind of distance between herself and her world. Fanny went to the East room to "try its influence on an agitated, doubting spirit – to see if by looking at Edmund's profile she could catch any of his counsel, or by giving air to her geraniums she might inhale a breeze of mental strength herself" (107). She goes there not only to achieve the kind of harmonizing perspective the room gives her on the past, but also to gain access to her ideal self, primarily through thinking of Edmund's counsel. Instead, "as she looked around her, the claims of her cousins to being obliged, were strengthened by

the sight of present upon present that she had received from them" (107)[20] and then Edmund himself enters not to give her counsel, but rather receive approval for his inconsistent reasoning, which he can perceive as little as he can admit Mary's influence. Instead of providing her with a harmonizing perspective and helping her establish what is "*right*" (107), the East room highlights the immediate claims of her cousins rather than the more distant and general claims of Sir Thomas, and it now becomes the setting for an experience even worse than the one that she suffered in the drawing room the night before. Both the man she hopelessly loves and a moral standard have disappointed her. In response, Fanny thinks of herself as so emotionally compromised as to no longer care about either her moral standards or her fear of acting. The emotional distance that Fanny puts between herself and her cousins is no longer aesthetic; rather, it now distances her from her moral standards and her idealized self. It is not, however, so easy for Fanny to maintain such a distance from her fear of acting or from her emotional and social involvements with the actors.

The narrator agrees with Fanny's distrust of Edmund's motives, describing his and Mary's mutual satisfaction in his decision as "very sweet, if not very sound" (111). But Fanny's correctness, having already been compromised by her emotional response to Edmund's decision, is even more compromised by her reaction to being the only one not involved in the private theatricals. Upset by being obliged to Mary for saving her from having to act by suggesting that Mrs. Grant take the part for which she was wanted, and "wretched" at Edmund's happiness under the decision that she cannot "acquit," Fanny is

[20] Cleere interprets the East room in economic terms, noting that Fanny's occupation of the room "confirms her social displacement" and that the objects in the room remind her of the debt she owes the Bertrams and is obligated to repay through domestic labor (117).

"full of jealousy and agitation" (111). Having previously described how Fanny gives up pursuing her doubts about her own behavior, the narrator here describes Fanny's inability to "feel that she had done wrong herself" (111), her certainty of Edmund's mistake,[21] and the negative effects which her knowledge of the reasons for this mistake have on her attitude towards Mary and towards her own peripheral position. The narrator exposes not only Fanny's jealousy, but also, and more importantly, an anger at being unimportant that contradicts both the moral high ground of Fanny's refusal to participate and the low opinion of her worth about which she is usually so insistent:

> Miss Crawford came with looks of gaiety which seemed an insult, with friendly expressions towards herself which she could hardly answer calmly. Every body around her was gay and busy, prosperous and important, each had their object of interest, their part, their dress, their favourite scene, their friends and confederates, all were finding employment in consultations and comparisons, or diversion in the playful conceits they suggested. 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. (111)

The same Fanny that listened raptly to stories of her cousins' pleasures at balls, as if these were tales of a world separated from her own by an unbridgeable aesthetic distance, now languishes at being left out of something in which she is constitutionally unequipped to participate and which she moreover judges as wrong. The passage, furthermore, presents the activities of those around her from Fanny's perspective, but in balanced listing ("gay and busy," "prosperous and important," "their...their...their...their") that suggests both a calmness it explicitly undermines and an unbearable piling up of things from which Fanny

[21] "…her heart and her judgment were equally against Edmund's decision" (111)

feels excluded. Though the final sentence maintains the rhythm of repeated conjunctions, it shifts from the "and"s of the first sentence's description of the gaiety of the others to the "or"s describing Fanny's superfluousness. Readers unsympathetic to Fanny cannot forgive this lapse in her usual, and somewhat problematic, insistence on her unimportance. Her compromised certainty that she is right to refuse and the rest are wrong to participate does little to comfort her, and instead she longs to be involved in the activity of which she disapproves.

Readers who condemn Fanny as hypocritical are not likely to be appeased by the narrator's assurance that "reflection brought better feelings, and shewed [Fanny] that Mrs. Grant was entitled to respect, which could never have belonged to *her*, and that had she received even the greatest, she could never have been easy in joining a scheme which, considering only her uncle, she must condemn altogether" (111). After the surprising request that she act, Fanny weighed the claims of her cousins against her own preference; and, after having experienced jealousy at not being included, Fanny weighs the claims of Sir Thomas against her own desire for respect, comforting herself by reasserting the absoluteness of two circumstances about which she has doubted: her lack of entitlement to respect and the force of Sir Thomas's disapproval of the private theatricals. Fanny's reassertion of the lowliness of her personal claims, together with the rightness of her refusal, cannot satisfy readers who want Fanny, as a heroine, either to possess more assertive and charming qualities or to be more assertive and steadfast in her good judgment. Readers sympathetic to Fanny's attempts to be both good and lowly are more likely to forgive her jealousy and emotional response to Edmund's decision.

Fanny's problematic refusal to act highlights the tension between *Mansfield Park*'s marriage plot and its focus on Fanny's emotions, perspectives, and judgments. As the

heroine of a marriage comedy, Fanny would generally either occupy a central position in her fictional world or be peripheral in a way that reinforces the qualities that inspire hopes for her happy ending. Instead, the novel problematizes how Fanny occupies her peripheral position. The depiction of Fanny's early aesthetisized perspective on social life at Mansfield Park emphasized her timidity as well as the influence of her feelings for Edmund on her conceptualization of her position on the periphery of the action. The episode of the private theatricals exposes her failure to control her inappropriate feelings for Edmund as well as the effect of her emotions on her moral standards. The novel's focus on Fanny, its invitations to readers both to sympathize and to empathize with her, are complicated by its exposures of her failures, on the one hand, to be a more typical marriage comedy heroine, and, on the other hand, to be the kind of person that she strives to be. Fanny's refusal to participate in the private theatricals exhibits both kinds of failures. I will return below to the questions these failures raise about the relationship between the distance from which readers regard Fanny and their judgments of her as well as of the novel.

IV. Observing Theatrical vs. Social Acting

After Fanny refuses to act, abandons her self-examination, and struggles with jealousy of the participants in the play, she resumes her role on the periphery of the action at Mansfield Park. This action, however, now includes theatrical as well as social role-playing. How does Fanny's role on the periphery of the private theatricals compare to her earlier role as observer of her cousins' gaieties and her more recent role as jealous outsider? How does her peripheral participation in rehearsals compromise her refusal to act in the play? What is the nature of Fanny's aesthetic enjoyment of the rehearsals and on what type of distance does this enjoyment rely? The narrator singles Fanny out as the only character capable of

appreciating the acting aesthetically. Though in one sense, aesthetic appreciation is the only appropriate response to a play, the way in which the play is put on at Mansfield Park makes it an inappropriate object of aesthetic appreciation. Fanny's complicated distance from the actors, I argue, compromises both her aesthetic appreciation of their performances and the moral status of her refusal to join them.

Before Edmund's decision to join the private theatricals, Fanny observed her cousins' attempts to choose a play without concern. As they fought over which play to choose, "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. For her own gratification she could have wished that something might be acted, for she had never seen even half a play, but every thing of higher consequence was against it" (93).[22] The narrator here juxtaposes Fanny's peripheral position in the household, her desire to see a play, and her principled opposition to the private theatricals. Her amusement at the selfishness displayed by the others emphasizes the personal and emotional disinterestedness with which she observes them. Fanny's lack of emotional or personal involvement makes her as distant from her cousins' squabbles as she would be from any scenes they represent.[23] Fanny does, however, distinguish between her personal gratification and considerations of "higher consequence" (93) in a way that the early participants in the private theatricals do not.

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[22] Fanny's amused observation of this selfish behavior can be compared to the disinterested observer's amusement of Mary's blunder at Sotherton. For a different reading of these lines, see Despotopoulou, who sees them as an example of the "more penetrating" "feminine angle of vision" (579) that Fanny represents.

[23] This stance forms an interesting comparison with Tom's contention, discussed in Chapter Three, that conversing in the words of a playwright can be no worse than everyday social conversation. While Tom puts the play into the same realm as everyday social interaction, Fanny puts everyday social interaction into an aesthetisized realm such as that of a play.

As I discussed above, Fanny cannot maintain the same personal and emotional distance from the others when she is asked, and even less after Edmund agrees, to participate in the private theatricals. Instead of observing from an aesthetisized distance, she first struggles with her reasons for refusing to oblige her cousins' request and then feels excluded from their happy activity. She is able, however, to become less jealous by reasserting both her lowly position and her objections to the scheme. The changing situation that Fanny observes, furthermore, aids her internal efforts to quell her emotional response to what she sees. Fanny's observation, first, of Julia's suffering from Henry's preference for Maria, and, second, of the troubles among the actors, helps her come to terms with her peripheral role. Instead of feeling excluded, she begins to feel useful. In returning to her habitual role of helper, she forgets that she aids an activity to which she has objected so vehemently and on such incontrovertible grounds as Sir Thomas's certain disapproval.

The narrator reminds readers of Fanny's initial jealousy in noting that "she had not to witness the continuance of such unanimity and delight as had been almost too much for her at first. Every body began to have their vexation" (114). This universal vexation helps change Fanny's position on the periphery of the action from jealous outsider to sympathetic listener. She, "being always a very courteous listener, and often the only listener at hand, came in for the complaints and the distresses of most of them" (114). Because Fanny does not act herself, she can listen to the complaints of all the actors without the interest a fellow participant would feel. On the one hand, this lack of involvement makes her the perfect audience for the complaints of the actors. On the other hand, listening to their complaints involves her enough in their activities to banish her jealousy. In banishing her jealousy, this feeling of peripheral involvement also seemingly banishes her objections to the private theatricals. Her moral stand against the private theatricals has removed Fanny from life at

Mansfield Park more completely than she could bear. She fails to examine her moral as well as her social position as she reestablishes her role on the periphery of her cousins' lives. Should Fanny's disapproval of the scheme prevent her from comforting the participants?

Fanny becomes an audience not only to the social action surrounding the private theatricals, but also to the theatrical acting supposedly at their center. Once the rehearsals have begun, Fanny "believe[s] herself to derive as much innocent enjoyment from the play as any of them" (115).[24] This pronouncement immediately follows the details of everyone's vexations. Both the enjoyment and the innocence of the participants have been somewhat undermined, and certainly do not set a high standard for comparison. The narrator's use of "believe" here imposes a potentially ironic distance between what Fanny believes and what the narrator, and reader (should she choose to follow the narrator), believe about what Fanny believes. This ironic use of "believe" raises questions about both Fanny's innocent enjoyment and her perspective on her own feelings.

What kind of innocent enjoyment can any of them take in the play? I have already discussed the self-interested social enjoyment motivating the more innocent participants in the play, as well as the self-interested romantic enjoyment motivating the less innocent participants. Fanny's position as an audience member rather than a participant raises the possibility of aesthetic enjoyment of the play for the first time.

Although being an actor in the play does not necessarily preclude, but instead merely changes, the type of aesthetic engagement possible with the play, the participants have not decided to stage a play out of any desire to create a successful aesthetic experience, but

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[24] Miller finds this line "wonderfully ambiguous" (56). He emphasizes the contrast between the voice of Fanny's modesty: "we are supposed to know that [Fanny's] enjoyment alone is genuinely innocent," and the more literal meaning raised by the questionable innocence of all the participants, including Fanny (56). Interestingly, he does not explore how the narrator positions readers in relation to these possible readings.

rather out of desires to create pleasurable personal and social experiences. Just as being part of the play does not necessarily preclude aesthetic engagement with it, neither does not being an actor compel one's aesthetic appreciation of the play. Julia is too jealous, her mother too lazy, and her aunt too pecuniarily interested to regard rehearsals aesthetically. Fanny, by contrast, has been trained to enjoy aesthetic pursuits and thinks of herself as doing so when she starts to attend rehearsals. But the social nature of the private theatricals that prevents the participants from engaging aesthetically with their pursuit also qualifies both Fanny's ability and her willingness to enjoy rehearsals aesthetically.

The narrator qualifies Fanny's "innocent enjoyment" of the play by indicating the moral objections and social entanglements that interfere with it, especially as she watches Henry and Maria:

> Henry Crawford acted well, and it was a pleasure to *her* [Fanny] to creep into the theatre, and attend the rehearsal of the first act – in spite of the feelings it excited in some speeches for Maria. – Maria she also thought acted well – too well; – and after the first rehearsal or two, Fanny began to be their only audience – and sometimes as prompter, sometimes as spectator – was often very useful. (115)[25]

The emphasis on the pleasure that Fanny specifically can take in Henry and Maria's rehearsals indicates that the other participants are not in positions to enjoy their rehearsals in the same way. Because she does not act in the play, she does not watch rehearsals with the personal (and possibly aesthetic interest) of a fellow actor. Fanny's "innocent enjoyment" (115) of the rehearsals, however, comes at the expense of ignoring her concern for Maria's behavior. Not only does her aesthetic enjoyment of their rehearsals occur "in spite of the

[25] Urda cites this passage as an example of a place where Austen might have, as her contemporaries often did, shown the scene acted. Austen's choice not to do so, Urda argues, emphasizes true character over superficial performance (292).

feelings it excited in some speeches for Maria" (115), but also her judgment of Maria's acting rests on her knowledge of the real feelings that it expresses rather than on an appreciation of any theatrical ability. Fanny's personal and social relationship with Maria conflicts with her aesthetic pleasure in the rehearsals. This conflict does not, however, prevent her attendance of their rehearsals, let alone her enjoyment of them.

Instead of trying to manipulate aesthetic distance, as do Maria and Henry, or trying to keep separate theatrical and social roles, as does Edmund, Fanny is challenged by the relationship between her social interaction with and responsibility to the actors, on the one hand, and her aesthetic appreciation of their acting or the play that they stage, on the other. The narrator's description of her attendance at Maria and Henry's rehearsals indicates the tensions among her aesthetic appreciation, her awareness of Henry and Maria's problematic use of their theatrical roles, and her habitual social position as an observant helper.

Although Fanny is the only one in any position to appreciate aesthetically Henry and Maria's rehearsing, she is also the only one who both notices and cares about their flirtation (until she is joined in this knowledge and concern by Mr. Rushworth). Instead, however, of preventing her from attending Maria and Henry's rehearsals, she is willing to attend as well as be "useful," "sometimes as prompter, sometimes as spectator" (115).[26] How should Fanny's peripheral involvement in the private theatricals be judged? To what extent do her own social concerns obscure her moral judgments? How might she imagine Sir Thomas judging her involvement and how grievous is it that she fails to perform this imaginative act?

[26] The different ways in which the narrator specifies Fanny's usefulness suggest two types of usefulness. Her usefulness as a prompter helps Henry and Maria get through the scene. Her usefulness as a spectator might be of the same sort, but it might also be useful in limiting the display of impropriety their rehearsals involve. The extent to which Henry and Maria consider Fanny a "non-person" (see Goffman 150) determines her usefulness in this second capacity.

The narrator's depiction of Fanny's behavior during the private theatricals challenges readers' abilities to answer the questions it raises. Readers are told that though Fanny does have "many uncomfortable, anxious, apprehensive feelings" about the private theatricals,

> she was as 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. (116)

Fanny's concerns about her cousins' misbehavior have been obscured by her feelings of jealousy and exclusion, which have in turn been overshadowed by her involvement in the rehearsals of the play. Though she does not discuss her anxieties with anyone, she is comforted by the knowledge that she is not the only sufferer. Her role as listener to and observer of both the social and theatrical acting of the others allows her to feel useful, and the unrest which she experienced after learning of Edmund's decision has given way to a feeling of peace, a feeling which is formulated in a similar way as was her "innocent enjoyment of the play" (115): compared to the unrest and guilt of the others, Fanny's involvement with and enjoyment of the play can be described as peaceful and innocent. But, while Fanny's "innocent enjoyment of the play" was qualified by the narrator's pointing out that this is what Fanny believes, her comparative peace during rehearsals is preceded by a "perhaps." This "perhaps" also introduces a potentially ironic distance by raising the question of who might be able to settle this uncertainty about Fanny's state of peace, and on what basis readers might decide for themselves.

As I discussed in Chapter One, the aesthetic distance that Fanny self-protectively and problematically places between herself and her cousins helps prevent any jealousy of their

advantages before it begins, and denies her romantic feelings for Edmund. Though this aesthetic distance prevented Fanny from entering into her cousins' excitement as they prepared for balls, it does not generally prevent her from making moral judgments about, or entering into the suffering of, those she observes. Both Fanny's concern for the suffering that Henry and Maria's flirtation might cause and her moral judgment of it are, however, suspended by her aesthetic appreciation of their acting and her pleasure in feeling useful. Fanny's insistence on her lowly position in the household and the aesthetic distance that she uses to strengthen it inhibits her ability to take responsibility for her interactions with the Bertrams. This complex attitude contributes to the ease with which she enjoys aesthetically the rehearsals she considers morally problematic. Fanny's desire to be useful to the others does not admit of any possibility of influencing them for the better. Her role as prompter and spectator at Maria and Henry's rehearsals does not remind her of her objections to the whole endeavor; instead, it reinforces her problematic conception of her role in the household as an uninvolved helper, and offers an opportunity for aesthetic enjoyment that would be ruined by a more complete social engagement with the actors.[27]

Readers who blame Fanny for her attitude towards her position in the Bertram household will judge negatively the emotion, moral high ground, and inconsistencies of her attitude towards the private theatricals. Readers who blame the Bertrams and Mrs. Norris for the position in which they put Fanny will be more sympathetic to her troubled attempts to occupy it, as well as to her attempts to distance herself from her own interests. Fanny objects to the private theatricals first, because of Sir Thomas's certain disapproval, and, second, because of the somewhat scandalous situations the real people around her will represent in the play. Once rehearsals begin, however, she cannot help but regard them as the kind of

[27] An engagement, it should be noted, that none of the other characters achieve either.

aesthetic object that she has longed to see, and which "everything of higher consequence" (93) warned her that the private theatricals would not be. Fanny's social involvement with the actors interferes with her enjoyment of the play as a play, while her enjoyment of the play as a play interferes with the standards of social behavior that motivated her objections to the scheme. Neither her aesthetic appreciation nor her moral objection to the private theatricals remains pure.

This picture of Fanny's social, moral, and aesthetic proclivities and mistakes is further complicated by her unwilling involvement in a rehearsal of Edmund and Mary's as well as by her ultimate yielding to the requests that she fill in for Mrs. Grant in the rehearsal prevented by Sir Thomas's unexpected return. Her ability to bracket the feelings aroused by Maria's rehearsals with Henry does not extend to those aroused by the mere idea of Edmund and Mary rehearsing their love scene. The narrator emphasizes Fanny's personal and emotional interest in this scene, characterizing it as one "which interest[s] her most particularly" (116) and the representation of which she looks forward to "as a circumstance almost too interesting" (117). Her personal and emotional interests make Fanny curious and combine "longing" with "dreading to see how they would perform" (117). Fanny both wants to see and fears watching Edmund and Mary perform theatrical roles in which their characters make explicit feelings their actors have not declared: "a marriage of love was to be described by the gentleman, and very little short of a declaration of love be made by the lady" (117).[28] Though Mary, as I have already mentioned, has more subtle means of communicating her feelings than the forwardness favored by her character, Edmund's hopes

[28] Ford notes that Fanny's emotional response to the private theatricals extends to her reaction to the play itself, especially the scene between Edmund and Mary which Fanny cannot interpret at all due to her focus on the real people who will act it.

for her hand rely on her ability to choose a marriage of love over one of material and social advantage.

Fanny's personal and emotional interests in their romance overshadow any aesthetic interest she might take in their performance. She has already characterized Maria as acting "too well" (115) in her character's expressions of affection for the character played by Henry; her curiosity about how Edmund and Mary will perform has to do with whether she will be able to discern their real feelings in their theatrical performances. Before she is given the opportunity to see them together, Fanny is surprised by Mary's request that she herself take Edmund's part in order to help Mary prepare for her performance with him. Mary emphasizes her discomfort at the explicitness of the scene. She wonders to Fanny, "'How am I ever to look him in the face and say such things? Could you do it?'" (117). Without giving Fanny a chance to answer, Mary remembers the familial relationship between Fanny and Edmund and appeals to their similarities in asking Fanny to rehearse with her: "'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'" (117).

Mary's request that Fanny put herself in Mary's position is immediately followed by a denial that their positions are equatable.[29] Fanny's familial relationship to Edmund, supposes Mary, should prevent her from the discomfort that Mary, as a possible match for Edmund, must feel in acting a love scene with him. Even if Mary had no romantic feelings for Edmund, the possibility that they be romantically involved, a possibility supposedly precluded by Fanny's familial relationship, would make the scene uncomfortable. Mary's comment suggests that because Fanny's real relationship with Edmund precludes the

[29] Marshall notes the difficulties and complexities of Fanny's "uncanny embodiment of identity and difference" in this scene, finding "a finely tuned sadism in Mary's disingenuous casting" (77).

romantic relationship theatrically represented, Fanny could not feel the same kind of social discomfort Mary feels in her theatrical role.

Accordingly, Mary shifts from asking Fanny to empathize with her to asking Fanny to represent Edmund.[30] This request strikes Fanny differently than any of the urgings that she play the cottager's wife in the play. The narrator exposes both Mary's intentions and the response aroused in Fanny, saying that once Mary begins the scene, "Fanny join[s] in with all the modest feeling which the idea of representing Edmund was so strongly calculated to inspire; but with looks and voice so truly feminine, as to be no very good picture of a man" (118). Instead of considering the request as one to participate, however privately, in the ill-judged scheme to put on a play, Fanny takes seriously Mary's comparison between herself and Edmund, takes seriously the task of representing the cousin whom she so admires and loves. Instead of imagining how Edmund might feel acting opposite Mary, Fanny's representation of Edmund seems more akin to her imagined ideal of him, an ideal that Fanny uses in her own attempts to be her ideal self.

It is significant that, rather than asking Fanny to represent Anhalt, Mary asks Fanny to represent Edmund, a request to which she correctly calculates Fanny is more susceptible. Mary's request is calculated not only to inspire acquiescence and "modest feeling" (118) in

[30] This request introduces another interesting instance of a character being asked to put oneself in another's position. The idea of putting herself in Mary's position vis-a-vis Edmund is both desirable and unbearable for Fanny. It is desirable insofar as she longs to be in Mary's position of a potential match for Edmund. It is unbearable for two reasons, one having to do with her own position and the other having to do with Mary's: Fanny does not want to put herself in Mary's position because she denies desiring to be in it; she does not want to put herself in Mary's position because she does not want to imagine what Mary must feel as a potential match for Edmund. The idea of representing Edmund could present Fanny with the same problem: she does not want to imagine what she believes he feels for Mary. She does not, however, understand the request in this way, instead thinking of Edmund generally rather than in his particular relationship with Mary.

Fanny, but also to give Mary the opportunity to prepare herself for acting opposite Edmund as Edmund rather than Edmund as Anhalt. Fanny's femininity, however, provides Mary with the same kind of safety that she assumed Fanny's familial relationship with Edmund would provide her.[31] In both cases, the impossibility of a real romance is thought to make the theatrical representation of a romance easier by preventing any overlap between real and represented. While Mary practices quelling the social concerns that impede her theatrical performance with someone who does not arouse them, Fanny's representation of her cousin distracts her from the social concerns that he might have in his theatrical role.

Fanny looks to Edmund as an ideal. Mary's request that she represent Edmund, therefore, focuses Fanny on his abstract qualities and distracts her from examining the theatrical representation of the real romantic feelings that she fears Mary and Edmund have for one another. Edmund's sudden arrival, motivated by the same intentions that Mary has in seeking out Fanny, reawakens Fanny's emotions, forces her to consider his particular feelings for Mary, and returns her to a position on the periphery of their social and theatrical performances. Fanny's emotional involvement prevents her not only from performing the "office of judge and critic" with which she is "invested"(118) by Edmund and Mary, but also from wanting to remain in the peripheral role on which she usually, if problematically, insists.[32]

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[31] M. Anderson also notes that Mary asks Fanny to portray Edmund rather than a character, but argues that this move places the two women into an erotic relation. Anderson also notes that Fanny's participation in this impromptu rehearsal does not sit well with her refusal to act or with her attitude towards private theatricals in general (174-5).

[32] Marshall notes that we may sympathize with Fanny's suffering as she considers Edmund and Mary's performance, but also that readers and Fanny are confronted with her desire for Edmund when she is forced back into the peripheral role on which she problematically insists (81).

The narrator's formulation of the inverse relationship of Fanny's comfort to Edmund and Mary's happiness together, makes explicit Fanny's reaction to how Edmund's entrance changes the dynamic in the room: "*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 having been sought by either. They must now rehearse together" (118). Edmund and Mary's affection excludes Fanny from their interaction more dramatically than she is used to being excluded as a peripheral observer. Their affection turns her into a third wheel, but one whose presence they insist upon so that she may assist their rehearsal. This situation again causes Fanny to feel left out of something of which she insists she wants no part. Instead of observing as if there were no question of her real involvement with what she sees, Fanny observes as someone wanting to be included.[33] The attention Mary and Edmund pay to one another, Fanny feels, makes it impossible for either of them to pay her the attention which each intended to pay to her in seeking her help. The usefulness that she had to each of them is obliterated by the discovery of its coincidence; having found each other seeking Fanny's help, Edmund and Mary no longer need to rehearse with Fanny, and she "was wanted only to prompt and observe them" (118).[34] Fanny's refusal to act in the play again results in the feeling that she is excluded from social life.

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[33] Lott reads Fanny's disappointment at Edmund's arrival as that of being "relegate[ed…once again to the role of spectator," arguing that Fanny does want to "participate in the play" (278). I cannot agree that Fanny actually wants to participate in the play, or that her discomfort when Edmund arrives has to do with not being able to continue reading his part.

[34] This formulation parallels that describing Fanny's participation in Maria and Henry's rehearsals, but while there she was a spectator, only slightly bothered by her personal involvement with the actors, of something she considered a primarily theatrical event, here she is an observer of a social drama, able to pay no attention to her tasks pertaining to the theatrical performance.

Fanny cannot move easily from representing Edmund with Mary to observing them rehearse together. Although she "earnestly desired to exercise [the office of judge and critic] and tell them all their faults," Fanny "could not, would not, dared not attempt it" (118). Fanny's desire to exercise this office, the narrator suggests, is not as a critic of theatre, but rather as a social critic evaluating the behavior of people with whom she shares a world. Emotional and social impulses prevent Fanny from being able to fill the office. "Had [Fanny] been otherwise qualified for criticism," the narrator goes on, "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" (118-9). This description not only compares but even conflates Fanny's lack of theatrical qualifications to be a judge and critic of Edmund and Mary's rehearsal with the lack of disinterestedness that prevents her from being a judge and critic of their behavior. Fanny does not consider herself qualified to judge and criticize Mary and Edmund's rehearsal; her "could not" (118) corresponds to her low opinion of her worth to and claims on others, an opinion that I have argued is challenged by her jealous wishes to be included by them. Fanny's "would not" (118) corresponds to the restraint of her conscience, which prevents her from engaging in an emotionally compromised judgment of their acting or of their behavior. The extent and type of Fanny's disapprobation means that she "dare not" (118) express even the insignificant and particular criticisms of a theatre critic, albeit an unqualified one, lest she betray her personal emotional disapproval of Edmund and Mary's relationship. This description of Fanny's inability fulfill the "office of judge and critic" (118) is followed by another use of "believed herself" (119) to introduce Fanny's feelings. The narrator's common use of "believe" to introduce ironic distance may suggest, to readers less sympathetic to Fanny, that she is less honest about her feelings than she thinks. In this instance, however, the distance implied emphasizes not the

difference between what Fanny and the narrator believe about Fanny, but rather the distance provided by Fanny's conscience, a distance from which she sees she must disqualify herself as judge.

Fanny does not allow herself to act as judge and critic of Edmund and Mary's rehearsal. She is, moreover, too emotionally affected by watching them to fulfill the role of prompter that she has decided "must be enough for her" (119). Even this role "was sometimes *more* than enough; for she could not always pay attention to the book. In watching them she forgot herself; and agitated by the increasing spirit of Edmund's manner, had once closed the page and turned away exactly as he wanted help" (119). Fanny is not a good prompter because she is too interested in watching Edmund and Mary to follow them in the script. Fanny's involvement in what she watches causes her to forget, not her feelings and criticisms, but rather her role as prompter. The more Edmund enters the spirit of the scene, the more Fanny reacts to the real emotions that she sees in his performance.

Fanny's immediate emotional reaction to the reality behind Edmund and Mary's performance in the scene is reinforced by her recollection of it once they have left her. Fanny is "inclined to believe 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. Whatever might be its effect, however, she must stand the brunt of it again that very day" (119). In seeing them read together, Fanny is convinced that the real emotions inspiring Edmund and Mary's performance will earn them praise as actors. She knows also that she will be affected not by their theatrical success, but instead by the emotional reality to which she attributes this success.

Fanny could not have foreseen or prevented the rehearsal between Edmund and Mary that she suffers in the East room. She later admits, however, that she need not have

attended the larger rehearsal from which she anticipates suffering. Mrs. Grant's absence at that rehearsal occasions requests that Fanny take her place. Even Edmund's urging her to read the part does not immediately sway Fanny, who cannot "endure the idea of it" (120). The questions that Fanny asks herself reveal both the stubbornness of her resistance to acting and a shadowy awareness of how her participation in rehearsals compromises her refusal to act. She first appeals to the source that has already saved her twice, wondering to herself why Mary was not "to be applied to as well" (120). Fanny then turns from seeking external excuses to blaming herself for the position in which she has put herself. "Or why had not she rather gone to her own room," Fanny asks, "instead of attending the rehearsal at all? She had known it would irritate and distress her – she had known it her duty to keep away. She was properly punished" (120).[35] Above, Fanny assumed that she must suffer the rehearsal that she here insists she knew better than to attend. The renewed request that Fanny take the stage reawakens both her general and more personal objections to the private theatricals.

Before seeing Edmund and Mary rehearse together, Fanny's emotional interest in their performance prevented her from even considering the possibility of not attending the rehearsal. After being surprised by their impromptu rehearsal, she still considered the scheduled rehearsal unavoidable. When asked to act, however, Fanny remembers that the very emotional interest that made her curious should have been grounds for her refusal to satisfy this curiosity. The "duty to keep away" (120) from the rehearsal, a duty that she has not been seen to experience in relation to the other rehearsals which she has attended, could refer to a duty to avoid emotional unrest or a duty to respect Sir Thomas's certain

[35] Marshall suggests that Fanny feels punished "perhaps for having been seduced into acting earlier that afternoon, perhaps for having recognized her own desire" (81).

disapproval of the private theatricals. The renewed request that Fanny take the stage puts her again into a situation in which her strong personal preference coincides with her sense of what is right. Fanny's emotional, social, and aesthetic participation in the private theatricals means, however, that she must now suffer her punishment rather than examine her scruples.

This reminder that her emotional interest in the rehearsal and her duty to Sir Thomas should have prevented her from attending the rehearsal does not prevent Fanny from yielding. Having put herself in danger, Fanny cannot refuse the requests of her cousins and extricate herself from having to do something which scares her and which she has judged to be disrespectful and wrong. Before Fanny has actually to act, however, the rehearsal is interrupted by the sudden return of Sir Thomas.

V. The Stakes of Confusing the Real and the Represented

Mansfield Park's depiction of the private theatricals emphasizes the consequences of confusing the real and the represented. The characters put themselves in dangerous positions when they ignore the conditions and constraints of reality. I discussed in Chapter Three how using the play to indulge their real flirtation positions Henry and Maria for social scandal and personal unhappiness. In this chapter, I have analyzed Fanny's failure to live up to her standards in the face of pressure to join the play, disappointment in Edmund when he capitulates, and feelings of jealousy when she is excluded. The habitual way in which Fanny obscures the real conditions of her social relationship with her cousins by imposing an insurmountable aesthetic distance between herself and them makes it more difficult for her to navigate the conflict that arises during the private theatricals between the ideal she sets for herself of obliging her cousins and the ideal of Sir Thomas's sense of propriety that she has internalized. Though Fanny falls short of both these ideals, her reference to them mitigates

the consequences of her mistakes. Readers' judgments of these mistakes are further complicated because the behavior that they know to have been compromised begins to earn her the recognition within the fictional world that the marriage plot promises for her.

I will discuss in the next chapter the credit that Fanny gets from Sir Thomas and Edmund despite her compromised position in relation to the private theatricals. Here, my focus remains on the status of Fanny's mistakes during the private theatricals and how they might be judged. Unlike Henry and Maria who manipulate aesthetic distance, Fanny ignores the conditions of the reality that governs her social interaction with her cousins. In an attempt to live up to the ideal she believes her role in the household demands, she does not act out of self-interest. Fanny's failures to live up to her ideals, furthermore, do not affect others. She struggles with her standards and her emotions, but her behavior never encourages misunderstandings or puts anyone else in precarious situations.

The narrator's exposure of the inner turmoil that Fanny experiences in failing to live up to her ideals can overshadow how her behavior looks from the outside. She continues to be timidly helpful, taking pleasure in alleviating the stress of others and enjoying the rehearsals, which are the closest thing to a real play that she has had the opportunity to experience. Readers not only know that this externally unobjectionable behavior is compromised by Fanny's emotions and the her failure to meet her standards, but also might find it problematic according to the standards of the marriage plot. As a heroine, Fanny is not supposed to be relegated to the sidelines unless she occupies this position with irreproachable and idealized qualities that will eventually be recognized. The tension between the marriage plot and the position plot intensifies during the episode of the private theatricals, raising the issue of how readers relate to Fanny as a representation.

The marriage plot and the position plot suggest two different sets of conditions of representation. While the former indicates idealized characters at an aesthetic remove from readers, the latter suggests realistic characters with whom readers are encouraged to empathize. This combination asks readers to maintain a complicated aesthetic distance from its characters, one that allows them to empathize with Fanny without forgetting that she is neither real nor ideal. She does not meet the standards of a typical, idealized heroine, nor does her status as a representation, one whose inner world is selectively revealed to readers, permit the same kind of judgment appropriate to a real person with whom readers share a world. Instead, she is a realistic heroine with flaws as well as strengths. In order to hope for her idealized happy ending, readers must both want her to live up to her ideal self and forgive her failures to do so.

Chapter Five: The Two Plots Converge

I. The Challenges of Fanny's Increased Importance

Chapters Three and Four dealt with how *Mansfield Park*'s characters understand and navigate the relationships among the real, the represented, and the ideal during the private theatricals. In this chapter, I turn to how the novel as a representation challenges readers to consider its realism and idealism. It is in these terms that readers are forced to reevaluate their expectations for Fanny as well as for the novel when she becomes important within the fictional world. Henry's pursuit of Fanny raises questions about the kind of heroine readers want Fanny to be, the kind of marriage comedy they want *Mansfield Park* to be, and the grounds of their judgments of the characters and of the novel. Fiction, *Mansfield Park* claims, ought not to be judged by the standards of either the ideal or the real, suggesting instead the ways in which judgments of the ideal and of the real might inform one another.

In this chapter I consider how this suggestion appears, first, in the novel's developing plot-geometry and, second, in a sentence in which the narrator uncharacteristically intervenes to comment on Fanny as a heroine. While the novel's marriage plot asks readers to form expectations for Fanny's happy marriage, the position plot emphasizes the obstacle to this happy marriage created by Fanny's own unwillingness to consider such a marriage possible. In the previous chapter, I discussed Fanny's attempts to live up to an ideal self capable of disinterested judgment. Such a self could be the heroine of a marriage comedy in which the value of this faultless person is finally recognized by those around her. But, by exposing Fanny's failures to achieve her ideals, the position plot casts Fanny as an idealistic, but less idealized, heroine. So, whereas the novel's marriage plot casts Fanny as an idealized heroine whose true value will eventually be recognized by those

around her, the novel's position plot casts Fanny as a more realistic heroine with whose fallibility readers are asked to sympathize.[1]

In the novel's first volume, the interaction of these two plots, as I argued in Chapters One and Two, challenges readers' judgments of Fanny and suggests the possibility of various obstacles to her happy marriage with Edmund. Fanny's increasing importance in the second volume of the novel corresponds neither to expectations encouraged by the marriage plot that her happy marriage will be facilitated when the Bertrams learn her true value, nor to expectations encouraged by the position plot that her happy marriage will be facilitated when Fanny begins to value herself differently. Although Fanny's increased importance does develop the idea that a general change in the way values are held at Mansfield Park will be necessary for her happy ending, the reasons for her new importance complicate the possibilities for what this change might be and how it might take place. Henry's pursuit of Fanny introduces a new love triangle (among Henry, Fanny, and Edmund) that overlaps with the first (among Mary, Edmund, and Fanny) and offers the possibility of an alternative ending in which Fanny winds up with Henry and Edmund with Mary. This possibility forces readers to reevaluate their expectations of Fanny and of the novel. But the narrator's uncharacteristic comment on how Fanny might react to this twist in the plot challenges readers to consider the grounds of their judgment of Fanny and of the novel.

II. A Second Love Triangle and the Convergence of the Two Plots

[1] It is worth remembering that other approaches to the genre of the novel make use of the contrast between idealism and realism in ways distinct from my use here. Historical approaches often link the contrast to that between romance and novel; these generic distinctions are further analyzed, for example, in terms of changing socio-economic conditions (see Watt), changing notions of subjectivity (see Richetti), and dialectically (see McKeon). Critics of *Mansfield Park* often link idealism with didacticism and contrast it with Austen's realism (see Mudrick, Duffy). Others see Austen as using an idealized plot structure to ironic effect (see Brown, Tauchert).

As Chapters One and Two have shown, *Mansfield Park*'s position plot complicates the expectations associated with its marriage plot. The first volume of the novel develops instabilities among the Bertrams and the Crawfords. Its focus on Fanny, though establishing her as the heroine of the novel, emphasizes her lack of importance within the fictional world. The absence of instabilities concerning Fanny within the fictional world creates a tension with readers about how her happy marriage will be accomplished.[2] While Fanny's forbidden affection for Edmund and jealousy of Mary form the novel's first love triangle, her denial of these feelings conceals this love triangle which consequently is unsuspected by anyone else in the fictional world, indeed perhaps even by Fanny herself.

Fanny's refusal to acknowledge her romantic feelings for Edmund puts both her and readers in an awkward position. Fanny's denial of her feelings prevents her from confronting the effect that they have on her judgment. As I explained in Chapter One, she attempts to nullify her feelings by placing a problematic aesthetic distance between herself and her cousins. This self-deception also interferes with readers' proximity to Fanny, a proximity encouraged by the narrative's invitations to share her perspective. Readers are distanced from her by their awareness of Fanny's denial of her feelings and of the happy marriage promised by the novel. This distance is not, however, merely that of knowing more than Fanny knows, as it would be if she either did not have or did not deny her feelings for Edmund. Readers both know more than Fanny knows and know that she knows more than she admits to knowing. Each of these two kinds of superior knowledge distances readers from the perspective that they are invited to share with her, and each complicates the kinds of sympathy readers are able to feel for her. Instead of being positioned either to hope for a happy ending of which Fanny is entirely unaware or to share her confrontation with her

[2] See Phelan for the distinction between instabilities within a fictional world and tensions in the relationships among authors, narrators and audiences (*Reading People*).

inappropriate feelings, readers are positioned to see her denial of them and the effects of this denial on her judgment. Readers' superior knowledge of Fanny's feelings interferes with the proximity encouraged by using her as a focalizer.[3] They are both invited to share her perspective and given information that shows this perspective in a critical light.

The novel thus asks readers not only to expect something that Fanny considers impossible, but also to evaluate her tactics for dealing with her forbidden feelings. Readers who expect Fanny's happy marriage therefore must consider the kind of change necessary to make the marriage a happy ending. As I explained in Chapter One, the emphasis may be placed more or less on a change in how Fanny sees herself, on a change in how Fanny is seen within the fictional world, or on a change in how values are held within the fictional world. Readers unsympathetic to Fanny tend to place more emphasis on her need to change, while those who sympathize with her suppression of her feelings and forgive the effects that this has on her judgment are more likely to expect the others to change more than Fanny herself. The expectation of a change in how values are held within the fictional world might correspond to Fanny's becoming more like the others or to the others becoming more like Fanny in relation to the values espoused by the Bertrams.

The love triangle comprised of Fanny, Edmund, and Mary thus suggests a happy ending for Fanny for which readers might or might not be able to hope. Sympathetic readers hope for the ending that Fanny does not consider possible, while unsympathetic readers either hope for Mary's marriage to Edmund or want Fanny to change dramatically in order to deserve a happy ending with Edmund or with someone else. But, the novel also asks

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[3] See Bujak for an insightful analysis of Austen's narrative voice as a formal innovation obliged to Scott's narrative poetry. While I agree with Bujak about the importance of Fanny's peripherality, I cannot agree with his claim that it invites readers to relate to her as more like a narrator than a character. Her status as peripheral observer, I argue instead, continuously complicates the distance between her and readers in multiple ways.

readers to entertain another ending by introducing a second love triangle. When Fanny becomes more important within the fictional world and Henry begins to pursue her, a second overlapping love triangle is created that offers another possible ending, one that involves a dramatic change in Fanny (and a corresponding change in Edmund and/or Mary). Henry's attentions first raise the possibility of Fanny's marriage within the fictional world. For readers who already expect her marriage because of the novel's genre, by contrast, Henry's attentions add the question of "to whom?" to the question of "how?" already suggested by Fanny's feelings for Edmund.

When only one love triangle exists, the imbalance between Fanny's peripheral role within the fictional world and her importance to the novel's plot is reflected by the imbalances among readers' awareness of all three points of the triangle, characters' awareness of only the instability between Edmund and Mary, and Fanny's problematic denial of her feelings for Edmund and jealousy of Mary. The second love triangle reflects Fanny's increased importance by making her the focus of instabilities within the fictional world. These instabilities relate to Henry's pursuit of Fanny and her refusal of him. Though Fanny manages to keep her feelings for Edmund secret, her struggle to do so forces her to deal with them more explicitly, and the role they play in her continued refusal of Henry is made clear to her as well as to readers. The instability created by Henry's attentions also complicates the tension with readers about what they want for Fanny as well as about the kind of marriage comedy they want the novel to be. Preferring that she end up with Edmund means wanting the fulfillment of Fanny's unacknowledged hopes, while preferring that she accept Henry means wanting her to change her mind.

A number of additional positions fall under these two basic options for what readers might want for Fanny and from the novel. A desire for the realization of Fanny's

unacknowledged hopes might accompany a more or less strong desire for her to change before her hopes are fulfilled. Readers might want Fanny merely to acknowledge her hopes; they might want her to acknowledge her worthiness of Edmund; or they might want her to change in a way that makes her more worthy than she has been, either by her own standards or by those of a typical marriage comedy. Readers who want Fanny to change her mind and accept Henry expect a big change in either Henry or Fanny, or a smaller change in both. Readers who sympathize with Fanny and agree with her negative judgment of Henry might want Henry to become worthy of Fanny so that she revises her judgment. Readers who do not sympathize with Fanny, by contrast, either want her earlier judgments of Henry to be somehow undermined, or want her to give up the principles that have grounded these judgments. Both sympathetic and unsympathetic readers might hope that Fanny and Henry are united after he becomes more, and she less, principled. These different options, in turn, correspond to different hopes about changes in the way values are held in the fictional world. Are the Bertrams and Fanny to become more like the Crawfords? Are the Crawfords and Fanny to become more like the Bertrams? Or are the Crawfords and the Bertrams to become more like Fanny?[4]

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[4] Brenner argues that suspense is generated in the novel's third volume by raising the question of whether the "characters will improve sufficiently to make for a happy ending," but he considers only the alternative ending, an ending which he claims requires the improvement of both Henry and Mary, on the one hand, and Edmund and Fanny, on the other (25-6). I. Armstrong sees the alternative ending as a "teasing possibility" "in which a strong Fanny married a reformed Henry" (55). Brown sees the possibility of marriages between Edmund and Mary, on the one hand, and Fanny and Henry, on the other as a thwarted synthesis between classical and romantic values that fits with the novel's pessimistic realism (91-2). Duffy, who recognizes the fairytale qualities of *Mansfield Park*'s plot (at one point suggesting that Mary's biggest fault is not believing in fairytales (86)), does not see the Crawfords as viable options for Fanny and Edmund because his understanding of Austen's worldview and didactic purpose includes a condemnation of the Crawfords' faulty education and unprincipledness. Canuel sees Henry and Mary as wrong choices for Fanny and Edmund, mistakes they narrowly escape.

The choice between Edmund and Henry as a match for Fanny suggests a contrast between a Cinderella-tale about the rewards of patience and virtue and a marriage comedy in which sibling sets resolve into romantic sets that blend the serious and upright with the charming and witty. This choice is only possible, however, if a reader considers Fanny's marriage with Henry a potential ending.[5] And this question about the nature of *Mansfield Park*'s marriage plot i.e., the question of whether Henry is a possible match for Fanny or merely an obstacle to her eventual marriage with Edmund, is complicated by its position plot.

In the novel's first volume, the position plot's emphasis on Fanny's suppression of her feelings for Edmund complicates the marriage plot's emphasis on the love triangle made up of Fanny, Edmund, and Mary. Readers are aware of a love triangle that has an effect on, but remains unacknowledged within, the fictional world. When the possibility that Fanny will marry is raised within the fictional world in the novel's second volume, the position plot's emphasis on Fanny's reaction to being pursued by Henry complicates the question of whether he should be considered a possible match or not. This question develops the tensions introduced in the novel's first volume about exactly what stands between Fanny and her happy ending, as well as about how these obstacles can be overcome.

The tensions developed throughout the novel have to do, consequently, not only with how Fanny's happy ending will be accomplished, but also with what kind of happy

[5] Critics who do not see Henry as a viable option include N. Auerbach, who finds Henry's insincerity such that "only the most sentimentally credulous reader could find this new performance [his passion for Fanny] credible" (111). Banfield sees the outcome of the novel as "always in suspense" yet "all the same prepared for" ("Moral Landscape" 16). In the context of discussing the ease with which the modesty of a lower-class heroine who marries up can be interpreted as merely tactical, Davidson understands Fanny as refusing "the reward of marriage to Henry Crawford, although circumstances might have bestowed it upon her" (263). M. Butler sees Henry's attentions as a test of Fanny's virtue which she, as an exemplary heroine, cannot fail (246). Donohue does not consider Henry a viable option, but instead reads his pursuit of Fanny as a form of oppression.

ending the novel promises. Henry's attentions multiply and intensify the questions raised by the novel's first volume about the kind of change necessary in order for Fanny's happy ending to be accomplished. What kinds of changes are desirable or possible in Henry and Fanny? The unexpected ways in which Fanny becomes important within the fictional world complicate how readers answer these questions. Before turning to Henry's attentions, therefore, I discuss how and why Fanny first becomes important within the fictional world.[6] Her new importance does not conform to the idealized pattern of a marriage comedy, nor does it conform to either her own idealistic or realistic expectations for herself or others. While Fanny struggles to cope with a new importance that she does not understand or welcome, readers must reassess their expectations for the idealized happy ending of the novel's idealistic heroine, one who is portrayed realistically and as insistent on the limitations imposed by her own reality.

III. The Value of Appearances

The first thing that increases Fanny's importance at Mansfield Park is Sir Thomas's appreciation of her improved appearance. On the one hand, this appreciation corresponds to readers' expectations that Fanny's value at Mansfield Park will increase and that she will come to be seen as marriage material. On the other hand, the fact that Sir Thomas values only Fanny's appearance emphasizes that a change in how values are generally held at Mansfield Park is still necessary if Fanny is to be valued in a more substantial way, one that she might be more comfortable learning to accept. Her discomfort with her new importance, however, stems from her problematic conception of her position as much as from the

[6] Irvine reads Fanny as occupying the space of moral authority that Sir Thomas or Edmund would traditionally hold (68 and passim), and characterizes Fanny's rejection of Henry as Austen's rejection of Richardson's solution to female agency in the reform plot of *Pamela* (71).

superficial cause of her elevation. Sir Thomas's new appreciation of Fanny's appearance, in other words, superficially fulfills expectations raised by her status as the heroine of a marriage comedy while at the same time emphasizing the problematic nature of this new position of importance.

The first cause of Fanny's elevation thus challenges readers to evaluate different ways in which their expectations for Fanny might be met. Is being thought pretty enough to justify her increased importance and worthiness to marry? Might an appreciation of Fanny's appearance lead to an appreciation of her other qualities, as Edmund hopes? To what extent does Fanny deserve her elevation and how should she react to it? Answering these questions is further complicated by Edmund's claim to Sir Thomas that Fanny alone "'judged rightly throughout'" (129) the episode of the private theatricals. The narrative gives no indication that Sir Thomas judges Fanny to be as blameless as Edmund claims she is and emphasizes the superficial cause of his increased regard rather than any appreciation of her judgment. Edmund's claim, therefore, confronts readers with another reason that she could be but is not valued within the fictional world, albeit a reason that readers know is not entirely deserved. Not only was Fanny's judgment of the private theatricals compromised by her emotions, she also finally agreed, after Edmund's encouragement, to join the rehearsal that Sir Thomas's return stopped short.[7]

That Edmund first gives Fanny credit for good judgment that she does not entirely deserve, and that Sir Thomas then gives her credit only for appearances over which she has no control, complicate readers' evaluations of Fanny's elevation. Those who want her to be elevated because of her good qualities will be disappointed not only because she is elevated for more superficial reasons, but also because she has faltered in the good qualities for which

[7] Lott argues that Fanny's new ascendency begins with Edmund's praise of her judgment, and is complicated by her capitulation to his request to act (276-7).

Edmund tries to give her credit. Those who care less about the reasons for her elevation will be disappointed by her inability to accept her new, more valued, position.

Fanny's sudden elevation casts a new light on her peripheral position, a position that has generally been considered just and permanent within the fictional world and unjust and likely to change from the perspective of readers. Although it would have been considered presumptuous of Fanny to demand more consideration or attention, once it is given she is expected to appreciate it. Fanny's elevation thus challenges her conception of herself and the grounds of readers' judgments of her. The first volume of the novel challenged readers to differentiate between expectations justifiable from Fanny's perspective and those justifiable from their own; the second volume builds on this challenge by changing the expectations justifiable from Fanny's perspective and complicating those encouraged in readers by the novel's two plots.

Fanny's elevation begins with Sir Thomas's return from Antigua. She dreads meeting him again and worries about intruding on the family's reunion. Though she is "quite overlooked by her cousins" (122) as they rush to meet him, when she finally feels compelled to join them she hears him enquiring after the whereabouts of his "'little Fanny'" (123) and is shocked by his kind and affectionate greeting. The change Fanny perceives in Sir Thomas's treatment of her corresponds to the change he perceives in her appearance. Upon leaving for Antigua, Sir Thomas's kindness in encouraging Fanny to invite her beloved brother for a visit had been tempered by his observation that William "'must find his sister at sixteen in some respects too much like his sister at ten'" (25). Two years later,[8] Sir Thomas is impressed with the improvement in health and beauty that he had doubted before his departure. He perceives that Fanny has grown into a young woman in his absence, a change

[8] See Ferguson, Downie and Southam for examples of conflicting arguments about the timeline of the novel in relation to the Abolition Act of 1807.

that no one at home has remarked upon or seen as significant. Fanny's low position has been defined so that it would not matter whether she remained a sickly young girl or grew into a pretty young woman. Fanny accepts this definition of her position and never thinks of herself as the object of attention. But, once people want to look at her, she must learn to be looked at, a lesson that is much harder for timid and unassuming Fanny than was accepting others' neglect of her. The attention that she now receives, however, does more than embarrass Fanny; it challenges the self-conception that she has developed in accepting her position in the Bertram household and denying any feelings that she deems inappropriate to that position, most importantly her romantic feelings for Edmund.

Fanny's exclusion from the social activities of her cousins has indicated her exclusion from the marriage market.[9] As I discussed in Chapter One, Fanny conceives of her exclusion from the social world of her cousins as more rigid and extreme than that demanded by her relatively fluid social position. By conceiving of the social distance separating her from her cousins as an aesthetic distance akin to that separating a reader from the characters in a book, Fanny attempts to protect herself from her own feelings. Although she imposes this distance in order to make impossible her feelings for Edmund as well as any desire she might feel to enter her cousins' social world, the aesthetic distance she places between herself and her cousins misconstrues the effect that she might have on their world as much as it does the effect their world might have on her. In her denial of her feelings for Edmund, Fanny has also denied the possibility that he or anyone else might have feelings for her.

Sir Thomas's sudden recognition that Fanny has grown into a pretty young woman thus makes her the object of a kind of attention that she not only has never sought, but also

[9] See Mary's question about whether she is "out" (36).

has denied the possibility of receiving.[10] Sir Thomas's appreciation, moreover, is caused by and limited to Fanny's appearance, something over which she has little control and for which she can take little credit. The first cause of Fanny's increased importance within the fictional world is thus a change in how she is valued, but one that highlights the superficiality of the values held at Mansfield Park.

A conversation between Edmund and Fanny about the changes wrought by Sir Thomas's return makes more explicit Sir Thomas's new regard for Fanny and differentiates the way that Fanny and Edmund hold values from the way that the others do. In terms of the marriage plot, the conversation introduces Fanny's new position as marriageable. Though the possibility of Fanny's marriage is only made explicit when Henry begins to pursue her, this earlier conversation establishes her as worthy of attention and foreshadows the novel's conclusion. The conversation suggests that Fanny could better fulfill the role of daughter to Sir Thomas than do his own children and underscores her compatibility with Edmund. In terms of the position plot, the conversation between Edmund and Fanny highlights the discrepancy between the values that Sir Thomas espouses and those upon which he acts together with the discrepancy between Fanny's values and her position.

The conversation begins when Edmund comments on how serious the family has become since Sir Thomas's return, mainly due to his father's disinclination for visitors. Fanny corrects Edmund's impression that they "'had never lived so before'" (135) by reminding him of the seriousness of their evenings before Sir Thomas's departure. While Edmund had grown accustomed to the liveliness characterizing Sir Thomas's absence, Fanny

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[10] See Duane for an argument that Fanny's discomfort at Sir Thomas's attention should be seen, as it would have been by Austen's contemporaries, in terms the discourses of sensibility, nervousness, and hysteria, discourses linking physical and mental problems. Duane characterizes Sir Thomas's return and attention to Fanny's improved looks in terms of the gothic elements of unease and sexual violence (406).

is more suited to the graver evenings that have been reinstated by his return. She remarks on the pleasure that she takes in listening to Sir Thomas talk about the West Indies. "'It entertains *me* more than many other things have done,'" she says, "'but then I am unlike other people, I dare say'" (135-6). Edmund teases Fanny for daring to distinguish herself thusly from others, asking "'Why should you dare say *that*?' (smiling) – Do you want to be told that you are only unlike other people in being more wise and discreet?'" (136).

Edmund's teasing implicitly contrasts two styles of conversation and the values that accompany them: a witty style that values flattery and a frank style that values sincerity. His playful question suggests that Fanny's remark has been the kind of witty social role-playing wherein people do not say what they believe, but rather say whatever they think will forward their own interests.[11] Following this interpretation, Fanny intends her comment that she is unlike other people as uncomplimentary to herself so that Edmund will contradict it with a complimentary interpretation of her difference from others. The compliment that Edmund refuses to give her, however, belies the style of conversation that would demand it, a witty style of conversation that does not value wisdom and discretion.

Fanny and Edmund value not only wisdom and discretion, but also frankness. Edmund is able to tease Fanny because her hesitation to point out her good qualities looks almost like the kind of wittiness in which a person puts oneself down for the express purpose of being complimented. Fanny, however, does not mean to put herself down. She knows that being able to appreciate Sir Thomas's stories differentiates her positively from the Miss Bertrams. This knowledge is what makes her statement daring and invites

[11] The way in which compliments are demanded and given in this kind of conversation is indicated by the narrator in describing interactions between Henry and Maria when parts are being chosen for *Lovers' Vows*: "…Maria and Henry Crawford conversed together in an under voice, and the declaration with which she began of, 'I am sure I would give up the part to Julia most willingly, but that though I shall probably do it very ill, I feel persuaded *she* would do it worse,' was doubtless receiving all the compliments it called for" (97).

Edmund's teasing. His "'why should you dare say *that*?'" (136) indicates that their frank style of conversation allows for the kind of self-recognition of which Fanny stops just short. Though she values frankness, she cannot be frank about her own good qualities. Even when she recognizes these qualities, the fact that others do not makes it daring for her to express them.

Fanny cannot convey her appreciation of Sir Thomas's stories without indicating the positive quality that makes it possible. This quality differentiates her from others in a positive way, but Fanny is used to being distinguished as inferior. She retains her inferior position even as she demonstrates the qualities that should raise her in Sir Thomas's estimation. Sir Thomas, Edmund next clarifies, is more inclined to admire Fanny's appearance than the sensibility that enables her to appreciate his stories. "'But when did you or any body ever get a compliment from me, Fanny,'" Edmund asks. "'Go to my father if you want to be complimented. He will satisfy you. Ask your uncle what he thinks, and you will hear compliments enough; and though they may be chiefly on your person, you must put up with it, and trust to his seeing as much beauty of mind in time'" (136). Edmund's refusal to compliment Fanny not only consists of more compliments than Fanny could expect or desire, but also indicates his difference from his father. Though both Edmund and Sir Thomas value seriousness and frankness, Sir Thomas does not appreciate these qualities in Fanny, noticing only her exterior.

Edmund does not explicitly criticize his father's superficial appreciation of Fanny. He does, however, clarify how he and Fanny value appearances less than does Sir Thomas. In a remark that echoes Fanny's earlier differentiation of herself from others, Edmund distinguishes the response that he and Fanny have to her uncle's new appreciation from that which anybody else would have. "'Your uncle thinks you very pretty, dear Fanny,'" he says,

> "and that is the long and the short of the matter. Any body but myself would have made something more of it, and any body but you would resent that you had not been thought very pretty before; but the truth is, that your uncle never did admire you till now—and now he does." (136)

Edmund and Fanny are uniquely wise and discreet, he suggests, in valuing appearances less than others do. Edmund implies that while Sir Thomas might have the potential to be led from valuing outer to valuing inner beauty, Edmund and Fanny are not distracted from their commitments to inner beauty by preoccupations about whether outer beauty is appreciated.

Although Edmund is right that Fanny did not resent her not being thought pretty before, he does not understand the extent to which being thought pretty now disturbs her.[12] He implies that it is better to value appearances less than they are commonly valued without taking into account the significance for Fanny of the common value placed on appearances. In fact, after distinguishing how he and Fanny react to Sir Thomas's new appreciation of her appearance from how anyone else would, Edmund insists that Fanny "'must really begin to harden [herself] to the idea of being worth looking at'" and "'must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman'" (136). Unaccustomed to being looked at, Fanny does mind being thought a pretty young woman because an appreciation of her appearance not only highlights the depreciation of her other qualities, but also interferes with her insistence that she is not worthy of attention. Sir Thomas's admiration suggests the possibility of Edmund's admiration, a possibility for which Fanny cannot admit that she longs.[13]

Edmund's teasing exposes the problematic nature both of Fanny's self-conception and of values and evaluation in the Bertram household. Fanny does not explicitly assign a

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[12] Duane reads Fanny's discomfort here as resulting from the threat of Sir Thomas's unwanted sexual attention, part of the novel's invocation of a gothic incest plot (407).
[13] See Fanny's response and the narrator's comment: "'Oh! don't talk so, don't talk so," cried Fanny, distressed by more feelings than he was aware of" (136).

value to the difference that she notes between herself and others, but she is aware that being able to take an interest in Sir Thomas's stories is a characteristic that he values. In fact, this knowledge together with a consciousness of her inferior position prevents her from displaying the characteristic so obviously missing in his daughters. The Miss Bertrams' clear lack of interest in their father's stories prevents Fanny from continuing to question Sir Thomas about what he says because, as she tells Edmund, "'I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel'" (136).

At Mansfield Park, as I explained in Chapters One and Three, high social status is generally associated with good character and principles. The Miss Bertrams are valued as having both, while they possess only social status. Fanny, by contrast, has good character and principles without having social status. Her discomfort at displaying the qualities that the Miss Bertrams lack not only shows her awareness of this discrepancy between qualities and status but also exemplifies the kind of sensibility and modesty that Sir Thomas mistakenly believes his daughters possess. Fanny's formulation of her fears indicates how impossible she thinks it is for someone in her low position to be credited with the qualities associated with people of higher status. Hence Fanny believes that, if she acted as the Miss Bertrams should, she would not be valued as they are, but instead suspected of an attempt to appear more valuable than she is.

IV. The Idealized, Idealistic, and Realistic Heroine of *Mansfield Park*

In this section, I turn to the importance of Henry's pursuit of Fanny by analyzing a single long sentence in which the narrator uncharacteristically comments on Fanny as a heroine and the novel's status as a representation. Henry's attentions change Fanny's

position within the fictional world and radically challenge her self-conception and her judgment. They also cause the other characters to reevaluate Fanny's worth. Some raise Fanny to the worth that they consider merits Henry's attentions, while others consider her lucky to be receiving attentions that she does not really deserve.[14] Her refusal of Henry's attentions precipitates another reevaluation of Fanny and what others consider her inexplicable obstinacy proves to most that she does not deserve Henry's offer of marriage.

Henry's attentions also change the novel's plot-geometry such that readers must reexamine their expectations of the novel as well as the grounds of their judgments of the characters. What kind of marriage comedy do they want the novel to be and how can its happy ending be achieved? Which characters will undergo what kinds of changes? How will the way that values are held in the fictional world change and who will be valued for what? The narrator's uncharacteristic intrusion emphasizes Fanny's status as a representation and contrasts her with a different kind of ideal heroine. The comment creates a set of contrasts among the ideal, real, and represented that draw attention to how readers might judge Fanny in each of these categories.

Before turning to the narrator's uncharacteristic comment, I need, first, to provide more background about Fanny's increased importance and, second, to discuss the negative light in which Henry's attentions are introduced. Fanny has never been nor is she now wanted for herself, but instead to perform a role. Thus, when the newly married Maria leaves Mansfield Park, taking Julia with her, Fanny must get used to filling the "chasm" (140) created by their departure. The narrator clarifies how the change in Fanny's position has nothing to do with her and everything to do with the absence of the Miss Bertrams:

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[14] Edmund is alone in raising Henry, rather than Fanny, as a result of his choice. He tells Fanny "that [Henry's heart] being for you, has raised him inconceivably in my opinion" (238).

> Fanny's consequence increased on the departure of her cousins. Becoming, as she then did, the only young woman in the drawing-room, the only occupier of that interesting division of a family in which she had hitherto held so humble a third, it was impossible for her not to be more looked at, more thought of and attended to, than she had ever been before; and 'where is Fanny?' became no uncommon question, even without her being wanted for any one's convenience. (141)

This description of Fanny's increased importance emphasizes its similarity to her former lack of importance. Fanny's position as the third young woman at Mansfield Park was so humble that she was hardly considered to occupy the same interesting division as her cousins, and was treated more as an assistant to, than a participant in, their activities. She may no longer be wanted only to fulfill someone's immediate need, but being wanted as the only young woman around is being wanted to fulfill a general need.

The role of sole young woman at Mansfield Park is important not only in the drawing room there, but also at the Parsonage where Mary has little to occupy her. Fanny's new value at the Parsonage, like that at Mansfield Park, is a matter of convenience for those who now value her and a source of discomfort for the newly valued Fanny. Only "in the gloom and dirt of a November day" does Fanny become a guest "most acceptable to Mary Crawford" (141). Mrs. Grant, the narrator makes clear, thinks only of Mary in inviting Fanny to the Parsonage. "By the easiest self-deceit," however, she is able to "persuade herself that she [is] doing the kindest thing by Fanny, and giving her the most important opportunities of improvement in pressing her frequent calls" (141). Mrs. Grant obscures her use of Fanny to gratify Mary by labeling it a kindness to Fanny rather than to Mary. Fanny, in turn, is

expected to be grateful for being elevated, though, in fact, she is again being called upon as helpmate, now in the role of companion rather than servant.[15]

The narrator shows both Henry and Mary in a critical light when he shares with her his intention to "'make Fanny Price in love with [him]'" (157). Henry, first interested in Fanny because there is no one else with whom to flirt, becomes more interested when she is not immediately won over by his attentions and therefore presents an unusual challenge.[16] While Mary does hope that Henry "'will not be making her really unhappy'" (158), she does not try to stop her brother from toying with Fanny. Mary does as little to protect Fanny from what she assumes will be the meaningless attentions of her brother as she has done to

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[15] While Fanny could probably not refuse the invitations to visit Mary, the narrator makes explicit that the circumstances of the invitations free Fanny from seeing her visits as an obligation, emphasizing that these visits stem instead from "a kind of fascination" (143). Fanny's fascination with visiting Mary, I submit, parallels Mary's other motive in befriending Fanny. Mary knows that Edmund is impressed by kindnesses to Fanny, while Fanny cannot overcome her curiosity about the woman whom Edmund loves or about this woman's intentions regarding him. See Anderson for an argument about the homoerotic nature of this fascination.

[16] His sister is quick to guess his motives. In response to Henry's description of Fanny's "'claims to notice'" and the "'wonderful improvement that has taken place in her looks,'" Mary says:

"'Phoo! phoo! This is only because there were no tall women to compare her with, and because she has got a new gown, and you never saw her so well dressed before. She is just what she was in October, believe me. The truth is, that she was the only girl in company for you to notice, and you must have a somebody. I have always thought her pretty—not strikingly pretty—but 'pretty enough,' as people say; a sort of beauty that grows on one. Her eyes should be darker, but she has a sweet smile; but as for this wonderful degree of improvement, I am sure it may all be resolved into a better style of dress and your having nobody else to look at; and therefore, if you do set about a flirtation with her, you never will persuade me that it is in compliment to her beauty, or that it proceeds from anything but your own idleness and folly'" (157-8).

Henry does not answer the accusation, but his next comments clarify the nature of Fanny's charms: she poses a challenge. "'I never was so long in company with a girl in my life – trying to entertain her – and succeed so ill,'" he admits, continuing, "'never met with a girl who looked so grave on me! I must try to get the better of this. Her looks say, "I will not like you, I am determined not to like you," and I say she shall'" (158).

Readers are likely to be as quick as Mary to understand what motivates Henry's new interest in Fanny. Mary immediately corrects her first impression: "'And so this is her attraction after all! This it is – her not caring about you – which gives her such a soft skin and makes her so much taller, and produces all these charms and graces!'" (158).

protect the Miss Bertrams or any of the other friends whose hearts Henry has tried to steal. Henry and Mary consider his flirtations nothing more than amusements.[17] Neither of them worries about the consequences of misrepresenting themselves and their intentions, the consequences of making other people believe that they are something, e.g., potential husband or genuine friend, that they have no intention of being.

In classing Fanny generally as a young woman to be tricked into loving Henry, Mary further obscures the social distance between herself and Fanny that her desire for company has already encouraged her to overlook. Fanny, however, is different from the Miss Bertrams and the Crawfords in significant ways. First, her low social position distinguishes her from Mary's usual friends and Henry's usual targets. While Fanny must take seriously her social inferiority, the others are free to determine the practical meaning of her social status according to whether they need her to run their errands, keep them company, or return their affection. Second, her position and her values distinguish her view, especially of Henry, from that of the others: she does not see him as they do, nor does she see him as they think she does.

Fanny's position in relation to Henry's pursuit is clarified in the long sentence that also includes a rare and interesting intrusion by the narrator. The normally unobtrusive narrator enters to contrast Fanny with a different kind of novelistic heroine in order to clarify that her heart rather than her judgment will protect her from being taken in by

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[17] The exchange about Fanny quoted in the previous note begins with Henry:
"'And how do you think I mean to amuse myself, Mary, on the days that I do not hunt? I am grown too old to go out more than three times a week; but I have a plan for the intermediate days, and what do you think it is?'
'To walk and ride with me, to be sure.'
'Not exactly, though I shall be happy to do both, but *that* would be exercise only to my body, and I must take care of my mind. Besides *that* would be all recreation and indulgence, without the wholesome alloy of labour, and I do not like to eat the bread of idleness. No, my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me'" (157).

Henry.[18] The description begins with Mary's lack of concern for and knowledge of Fanny's real feelings:

> And without attempting any further remonstrance, she left 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 young ladies of eighteen (or one should not read about them) as are never to be persuaded into love against their judgment 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. (158-9)[19]

This grammatically and conceptually complex sentence that punctuates the question of Fanny's status as a fictional heroine presents in a nutshell the novel's general challenge to readers' expectations.[20] The narrator does not often voice explicit opinions about Fanny or

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[18] Hardy finds this priority inconsistent, and charges Austen with handling the love triangles with an "authorial double-standard:" here Fanny's love for Edmund protects her from Henry, but the moral basis on which Fanny's character is constructed requires that her right judgment reject Henry (74).

[19] Mary herself echoes this sentiment about Fanny's susceptibility to Henry when he tells her of his intention to marry Fanny: "'Were you even less pleasing – supposing her not to love you already, (of which however I can have little doubt,) you would be safe. The gentleness and gratitude of her disposition would secure her all your own immediately. From my soul I do not think she would marry you *without* love; that is, if there is a girl in the world capable of being uninfluenced by ambition, I can suppose it her; but ask her to love you, and she will never have the heart to refuse'" (200).

[20] Marshall places similar importance, but different significance on this appearance of the narratorial "I." For Marshall, this "I" "reminds us that Austen, like Fanny, has lost her place in the book. She may wish to speak her feelings, but she chooses to write and be silent" (90). The inescapability of signification, however, allows Marshall to read Fanny not only as a

her status as a fictional heroine.[21] Here, however, readers are directly challenged to sort out the grounds of their sympathy for and judgment of Fanny.

The sentence first hints at the importance of Fanny's feelings for Edmund in her refusal of Henry, and then delays making that hint explicit until its final clause. Two contrasts separate this hint and its revelation. Both deal with Fanny's susceptibility to Henry, but in different ways that combine to complicate readers' expectations and draw attention to their judgments of the characters and the novel. The sentence assumes that Henry will pursue Fanny without any serious intentions, and therefore could break her heart (something about which neither Henry nor Mary cares). The narrator then draws two contrasts, which suggest, but do not easily resolve into, multi-layered parallels. The first introduces an "unconquerable" heroine whose infallible judgment would protect her from falling in love with Henry and contrasts such a heroine with Fanny, who, the ironic and parenthetical formulation suggests, is both more realistic than the idealized heroine and more susceptible to Henry;[22] the second contrasts the tenderness and taste that make Fanny susceptible to Henry with the feelings for Edmund that protect her from falling in love with Henry.

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figure of the reader, but also of "the absent author: the supervising author who would not speak *in propria persona*" (89).

[21] That the narrator means fictional heroines (and not, for example, the real women who might be discussed in a newspaper) is suggested by the diction and detail of the description. "Unconquerable" ladies besieged by "talent, manner, attention, and flattery" (158) are the stuff of novels, not newspapers. The newspaper article that informs Fanny of their behavior makes no mention of how deficient Henry's judgment was in trying to "make Mrs. Rushworth Maria Bertram again in her treatment of himself" (317), nor Maria's in believing that his flirtation accompanied any serious intentions. *Mansfield Park*, however, discusses both lapses of judgment. See Davis for a discussion of the origins of the English novel in terms of fact and fiction as they interrelated in different forms of publications in the late sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries.

[22] Richetti's chapter on women novelists writing prior to Austen characterizes their challenge as "to balance plausibly full and entertaining representations of life and manners with the impossible paradoxes of idealized female personality" (192-3).

This long sentence is unusual in ways that draw attention to the novel's challenge to readers' judgments as well as to its own particular sort of artifice, neither simply ideal nor simply real. Not only does a narrator with thoughts and feelings about Fanny make an unusual intrusion, the intrusion itself is unusually self-referential in mentioning an idealized but unrealistic heroine. The sentence, like the novel, invites readers to sort through different perspectives on the real, the represented, and the ideal, as well as on how they might be related, that is, to consider how judgments of the real, the represented, and the ideal might differ from and inform one another. What kind of heroine is Fanny Price? What determines her status as a fictional creation and how? How do different narrative techniques determine this status and generate expectations? How are the underlying assumptions generated by the novel's two plots related to how readers sympathize with and judge the characters?

The long sentence emphasizes the relationship between fiction and reality as well as the relationship between judgment and the heart. The narrator's ironic assertion that the fictional existence of a type guarantees its reality raises questions about Fanny's status as fictional and as realistic. The narrator contrasts Fanny to these idealized and unconquerable heroines in terms of their different capacities for judgment, but the contrast has implications about their respective statuses as fictional entities. If the narrator's assertion about unconquerable young women is taken to be serious, then it follows that Fanny's existence in *Mansfield Park* guarantees the existence of real young women like her who are idealistic and yet conquerable. If the assertion is taken to be ironic, as I think it must be, the implication is that unconquerable heroines are unrealistic idealizations in contrast to Fanny, whose idealism does not correspond to idealized and unconquerable judgment, and who is therefore more realistic. Taken together, these possibilities suggest that while Fanny is more realistic than

idealized heroines with unconquerable judgment, she is also a fictional creation to be distinguished from real people.[23]

The very inclusion of the sentence further complicates its implications about the relationships among fiction, reality, and idealization. The narrator uncharacteristically intrudes to give an opinion about Fanny's true nature, but does not straightforwardly own up to any role in determining her nature. While the unusual narrative voice of the novel's final chapter (to which the final chapter of this dissertation returns) takes authorial responsibility for the characters, this narrating "I" professes to having "no inclination to believe" (158) that Fanny is among the unconquerable heroines about whom one reads. Far from passing judgment on the characters, the narrator hints at authorial power while simultaneously mimicking the position of a reader who must determine what to believe about Fanny.

Of course, an omniscient narrator's[24] inclination to believe something about Fanny differs fundamentally from the inclination of an inquisitive reader. An authorial narrator's inclination about a character generally corresponds with a fact rather than a belief about that character.[25] Readers' inclinations to believe something about a character, by contrast, can be

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[23] I will discuss in Chapter Seven how the realism of the novel's depiction of Fanny works with the idealism of its happy ending.

[24] See Culler's case for abandoning the term "omniscient," a term he convincingly argues is used to cover a variety of narrative effects including "the performative authoritativeness of many narrative declarations…the reporting of innermost thoughts and feelings…authorial narration…and the synoptic impersonal narration of the realist tradition" (26). The term persists, he argues, not because of its utility, but rather our "habit of naturalizing the strange details and practices of narrative by making the consciousness of an individual their source, and then imagining a quasi divine omniscient consciousness when human consciousness cannot fill that role" (32).

[25] Nelles argues that Austen's narrators do not possess the core attributes of omniscience and are better characterized as infallible. Nelles uses the final chapter of *Mansfield Park* as an example of an Austen narrator approaching "the rhetoric of omnipotence." This narrator, according to Nelles, "does admit to being a writer," but falls short of omnipotence in adopting "the familiar realistic pose that she can direct the presentation of the story, but not alter the fabula itself" (121). In Chapter Seven, I discuss the narrative voice of *Mansfield Park*'s final chapter in terms of realism and idealism, claiming that this narrative voice differs

affected by their individual preferences as much as by the direct claims or subtle hints of a narrator. The combination of these perspectives in the narrator's claim emphasizes the narrator's authoritative knowledge of Fanny by couching it in terms of a reader's interpretive whims. Thus, instead of taking authorial responsibility for the fiction, the narrator poses as someone who, like a reader, must interpret Fanny. This posturing, together with the narrator's ironic connection of fiction to life, draws attention to the role that readers play in judging fictional characters and worlds. The different ways that the narrative positions readers in relation to the fictional world and its characters force them to examine how both narrative strategies and idiosyncratic qualities affect these relationships.

The implication that "unconquerable" (158) heroines are less realistic than their authors claim that they are contains a further suggestion that readers should relate to Fanny differently than they would to a heroine with impeccable judgment. They should relate to her as fictional and yet realistically fallible. The explicit comment on how Fanny is susceptible to Henry's charms is surprising in its sharp contrast with the narrator's more frequent portrayal of ways in which Fanny's judgment falls short of her ideals. In giving readers Fanny's perspective, the latter instances show readers what Fanny thinks and feels, as well as what she fails to understand about herself and her situation. In being invited to feel along with Fanny at the same time as being invited to see her critically, readers are challenged to consider why they do or do not sympathize with Fanny's shortcomings. The narrator's explicit comment, by contrast, clarifies the diverse motivations at work in Fanny from a different sort of external perspective, one free of Fanny's incessant worrying. The narrator who provides this perspective clearly does not hold Fanny to the standards of an "unconquerable" (158) heroine and suggests that these standards are unrealistic. Both

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significantly from that of the rest of the novel, a difference that emphasizes the narrator's responsibility for the characters.

readers and Fanny, however, tend to hold Fanny to idealistic standards not unrelated to those governing "unconquerable" (158) heroines. On the one hand, the novel's marriage plot casts Fanny as a morally superior heroine whose judgment must withstand tests that will eventually prove her value. On the other hand, the position plot exposes both Fanny's aspiration to judge disinterestedly and her failures to reach this ideal. The narrator's unusually explicit comment presents the fallibility of Fanny's judgment in a different, but equally complicated way. While the novel's two plots pit generic expectations that Fanny behave ideally against the feelings and judgments aroused by showing her internal struggles to do so, the narrator's explicit comment pits generic expectations that fictional heroines behave ideally against an assertion that Fanny is no such ideal heroine.

How, then, should readers evaluate Fanny and her struggles to behave ideally? The narrator's explicit comment suggests that Fanny should not be judged as an idealized fictional heroine with infallible judgment. At the same time, the comment emphasizes Fanny's status as fictional together with her realistic fallibility. The narrator's explicit comment, in other words, proposes a set of standards by which to judge Fanny that avoids the distance imposed by idealism, on the one hand, and the proximity encouraged by realism, on the other. Readers are encouraged to enter into Fanny's mind without losing a critical distance as well as to impose a critical distance that takes into account the insight that they gain from having entered into her mind. Fanny should be judged, therefore, neither as an idealized heroine nor as a real person, but rather as a realistic representation.

While the novel's marriage plot suggests idealized characters such as Cinderella and Prince Charming, its position plot undermines this suggestion by presenting more realistic characters that do not conform to these ideals or live up to the standards of judgment appropriate to them. Fanny, Mary, Edmund and Henry all have characteristics that liken

them to Cinderella or Prince Charming, but they fail to conform to these types in diverse ways. Fanny, though in a Cinderella-like position, is not capable of hoping for a Prince Charming; fails to live up to the ideals that would make her worthy of a Prince Charming; and is not able to suppress the affection for Edmund that, if requited, would constitute a Cinderella-like elevation. Mary is not in the lowly position of a Cinderella, but her ambitions for a good marriage coincide with a desire to find a Prince Charming, a man with the status and wealth to fulfill her dreams of social success. Henry's proposal to Fanny casts him as a Prince Charming within the fictional world, but he offers Fanny neither a marriage that she can accept nor an elevation in status that she desires.[26] She does not even dare hope for a union with Edmund, whose ability to fulfill her suppressed desires casts him as her Prince Charming.[27] Edmund's status as such an idealized character is undermined, however, by Fanny's suppression of her desires, which amount in any case to nothing more than a modest life with Edmund. Like Fanny, Edmund does not desire status and wealth, and without a desire for these he could never fill the role of Prince Charming that Mary wishes him to play.[28]

How Fanny, Mary and Edmund all both conform to and deviate from the idealized types of Cinderella and Prince Charming is clarified in the women's disagreement about the relative merits of Edmund's name and title. Fanny both loves Edmund as a cousin and places him at an inaccessible and aesthetisized distance. Mary loves him as a potential husband, while desiring him to be something he is not. "'I am so glad your eldest cousin is

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[26] In her 1990 introduction to *Mansfield Park*, M. Butler notes that Henry is positioned as a Prince Charming, but is not what he seems (xi).
[27] Hinnant emphasizes Fanny as Cinderella and Edmund as Prince Charming in his reading of Austen's use of the courtship plot, arguing that Austen uses the Cinderella-plot to compare aesthetic style with sordid reality (296).
[28] Edwards notes that Edmund is hardly a Prince Charming and that the Crawfords, rather than Austen, "impose fantasy on truth" (55, note 5).

gone that he *may* be Mr. Bertram again,'" Mary says to Fanny, continuing, "'there is something in the sound of Mr. *Edmund* Bertram so formal, so pitiful, so younger-brother-like, that I detest it'" (145). In the absence of Tom, Edmund need no longer be distinguished from him and so Mary can pretend that he is not the younger brother that he actually is. Mary's ear, attuned to markers of status, detests the name that announces Edmund's as younger brother. To Fanny, by contrast,

> "the sound of *Mr.* Bertram is so cold and nothing-meaning – so entirely without warmth or character! – It just stands for a gentleman, and that's all. But there is nobleness in the name of Edmund. It is a name of heroism and renown – of kings, princes, and knights; and seems to breathe the spirit of chivalry and warm affections." (145)[29]

The "Mr." that indicates status to Mary means nothing to Fanny. But, instead of elaborating on the particular warmth and character that she associates with "Edmund," Fanny cites its connection with the qualities of fairytale heroes. The heroic qualities valued by Fanny and indicated by the name "Edmund" are paralleled by the prestigious qualities that Mary values and would like to see indicated by higher titles that might precede it. "'The name is good in itself,'" she grants, "'and *Lord* Edmund or *Sir* Edmund sound delightfully; but sink it under the chill, the annihilation of a Mr. – and Mr. Edmund is no more than Mr. John or Mr. Thomas'" (145). The "Mr." that means nothing to Fanny when preceding Edmund's family name makes Edmund appear a nothing to Mary when preceding his Christian name. But, while Mary enjoys calling Edmund by a title that obscures his status as younger brother, Fanny endows his Christian name with qualities that obscure her personal relationship to

[29] Garson cites this passage as an example of how Fanny's aesthetic endorses a patriarchal order. She links this endorsement with Austen's skepticism about the efficacy of inner resources and ultimate dependence of women on the material resources only men could provide (147-8).

him. Edmund does not possess the wealth and status that could make him Mary's Prince Charming; nor can he occupy the aesthetisized role of fairytale hero in which Fanny tries to cast him. The unrealistic roles into which Mary and Fanny try to place Edmund thus emphasize the realism with which all three are portrayed.

Many readers of *Mansfield Park* privilege either the idealism of its marriage plot or the realism of its position plot. But partiality of either sort causes dissatisfaction with the novel. On the one hand, the novel's focus on Fanny must frustrate readers who privilege the idealism of *Mansfield Park*'s marriage plot. Mary's dreams of a Prince Charming might make her seem a more suitable heroine, while Henry's ability to elevate Fanny above her cousins might make him a better candidate than Edmund for Fanny's Prince Charming. On the other hand, the fallibility of all of the characters must stand out to readers who privilege the realism of the novel's position plot. The characters' realistic flaws make it difficult for such readers to hope for or accept an idealized happy ending of the narrative. I argue that, instead of being either a flawed marriage comedy or an inconsistent example of realism, *Mansfield Park* combines a marriage plot suggesting idealized characters and a position plot portraying these characters realistically in order to encourage readers to maintain a difficult distance from the characters, one from which idealism and realism can inform one another in a way appropriate to fiction.

Chapter Six: Distance, Perspective, Judgment

I. Standards of Disinterestedness

Mansfield Park, I argued in the last chapter, suggests a unique mode of judgment appropriate to fiction, a mode of judgment that should be distinguished from the modes of judgment appropriate to the real or to the ideal. This mode of judgment appropriate to fiction can nonetheless inform judgments of the real in part by elucidating the difficulties of attaining disinterested judgment. In the last chapter, I discussed how readers' judgments of the characters and of the novel are complicated by the different standards of judgment suggested by the novel's two plots. In this chapter, I examine the different standards and ideals that inform the characters' judgments in order to develop the novel's suggestion that, while disinterested judgment is an impossible ideal, this impossibility does not affect the importance of a sincere relationship to it as an ideal.[1] This suggestion emerges from a comparison of faulty judgments by Fanny, Sir Thomas, and Henry about Henry's courtship of Fanny, a comparison that highlights the adequacy or inadequacy of the grounds on which characters make judgments of each other and on which readers make judgments of them.

This chapter's focus on the characters' different failures to achieve disinterestedness clarifies the novel's contribution to philosophical aesthetics. First, the characters' failures distinguish between two types of partiality that can interfere with disinterestedness: partiality as bias (most commonly, self-interest) and partiality as incompleteness. The novel's representation of these failures, furthermore, clarifies the relationships among the necessarily disinterested attitude created by fictional distance, the interest required for readers to engage in fiction, and a standard of disinterested judgment that might be applied to in real life.

[1] Cottom also suggests that ideals are impossible within Austen's fictional worlds, but attributes this impossibility to the conflict between aristocratic and middle-class values. Whereas his reading historically contextualizes *Mansfield Park*'s depiction of judgment, mine seeks to clarify the stakes of this depiction for literary judgment.

The concept of disinterested judgment is not only central to modern aesthetics, but traceable to eighteenth-century British thinkers influential in Austen's time. Jerome Stolnitz argues for both the importance of the concept of disinterestedness in aesthetics, and its origin in the writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury, as he is known, wrote various, very popular, essays, of particular interest in this context, "Sensus communis, an essay on the freedom of wit and humour in a letter to a friend," and "Soliloquy, or advice to an author." The former develops an idea of common sense which is linked to the subordination of self-interest to an idea of a common good (93). "Soliloquy" emphasizes the importance of private self-reflection.[2] These ideas of common sense and self-reflection form a central tension in aesthetic judgment and experience: that between subjective and objective grounds of judgment.[3] Aesthetic judgment, thus, involves both personal and impersonal elements. Disinterested judgment can be invoked as ruling out selfish interests or avoiding external influences confusing the right judgment available to individuals.[4]

Austen's portrayal of characters who are interested in the importance of and barriers to disinterested judgment aligns her with (nearly) contemporary thinkers such as Shaftesbury.

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[2] L. Clark links Austen to Shaftesbury's idea of soliloquy. Neither Valihora nor Clark is interested in proving that Austen read Shaftesbury, (a possibility Clark says is first suggested by Ryle in "Jane Austen and the Moralists"), but both see a suggestive relationship between the two. Ryle argues that "Austen, was, whether she knew it or not, a Shaftesburian" (301), and supports his claim by considering Austen's moral-aesthetic vocabulary and conception of character. Though he considers himself unfit to prove that Austen read Shaftesbury, he likes to think she did.

[3] Kant's is perhaps the most influential argument for a judgment of taste's subjectivity and claim to objectivity (universality).

[4] See "Truth and Politics" for Arendt's (Kantian) view of representative political thought. According to Arendt, in order to approach representative political thought, one must imagine oneself in other positions, thereby gradually enlarging one's perspective. Arendt is careful to distinguish this process from empathy, as well as from imagining another's perspective (in contrast to one's own, in a different position). In "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," Arendt elaborates on this kind of judgment as a response to situations in which judgment is contested, as in both post-Holocaust morality and eighteenth-century aesthetics.

This connection has been explored by Valihora and L. Clark. I focus, in contrast, on the specific, literary way Austen deals with these issues, and encourages her readers to do the same. The distinction between partiality as bias and partiality as incompleteness is particularly relevant to the judgment of fictional worlds. First, aesthetic distance frees readers from actual self-interest, but novels encourage partiality towards characters. Second, fictional worlds can create an illusion of completeness and a perspective suggesting wholeness that are unavailable in reality.[5] Austen challenges readers to notice the unique kinds of bias and perspective offered in relation to her characters and her novel.

II. Experience and Impartiality in Ideal Judgment

I addressed in Chapter Five the possible reactions of readers to the alternative ending suggested by Henry's proposal to Fanny. Within the fictional world, this alternative ending appears in an unquestionably positive light to everyone except Fanny, who sees both possible unions with the Crawfords as doomed to unhappiness.[6] Matches between Fanny and Henry, on the one hand, and Edmund and Mary, on the other, cast the inhabitants of Mansfield Park as lucky and the Crawfords as disinterested. According to the standards of the fictional world, neither Fanny nor Edmund can expect Henry or Mary to marry beneath them. A willingness to do so indicates that Henry and Mary are motivated by disinterested love rather than material concerns. The narrative's exposure of the shortcomings of Henry

[5] I do not intend any claim here about actual completeness, an author's knowledge of fictional worlds, or their ontological status. I merely refer to the possibility offered by fiction of providing views not normally accessible (e.g., of character's minds) and a general perspective, often associated with impersonal narrative, not available in real life. See Balfour for an interesting discussion of how Austen's free indirect speech plays with the tension between personal and impersonal which does and does not translate into the many film adaptations of her work. Also see Miller (*Style*)for a somewhat enraptured discussion of Austen's voice and style.

[6] Maria and Mrs. Norris also see the union between Fanny and Henry negatively, the former because of her feelings for Henry and the latter because of her dislike of Fanny.

and Mary, however, complicates readers' expectations for the alternative ending just as its depiction of Fanny complicates their expectations for her happy ending.

Although the narrator exposes the Crawfords' lack of disinterestedness, Fanny's pessimism about the possibility of happy marriages between her and Henry and Edmund and Mary is also exposed as biased. In Chapter Five, I discussed one instance in which the narrator suggests that Fanny would be likely to fall in love with Henry if it were not for her feelings for Edmund, and I will address another suggestion that Fanny and Henry could be happy together in the next chapter, the final one in this study of *Mansfield Park*. Here, I concentrate on the narrator's depiction of the faultiness of Fanny's pessimism about a happy marriage between Mary and Edmund.

The narrator invokes two standards of impartial judgment – experienced (complete) and impartial (disinterested) – to problematize Fanny's pessimism about the possibility of a happy marriage between Mary and Edmund. Before explicitly invoking these standards, the narrator undermines Fanny's disinterestedness by emphasizing her belief in it: the prospect of Edmund's marriage to Mary, according to the narrator, is "most sorrowful to [Fanny], independently – she believed independently of self" (249). Fanny's supposedly selfless sorrow over their match is based on her negative judgment of Mary. Mary's shortcomings, rather than Fanny's feelings for Edmund, Fanny insists, influence her reaction to their match. The narrator's repetition of the independence that Fanny believes her sorrow to have from her own relationship to Edmund and Mary, however, suggests that Fanny's judgment of Mary is affected by her emotional interest in Edmund.

Fanny believes her judgment of Mary to have been confirmed in their final conversation before Mary traveled to London, a conversation in which, Mary, "in spite of some amiable sensations, and much personal kindness, had still been Miss Crawford, still

shewn a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so; darkened, yet fancying itself light" (249). Fanny thinks that Mary has none of Edmund's moral fiber, that Mary so little perceives the darkness in which she lives that she believes herself enlightened. According to Fanny, Mary cannot improve because she does not understand that she needs improvement. The narrator, however, indicates that Fanny's inexperience skews her judgment, suggesting that

> she may be forgiven by older sages, for looking on the chance of Miss Crawford's future improvement as nearly desperate, for thinking that if Edmund's influence in this season of love, had already done so little in clearing her judgment, and regulating her notions, his worth would be finally wasted on her even in years of matrimony. (249)

After undermining Fanny's belief in the selflessness of her sorrow over Edmund's potential marriage to Mary, the narrator undermines her perspective by suggesting its lack of experience. Like older sages (and potential readers), the narrator does not think that Edmund's future with Mary would be so hopeless as Fanny imagines.

The narrator's suggestion that older sages might forgive Fanny for her lack of experience raises the question of whether they, or readers, are willing to forgive Fanny for the partiality that affects her judgment as much as they are willing to forgive her for her inexperience. This suggestion is quickly made explicit in the next paragraph, in which the narrator considers both experienced and impartial judgment:

> Experience might have hoped more for any young people, so circumstanced, and impartiality would not have denied to Miss Crawford's nature, that participation of the general nature of women, which would lead her to adopt the opinions of the man she loved and respected, as her own. –But as such were Fanny's persuasions, she suffered very much from them, and could never speak of Miss Crawford without pain. (249)

The narrator proposes that more experienced observers would not, like Fanny, consider Mary's early failure to be influenced by Edmund as an indication that she could never be influenced by him.[7] Mary and Edmund have enough love, means, and influences, the narrator suggests, to convince older sages of their chances of conjugal felicity. This view of marriage disputes not only Fanny's specific pessimism about Mary, but also Mary's general conviction that marriage is the result of deceit and bound to be plagued by it. These objections raise the question of whether the narrator's standard of experienced judgment is optimistic in the way that any person might be by disposition or in the way that the narrator of a marriage comedy must be by vocation. This question is related to questions of the novel's relationship to the idealism of marriage comedies, questions to which I will return in the next chapter.

If experience might lead to an optimistic view of marriage in general, impartiality definitely leads to optimism about Mary's specific potential for improvement. Fanny's interested judgment of Mary is so focused on the particulars of their situation that she fails to consider Mary more generally as a woman, apt to "adopt the opinions of the man she loved and respected as her own" (249). Fanny's partiality in denying that Mary shares "the general nature of women" (249) is both incomplete and biased. Not only does she see Mary exclusively in the limited context of their particular situation, this limited context inclines Fanny to judge Mary more harshly than would an impartial judge. Mary's shortcomings, the narrator proposes, would not prevent the happiness of her marriage with Edmund. The individual qualities and opinions that ill suit her to Edmund would be overcome by the

[7] Jones, in the context of her biographical and historical account of marriage in Austen's time, contrasts Fanny's pessimism with the "more impartial judgment" that she attributes to Austen. Jones's optimism about the happiness of Edmund and Mary's marriage does not, however, extend to a union between Fanny and Henry, which she sees as doomed by their dissimilarities (148).

influences of her general nature. Fanny, according to the narrator, falls short of the standards of experienced and impartial judgment in considering the potential happiness of Edmund and Mary's marriage. The shortcomings of Fanny's judgment affect Fanny herself more than anyone else, causing her to mourn for the unhappiness that she considers Edmund's fate.

The narrator's exposure of Fanny's failure to judge both impartially and from a wide experience raises questions for readers. How might Fanny correct her judgment? How should readers respond to the narrator's judgments about Mary and Edmund? Though Fanny cannot correct the inexperience of her judgment, she could potentially be more impartial than she is. If her feelings for Edmund did not affect her judgment of Mary, would her inexperience still lead her to pessimism and sorrow? Could partiality be corrected by experience instead of inexperience contributing to partiality? According to the narrator, experienced judgment would arrive at an optimistic view of marriage, while impartial judgment would lead to an optimistic view of Mary's potential to become more like Edmund. Do these judgments indicate that readers should hope for Mary's marriage to Edmund rather than for Fanny's?

The narrator exposes Fanny's failures to judge according to the standards of experience and impartiality not, I propose, to encourage readers to hope for Mary's happy marriage with Edmund, but rather to encourage readers to consider the effects of their own relative experience and partiality on their judgments of Fanny, Mary, and the novel. To what extent are readers' experiences of real marriage and of marriage comedies relevant to their judgments of Fanny, Mary, and their potential marriages? The novel's structure, I have argued, encourages a partiality towards Fanny that is challenged by the critical light in which

it shows her and by the contrast that it develops between Fanny and Mary.[8] How might readers be partial to Fanny or Mary, and how might these partialities affect their judgments of their potential marriages? Does hoping for Fanny's or Mary's marriage to Edmund necessarily prevent readers from judging the alternative impartially? Though readers are encouraged to develop emotional attachments to the characters, they are given a perspective on them that has more potential for completeness and impartiality than that of any individual character. The narrator's comments about the alternative ending remind readers of the possibility of attaining this perspective, as well as about the different kinds of limitations posed by their individual experiences and partialities.

In invoking standards of experience and impartiality, the narrator also introduces a conception of the general nature of women, a nature that would cause Mary, just as any other woman, "to adopt the opinions of the man she loved and respected as her own" (249). This conception of the general nature of women touches on one of the central questions raised by the interaction of the novel's two plots: to what extent can people be educated or improved?[9] The idea that women will adopt their husbands' opinions focuses on a specific

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[8] The novel further complicates expectations by suggesting that Edmund and Mary's marriage is more and more likely at the same time as showing Mary in a more and more critical light, especially through the letters she writes to Fanny in Portsmouth.

[9] Improvement and education are emphasized by many critics of the novel. Duckworth discusses Austen's symbolic use of the contemporary vocabulary of improvement to convey her conservative attitude towards the cultural heritage embodied in British estates. Boulukos links improvement with the kind of limited reform an absentee landowner like Sir Thomas might achieve. Brenner's interpretation of the novel as a "dark ironic vision" (30) means improvement is impossible generally in the fictional world, as well as specifically for Fanny and the Crawfords. I. Armstrong discusses how the novel uses the words "improve" and "improvement" ambiguously in both aesthetic and social contexts (89 and passim). Cleere, in her reading of the novel's family structure in economic terms, understands the novel to mean by "improvement" the "passage from utility to exchange" (122) undergone by Fanny after Sir Thomas's return from Antigua. Cohen sees "improvement" as "the drive to achieve the stability of a closed system" (677) in her reading of *Mansfield Park* in terms of family systems theory. Quaintance discusses ways in which Austenian improvement is more congenial to Reptonian improvement than is often supposed. Chan's attention to

type of influence between genders rather than on the general influence of a specific type of values. The narrator's assertion that Mary, insofar as she shares the general nature of women, would be influenced by Edmund suggests that Fanny would, if she were to fall in love with Henry, likewise be influenced by him. The alternate ending suggested by Henry's proposal implies, however, that Mary and Henry will be improved by Edmund and Fanny and adopt their values, not that both women will adopt the values of their husbands, whatever those values might be. The betterment that results from Henry's attempts to win Fanny thus suggests that good values are more likely to influence bad values than the other way around. The novel also suggests, however, that bad values cannot always be improved. The Crawfords prove educable in that they can learn to appreciate good values, but unimprovable because they cannot consistently act according to them, while the Bertrams[10] and Fanny are both educable and improvable in their ability to learn from their mistakes and to better act according to their values.[11] This contrast between educable and improvable people, I argue, is one place where *Mansfield Park*'s position and marriage plots intersect.[12]

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improvement and education distinguishes between formal and informal education, assessing the novel's depiction of the possibility of change as slim. L. Clark contrasts real improvement with merely utilitarian education, and links the former to Aristotelian mimesis. Canuel links error and punishment with the ability to correct, and so achieve selfhood and narrative distinction.

[10] Except Maria, to whose fate I will return in the next chapter.

[11] Susan's educability, and the relative effects of her natural qualities vs. her unfortunate environment provide another interesting example.

[12] See François for a discussion of "improvement" as a tradition in Western literary modernity to which she proposes a counter-tradition including *Mansfield Park*. Francois reads the novel as sharing an "ethos of attending to unobserved, not-for-profit experience rather than results entered on the public record, of defining action as a matter of timing and form rather than consequence, and of measuring difference not by what an action materially produces but by the imaginative possibilities revelation may either open or eclipse" (21). In this context, the question is not that of the characters' potential improvement ("in its early sense of 'the turning of a thing to profit or good account'" (234)), but rather that of how characters like Fanny "decline" (234) improvement, thereby questioning its limits and even desirability (235).

Although the narrator here insists that Fanny is wrong to consider Mary unimprovable, the novel asserts that she, like Henry, falls back too easily into the loose values of London because, though she can appreciate the ideals espoused at Mansfield Park, she cannot change her behavior to reflect these ideals.[13] The cynical attitude that the Crawfords have learned in London may be correctible under different circumstances, but their failure to understand the sincere attitude espoused at Mansfield Park prevents them from replacing their cynicism with sincerity. Of course, the failure of the Crawfords' improvement can be blamed in part on the superficiality of the sincerity espoused at Mansfield Park. But Mary and Henry, the novel also suggests, would need to be constantly with Edmund and Fanny, constantly reminded of the ideal embodied in them, in order to behave consistently according to this ideal. The judgments passed on the characters in the conclusion of the novel suggest that the kind of flawed relationship that Fanny and the Bertrams have to ideals provides better results than the kind of flawed relationship that the Crawfords have. Sir Thomas, Edmund, Tom, Julia, and Fanny all suffer and change (albeit somewhat abruptly) the way that they hold values. The Crawfords are influenced by their betters, but not fundamentally improved.[14]

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[13] I will deal in the next chapter with the narrator's final comments on the effects of Mansfield Park on Mary, and her inability to find an appropriate match.

[14] Several critics emphasize disposition in accounting for these successes and failures. Chan sees disposition as a product of both natural qualities and environment, something that once formed, becomes difficult to change. Donohue links his idea of social ordination to the novel's presentation of disposition as a natural tendency that is, nonetheless, susceptible to external influences (174).) Duffy emphasizes the precarious balance between natural gifts and education (77). Garson links improvement and education with the problem of justifying limited upward social mobility. Lynch's reading of Austen's allusions to nineteenth-century horticultural concerns ("'Young Ladies'") emphasizes the tension between the natural and artificial in courtship plots. Contrary to Austen scholarship that links realism with social regulation, Lynch argues instead that Austen aligns education with greenhouse cultivation, rewriting "that plot of naturalization in an idiom of artifice" (719).

III. Standards of Impartiality

Fanny's judgment of the potential marriage between Mary and Edmund is flawed, according to the narrator, both because of Fanny's lack of experience and her emotional and personal interest in Edmund. The first kind of partiality, her lack of a more complete picture of marriage, allows her to be more pessimistic about the possibilities of marital happiness than a more experienced perspective would recommend, while the second kind of partiality, the influence of her own feelings and interests, fails to balance her particular perspective on Mary with the results of a more general view of her as a woman. Sir Thomas's perception of Fanny's new potential and of her refusal of Henry provides an interesting contrast. His belief in his good values and his supposed strictness in judging the adherence of others to his own high standards disguise from him the laxity of his own conformance to them.

Having already been impressed by Fanny's improved appearance, Sir Thomas begins to take a greater interest in her when he notices Henry's interest. The narrator exposes the hypocrisy with which Sir Thomas observes Henry's attentions. Although Sir Thomas is

> infinitely above scheming or contriving for any the most advantageous matrimonial establishment that could be among the apparent possibilities of any one most dear to him, and disdaining even as a littleness the being quick-sighted on such points, he could not avoid perceiving in a grand and careless way that Mr. Crawford was somewhat distinguishing his niece – nor perhaps refrain (though unconsciously) from giving a more willing assent to invitations [from the Grants] on that account. (163)

Sir Thomas disapproves of the pursuit of advantageous marriages, but he cannot help being influenced by the advantage of a match between Henry and Fanny.[15] In other people, Sir

[15] Sir Thomas here repeats his mistake with Maria and Rushworth. After having observed them together, he offers Maria the chance to back out of the marriage but is too easily convinced by her refusal (138).

Thomas attributes "being quick-sighted" (163) about advantageous matches to the negative influence of material interests. Because he does not believe himself to be susceptible to such interests, Sir Thomas interprets his own perception of Henry's attentions not only as unavoidable, but also as carried out "in a grand and careless" (163) manner that he assumes is incompatible with the littleness exhibited by others. Sir Thomas's dismissal of the possibility that he could be motivated by material concerns blinds him to how his behavior is affected by his perception of Henry's attentions. The unacknowledged material motivations of his newfound sociability contradict the standards of disinterestedness that he casually invokes.

When Sir Thomas goes to the East room to tell Fanny about Henry's proposal, he invokes a standard of impartial (as complete) judgment in a way that exposes his own failure to adhere to, or even understand, this standard. Before mentioning his business, Sir Thomas notices that Fanny has no fire in the room that has been allocated for her use. After gathering that Mrs. Norris has not allowed it, Sir Thomas justifies her behavior to Fanny, acknowledges it as extreme, and insists that Fanny's impartial judgment will recognize it as kindly meant:

> "Your aunt Norris has always been an advocate, and very judiciously, for young people's being brought up without unnecessary indulgences; but there should be moderation in everything. –She is also very hardy herself, which of course will influence her in her opinion of the wants of others. And on another account too, I can perfectly comprehend. –I know what her sentiments have always been. The principle was good in itself, but it may have been, and I believe *has been* carried too far in your case. –I am aware that there has been sometimes, in some points, a misplaced distinction; but I think too well of you, Fanny, to suppose you will ever harbour

> resentment on that account. –You have an understanding, which will prevent you from receiving things only in part, and judging partially by the event. –You will take in the whole of the past, you will consider times, persons, and probabilities, and you will feel that *they* were not least your friends who were educating and preparing you for that mediocrity of condition which *seemed* to be your lot. –Though their caution may prove eventually unnecessary, it was kindly meant; and of this you may be assured, that every advantage of affluence will be doubled by the little privations and restrictions that may have been imposed. I am sure you will not disappoint my opinion of you, by failing at any time to treat your aunt Norris with the respect and attention that are due to her." (212)

Sir Thomas's appeal to impartial judgment based on a true picture of the whole situation under consideration is bookended by two comments about partiality: the first excuses that of Mrs. Norris, while the second attempts to ameliorate Fanny's privations by insisting that they will enhance her experience of advantages. Mrs. Norris, according to Sir Thomas, should be forgiven for failing to live up to the standard he expects of Fanny: to "'take in the whole of the past…consider times, persons, and probabilities'" (212). Fanny, furthermore, should consider the advantages that Sir Thomas expects she will soon enjoy from the perspective of her privations rather than considering her privations from the perspective of these new advantages.

In fact, Sir Thomas appeals to the standard of impartial, complete judgment precisely to forestall the possibility that Fanny, elevated by Henry's offer, will judge Mrs. Norris harshly from her new position. But Sir Thomas's appeal to a standard of impartial judgment

is problematic in a number of ways.[16] He insists both that Mrs. Norris went too far in her treatment of Fanny and that this treatment was consistent with Fanny's low position. This inconsistency can be unsatisfactorily resolved by a second, namely, his failure to hold Mrs. Norris to the same standard to which he holds Fanny. Following this interpretation, Mrs. Norris treated Fanny in a way that she thought was appropriate, but which was in fact excessive due to her failure to consider the difference between Fanny's constitution and her own. Sir Thomas excuses Mrs. Norris's insistence that Fanny have no fire in the East room by explaining the partiality of the former's perspective. This excuse is weakened considerably, however, when he follows it with the injunction that Fanny's judgment must not be partial, and instead must consider everything. Furthermore, while this excuse pertains to Mrs. Norris's insistence that Fanny have no fire in the East room, it does nothing to explain the '"misplaced distinction"' (212) that Sir Thomas acknowledges has sometimes been made between Fanny and her cousins. Sir Thomas has been complicit in making this distinction,[17] and his attitude towards it now betrays the slippery partiality of his own judgment. His acknowledgment that Fanny has been mistreated rests on his current expectation of her elevation, while his insistence that Mrs. Norris's treatment of Fanny has been appropriate rests on the former's belief in Fanny's inescapable '"mediocrity of

[16] Sir Thomas is not alone in invoking ideal standards to influence Fanny's judgment of Henry. Edmund grants her that her refusal has shown her to be '"upright and disinterested"' (236), but continues by urging: '"prove yourself grateful and tender-hearted; and then you will be the perfect model of a woman, which I have always believed you born for"' (236). Not only does Edmund believe that accepting Henry would make Fanny an ideal woman, he also believes that Henry's affection for Fanny makes him, if not an ideal man, at least his ideal self. His love for Fanny, insists Edmund, '"proves him unspoilt by his uncle. It proves him, in short, every thing that I had been used to wish to believe him, and feared he was not"' (238). Edmund's feelings for Mary influence his judgment of Henry, as well as his inclination for a match between Henry and Fanny.

[17] I discussed in Chapter One his conversation with Mrs. Norris about the '"distinction proper"' (10) to be made between his daughters and Fanny. He thereafter entrusts Mrs. Norris to enforce this difficult distinction, becoming aware of the way she does so only when it looks problematic in the light of Fanny's imminent elevation.

condition'" (212). Sir Thomas demands of Fanny an idealized impartial judgment that forgives the partiality of Mrs. Norris. His expectation of Fanny's impartiality, moreover, rests on the partiality of his own judgment. This partiality judges the mistreatment that he only somewhat acknowledges from the perspective of the elevation that he expects for her. Without the expectation of this elevation, Sir Thomas would not find the distinction between Fanny and her cousins misplaced, nor worry about Mrs. Norris's overzealous application of her principles.

If Sir Thomas's judgment is interested, partial, and inconsistent when he considers Fanny's elevation, it becomes even more so when he understands that she means to refuse Henry's offer. Fanny's inability to explain her refusal without exposing either Maria's behavior with Henry or her own feelings for Edmund contributes to the partiality of Sir Thomas's perspective. His own interests, however, also play a role in his reaction to Fanny's refusal. Henry's status and charm prevent Sir Thomas from suspecting that he could lack principles. He does suspect that Fanny might have feelings for Edmund that would prevent her from accepting Henry, but satisfies himself "on the score of the cousins" (215) by calculatedly testing her and observing her reaction to his comments about Edmund's love for Mary. Like the rest of the people in the fictional world, Sir Thomas cannot understand how someone in Fanny's position could refuse an offer as advantageous as Henry's, even without having affection for him.[18]

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[18] Adler characterizes their argument as one of the starkest examples of feminine versus masculine styles of argumentation in Austen, with Fanny's recourse to personal testimony completely overpowered by Sir Thomas's use of "purely objective, legitimate strategies" (174). Adler's interest in distinguishing feminine from masculine styles of argumentation causes her to deemphasize the reasons behind Fanny's inability to support her position with objective reasons as well as the interests motivating Sir Thomas's dismissal of her personal testimony.

Sir Thomas's attitude towards Henry's offer and his lack of information about Fanny's motives cause him to judge her refusal harshly. Although he has just attributed to her a judgment that meets the highest of standards, when he understands her refusal he reverses this opinion, calling her willful, inconsiderate, and selfish. Instead of trying to understand her refusal in the light of his previous opinion of her character, he adjusts his opinion of her character to fit his opinion of her refusal.[19] Sir Thomas's judgments of Fanny are conditioned, in other words, by the context in which they are made, rather than by a serious contemplation of their object.

After upbraiding Fanny for a willfulness and selfishness that he does not associate with her generally,[20] Sir Thomas compares Fanny unfavorably to his daughters and reinstates the distinction between her and them that he had been on the verge of erasing, saying:

> "And I should have been very much surprised had either of my daughters, on receiving a proposal of marriage at any time, which might carry with it only *half* the eligibility of *this*, immediately and peremptorily, and without paying my opinion or my regard the compliment of any consultation, put a decided negative on it. I should have been much surprised, and much hurt, by such a proceeding. I should have thought it a gross violation of duty and respect. *You* are not to be judged by the same rule. You do not owe me the duty of a child. But, Fanny, if your heart can acquit you of *ingratitude*-" (216)

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[19] He expresses his discontent thusly: "I will, therefore, only add, as thinking it my duty to mark my opinion of your conduct – that you have disappointed every expectation I had formed, and proved yourself of a character the very reverse of what I had supposed" (216).
[20] After Mrs. Norris accuses Fanny of "'a little spirit of secrecy, and independence, and nonsense'" (219), the narrator shows Sir Thomas's inconsistency: "As a general reflection on Fanny, Sir Thomas thought nothing could be more unjust, though he had been so lately expressing the same sentiments himself…" (219).

Sir Thomas accuses Fanny both of falling short of the standard to which he holds his daughters, and of not having the status that would demand such a standard. His inconsistency is doubly hurtful as it stresses not only his disappointment in Fanny, but also her inferior position in his household.[21]

If Fanny is not to be judged by the same rule as the Miss Bertrams, what rule does Sir Thomas use in judging her? His accusation of ingratitude implies that Fanny owes him the gratitude of a beneficiary rather than the duty of a child. While he expects his children to consult his opinion before making important decisions, he seems to expect from Fanny an automatic obedience to his preferences. Sir Thomas's judgment of Fanny is partial both before and after her refusal of Henry. Beforehand, his expectation of her elevation causes him to see her in an idealized light and to hold to her to standards of impartial, complete judgment. Afterwards, he sees her in an unusually harsh light, holding her to standards of obedience in which her judgment has no place.

The irony of Sir Thomas's invocation of impartial judgment is not limited to its expression of his own partiality. Fanny's perspective from the periphery of the social action at Mansfield Park has always afforded her a more complete perspective on the behavior that she observes than the perspective of any of the more active participants. The narrator has exposed the problematic way in which Fanny's exclusion from her cousins' social world affects her perspective on it, as well as the interested partiality with which Fanny judges Mary. At the same time, the narrator has made clear that Fanny's exclusion allows her to see

[21] Duane characterizes this encounter between Sir Thomas and Fanny as gothic, and discusses how ideals of daughterly gratitude and feminine pliability blur the boundaries between Sir Thomas's demands and Fanny's desires (406-7).

and judge behavior, such as that among Henry and the Miss Bertrams, that the other characters either notice only insofar as it relates to their own interests or fail to notice at all.[22]

This relatively complete perspective on the social action and actors at Mansfield Park, moreover, informs Fanny's attitude towards her elevation. She cannot take seriously either Henry's attentions or the new importance that they afford her. Far from adopting the new position of superiority that Sir Thomas fears will affect her judgment of Mrs. Norris (and, perhaps, the rest of them), Fanny resists her elevation and continues to insist on her lack of importance. The whole picture of Mansfield Park that Fanny is used to considering barely includes her, let alone places her at its center.

Fanny's image of Mansfield Park and her role there is shown, however, to rest on an idealized image of Portsmouth as a home in which she belongs. Fanny's return to Portsmouth profoundly challenges her perspective on her place in the world, revealing the radical incompleteness of her relatively complete, though problematic, view of Mansfield Park.[23]

IV. The Distortions of Distance: Incompleteness and Partiality

Sir Thomas and Fanny see Henry's offer in very different lights. The incompleteness of the former's perspective together with the influence of his material interests prevents him from seeing Henry's offer as anything but advantageous, whereas Fanny's more complete perspective on Henry together with her partiality towards Edmund prevents her from seeing

[22] M. Butler associates Fanny's role as observer with the privileged eighteenth-century literary role of "thoughtful bystander" (228). Readers, she argues, are meant to identify not with Fanny herself, but rather this role.

[23] Halperin argues that the Portsmouth episodes are the biggest flaw of *Mansfield Park* because Austen unwittingly represents a life of feeling there in contrast to the vacuity and superficial morality of Mansfield Park. Collins sees Portsmouth instead as a representation of the "seaminess" (180) of poverty unique in Austen, one associating *Mansfield Park* with Victorian novels and distinguishing it from Austen's other novels.

the offer as anything but disadvantageous. Sir Thomas decides to send Fanny to visit her family in Portsmouth as "a medicinal project upon his niece's understanding" (250), a decision Fanny receives with delight. While Sir Thomas believes that experiencing the difference between Portsmouth and Mansfield Park will "teach her the value of a good income" (250), Fanny believes that she will be returning to a home where she is an equal rather than an inferior. Sir Thomas is right that the perspective afforded by Portsmouth will change Fanny's attitude and judgment, but he is not right about the kind of change it will effect.

Instead of re-evaluating Henry's offer in Portsmouth, Fanny re-evaluates her concept of home.[24] Although she does judge Henry as improved and is aware of what he could provide for her and her family, she does not consider accepting his offer and making a new home with him.[25] She desires only to return to Mansfield Park and the position of inferiority to which she had become accustomed and which she appreciates in a new way after spending time in Portsmouth. All the discomforts of that position are erased by the graver discomforts of Portsmouth. Sir Thomas's plan works insofar as it teaches Fanny to appreciate the comforts of Mansfield Park. Her return to Portsmouth cannot, however, teach Fanny to value a good income at the price of a loveless marriage. Although she has

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[24] "When she had been coming to Portsmouth, she had loved to call it her home, had been fond of saying that she was going home; the word had been very dear to her; and so it still was, but it must be applied to Mansfield. *That* was now the home. Portsmouth was Portsmouth; Mansfield was home" (292).

[25] Fanny thinks primarily of Susan: "Poor Susan was very little better fitted for home than her elder sister; and as Fanny grew thoroughly to understand this, she began to feel that when her own release from Portsmouth came, her happiness would have a material drawback in leaving Susan behind. That a girl so capable of being made, every thing good, should be left in such hands, distressed her more and more. Were *she* likely to have a home to invite her to, what a blessing it would be!—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 own comforts. She thought he was really good-tempered, and could fancy his entering into a plan of that sort, most pleasantly" (284).

become accustomed to a certain standard of living at Mansfield Park, she has also internalized ideals that limit the influence of material interests on her judgment.[26] She does not want to live in the squalor of Portsmouth, but she will not marry Henry just to escape it.[27]

Fanny is not forced to decide, however, between staying in Portsmouth and marrying Henry. Her realization that Mansfield Park is her home coincides with a realization at Mansfield Park that she belongs there. Although her new place in the household is cemented only in the novel's final chapter after she returns, both her experiences in Portsmouth and the experiences of adversity suffered by the inhabitants of Mansfield Park in her absence contribute to a new mutual appreciation. Fanny's judgment of herself and of Mansfield Park benefit from the perspective she gains in Portsmouth at the same time as her judgments of the Crawfords are borne out by their behavior. This behavior gives Sir Thomas a new perspective on Fanny's refusal of Henry, while life in Portsmouth gives her a new perspective on Mansfield Park.

Before turning to how Fanny's perspective changes in Portsmouth, I must explain further Sir Thomas's intentions in sending her there as well as the idealistic hopes with which Fanny greets his decision. Fanny's refusal of Henry causes Sir Thomas to consider her judgment "as at present diseased. A residence of eight or nine years in the abode of wealth and plenty had a little disordered her powers of comparing and judging" (250). Sir Thomas's

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[26] Lynch's view of *Mansfield Park* as pushing the genre by exploring the psychological costs of a virtue-rewarded plot emphasizes both "the shaping power of circumstance" and, especially in relation to Fanny's changing judgment after arriving in Portsmouth, her "susceptibility to the Bertrams' influence" and her internalization of their "class prejudices" ("Introduction" 11).

[27] De Rose reads the contrast between Mansfield Park and Portsmouth in terms of Johnsonian morality, emphasizing the inescapable hardship of both places, and the "discipline and moral strength" that allow Fanny to find pleasure at Mansfield Park that would have been impossible at Portsmouth (273).

diagnosis suggests that constant comfort is a detriment to healthy judgment, and, conversely, that a dose of privation can prevent or cure the disorder caused by constant comfort. In order for judgment to be healthy, in other words, it must be aware of different possible states of being, it must have a relatively complete picture of the possibilities that it evaluates.

Sir Thomas's diagnosis again invokes an ideal of impartial, complete judgment. It also, however, reduces the problem posed to Fanny's judgment by Henry's offer to a question of material well-being. Having quickly ruled out the possibility of shortcomings on Henry's part or a pre-engaged heart on Fanny's, the only consideration that remains for Sir Thomas is the material advantage of the marriage. Although Fanny recognizes the disadvantage of not being able to express her doubts about Henry's character, she "had hoped that to a man like her uncle, so discerning, so honourable, so good, the simple acknowledgment of settled *dislike* on her side, would have been sufficient. To her infinite grief she found it was not" (215).[28] Sir Thomas would agree with Fanny's attribution to him of discernment, honor, and goodness; he would not agree, however, with her interpretation of how these qualities should affect his judgment of Henry's offer and her refusal. Fanny's dislike of Henry does not figure into Sir Thomas's judgment of the situation. He considers her emotional well-being to be dependent on and subordinate to her material well-being.

Sir Thomas's diagnosis of Fanny's judgment not only subordinates emotional to material considerations, but also reveals his attitude towards Fanny's situation in his household. Henry's offer promises to relieve Sir Thomas of the burden of caring for Fanny, and he expects Fanny to see it in the same way. Because she does not appreciate the "value

[28] Burdan reads Fanny's mistake about how Sir Thomas will react to her refusal of Henry as one among many mistakes caused by her moral self-deception (201). François reads Fanny's inability to express her doubts about Henry as one example among many of "Fanny's refusal to enlighten those around her" (243), as well as of the coincidence of her principles and her self-interest (244).

of that home of greater permanence, and equal comfort" (250) to Mansfield Park that Henry offers her, Sir Thomas considers Fanny's judgment diseased. He accordingly sends her to Portsmouth so that she will appreciate not only the comforts to which she has become accustomed, but also the precariousness of her position at Mansfield Park.[29]

Fanny does not consider her position at Mansfield Park precarious, nor does she consider Mansfield Park her real home. Her anticipation of what it will be like to return to her family in Portsmouth highlights how she thinks of her place at Mansfield Park. Fanny is overwhelmed by the thought of returning to Portsmouth. The narrator contextualizes her expectations before expressing them in a series of phrases in free indirect speech:

> The remembrance of all her earliest pleasures, and of what she had suffered in being torn from them, came over her with renewed strength, and it seemed as if to be at home again, would heal every pain that had since grown out of the separation. To be in the centre of such a circle, loved by so many, and more loved by all than she had ever been before, 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! – This was a prospect to be dwelt on with a fondness that could be but half acknowledged. (250-1)

The narrator's introduction of Fanny's specific expectations points out the effect of her memories on these expectations: they make it *seem as if* being at home will return her to the world of these idealized memories, erasing the time and the reality that separates her from them.[30] Fanny conflates idealized memories of her early years with idealized images of

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[29] Garson notes that Sir Thomas is right about Fanny's limited resources and sees his surprise at Fanny's refusal of Henry as natural (150). His surprise may be justified, but his subsequent judgments of Fanny, I argue, are problematic.

[30] Here, Fanny's memory idealizes in an imbalanced and partial way that contrasts with the kind of harmonizing memory she attains in the East room (discussed in Chapter Five). In

returning home. The time between her leaving and her return will have no effect, she imagines, on Portsmouth or on her role there. She fills this time, moreover, with pain that will be entirely nullified by reoccupying the place she remembers so fondly. How she thinks about the pain of her time at Mansfield Park is clarified by the pleasures that she imagines await her in Portsmouth. If Portsmouth is filled with love and acceptance, Mansfield Park has been characterized by coldness and disapproval. The impossibility of acknowledging how fondly she dwells on her idealized expectations of Portsmouth, however, suggests Fanny's inability to face directly their implications about Mansfield Park.

Fanny nonetheless believes that Portsmouth will offer her all that Mansfield Park has not provided. In Portsmouth she will not be excluded or inferior; she will be at the center rather than on the periphery; she will be loved rather than tolerated; she will be accepted rather than pressured to change her opinion of the Crawfords. Fanny's memory of home includes no awareness of the material conditions of which Sir Thomas is so eager to remind her. Her family's ignorance of the Crawfords might guarantee that they will not reproach her on their account, but Fanny's failure to consider material conditions makes her unaware of how much more advantageous Henry's offer would look to them than it does even to Sir Thomas. The latter values material considerations over emotional, but Fanny's emotional idealization of Portsmouth ignores material considerations altogether.

As the narrator explains, Fanny anticipates returning to a home where she will not only be loved, but "more loved by all than she had ever been before" (251). This hope rests simultaneously on Fanny's idealization of her family and her memory of not being as loved by them as this idealization imagines. The "few simple lines" that she receives from her mother after writing to propose her visit

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the East room, Fanny gains perspective on people with whom she lives. No such proximity to Portsmouth tempers her idealization of her former home.

> expressed so natural and motherly a joy in the prospect of seeing her child again, as to confirm all the daughter's views of happiness in being with her—convincing her that she should now find a warm and affectionate friend in the "Mamma" who had certainly shewn no remarkable fondness for her formerly; but this she could easily suppose to have been her own fault, or her own fancy. She had probably alienated Love by the helplessness and fretfulness of a fearful temper, or been unreasonable in wanting a larger share than any one among so many could deserve. Now, when she knew better how to be useful and how to forbear, and when her mother could be no longer occupied by the incessant demands of a house full of little children, there would be leisure and inclination for every comfort, and they should soon be what mother and daughter ought to be to each other. (252)

Again, the narrator's portrayal of Fanny's expectations undermines them. Even when Fanny acknowledges the less than ideal realities of the past, she excuses the lack of love she remembers by blaming herself. In so doing, Fanny applies different standards in her assessments of her mother from those she applies in her implicit criticisms of Mansfield Park. If her own mother could not be expected to love a helpless, fretful, and fearful Fanny, what could Fanny expect of her relatives at Mansfield Park? If the positive qualities she has gained (at Mansfield Park) are to win over her mother, why have they had so little success at Mansfield Park?

While it might be reasonable to expect more from one's family than from distant relatives, Fanny's explicit and implicit expectations of Portsmouth and Mansfield Park are inconsistent with the difference between a natural and an adoptive home. First, Fanny holds Mansfield Park to higher standards than she does Portsmouth in not forgiving the former for a lack of love for which she excuses her mother. Second, she holds Portsmouth to higher

standards than she does Mansfield Park in expecting her mother to be affected by qualities that she does not expect Mansfield Park to reward. The ideal mother-daughter relationship that Fanny expects to materialize at Portsmouth does not conform to anything that Fanny has experienced, nor does she consider, in this expectation, that different standards of life and of familial relationships might operate in Portsmouth and in Mansfield Park.

Fanny's expectations of her family interact with her judgment of Mansfield Park in a way that does neither justice. Her idealization of Portsmouth degrades her judgment of Mansfield Park, obscuring the values and comforts to which she has become accustomed. This idealization also overlooks the reality of Portsmouth, a reality that her habituation to Mansfield Park has made unbearable to Fanny. Fanny is confronted with this reality immediately upon her arrival in her parents' home, where no one has either the "leisure" or the "inclination" (252) to conform to her ideals.

Fanny's arrival at Portsmouth provides a mirror image of her arrival at Mansfield Park eight years earlier.[31] The grandeur of the latter had made her uncomfortable, with its "rooms…too large for her to move in with ease" (13). Upon arriving in Portsmouth, however, she has become so accustomed to the large rooms of Mansfield Park that when she is taken into the parlour of her former home, a room "so small that her first conviction was of its being only a passage-room to something better,…she stood for a moment expecting to be invited on" (256). Fanny's judgment of each place is conditioned by the expectations habituated in the context of the other.

The material conditions of Portsmouth are not alone in appearing differently to the eighteen-year old Fanny than they did to the ten-year old that left them. She is surprised by

[31] Wright reads sending Fanny to Portsmouth as a temporal displacement plot showing readers what has been prevented by sending Fanny to Mansfield Park. Fanny's arrival in Portsmouth, she argues, is characterized more as a first time visit than a return home (386-7).

her parents' lack of interest in her and shocked by the disorder and noise that reigns in the household that she has remembered as so comfortable.[32] Fanny's idealized picture of home clashes with its reality, a clash that first forces a revision of her ideal. "She was at home," Fanny insists, "But, alas! it was not such a home, she had not such a welcome, as—she checked herself; she was unreasonable" (260). Just as at Mansfield Park Fanny excused her mother's previous lack of love, in Portsmouth Fanny excuses her family's lack of interest in her, asking: "What right had she to be of importance to her family? She could have none, so long lost sight of!" (260). When still in Mansfield, Fanny could imagine the fulfillment of her ideal in Portsmouth; but, once in Portsmouth, she must confront the distance of its reality from her ideal.

The standards by which Fanny judges Portsmouth are those that she has learned at Mansfield Park.[33] While Portsmouth falls far below these standards, the now distant Mansfield Park embodies them in a way that obscures from Fanny the less-than-ideal everyday realities that she had suffered there and that she had hoped to escape in Portsmouth. Even before she begins calling Mansfield Park her true home, she idealizes Mansfield Park in a way similar to how she had idealized Portsmouth when at Mansfield Park. While blaming herself and her unreasonable expectations for her disappointment in Portsmouth, she nevertheless "thought it would not have been so at Mansfield. No, in her uncle's house there would have been a consideration of times and seasons, a regulation of

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[32] Banfield's argument that Mansfield Park represents the "just mean" (5) between the extremes of Portsmouth and Sotherton emphasizes Portsmouth's disorder and chaos. Brown characterizes London, Portsmouth, and Mansfield Park as hell, purgatory, and heaven, respectively (81).

[33] Lodge also notes that Fanny judges the inhabitants of Portsmouth according to the standards of Mansfield Park. He considers these judgments particularly harsh because he (like Halperin) sees Portsmouth as full of life, especially in contrast to Mansfield Park, and because he, rightly I think, emphasizes the difficulty posed by Fanny's relative blindness to the faults of the Bertrams, who fail to live up to the values they espouse (95-6).

subject, a propriety, an attention towards every body which there was not here" (260).[34] What she once experienced as the coldness and formality of Mansfield Park has become a comfortable and necessary conformance to propriety.[35]

Fanny's idealizations of Portsmouth and of Mansfield Park share the effects of distance. From a physical (and in the case of Portsmouth, temporal) distance, Fanny focuses on the general qualities of each place without considering the immediate experience of each or its more particular qualities. There are, however, also important differences between Fanny's idealizations of Portsmouth and of Mansfield Park. Fanny was taken from the home in Portsmouth in which she was happy to Mansfield Park, a place she first experienced as terrifying and uncomfortable. Her idealization of Portsmouth grew out of her longing for her former home. As she grew more accustomed to Mansfield Park, Fanny adjusted her memories of Portsmouth to supply the comforts that were not forthcoming at Mansfield Park, but did not adjust them in accordance with the comforts to which she had become accustomed.

While Fanny idealizes Portsmouth over time as the perfect home, her idealization of Mansfield Park occurs almost immediately in reaction to the reality of Portsmouth. Though she cannot help but shed tears upon departing from Mansfield, Fanny leaves "willingly and eagerly" (254),[36] anticipating a happy homecoming in Portsmouth. The reality of the

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[34] Cohen reads Fanny's judgment as reflecting the different familial structures of the Betrams and the Prices rather than her own shifting loyalties (674-5).

[35] Zimmerman reads Fanny's trip to Portsmouth as teaching her to value manners, even though polite society does not always live up to her moral standards (352-3).

[36] The narrator teases Fanny a little in describing her sensitivity and emotion upon leaving Mansfield Park: "Poor Fanny! though going, as she did, willingly and eagerly, the last evening at Mansfield Park must still be wretchedness. Her heart was completely sad at parting. She had tears for every room in the house, much more for every beloved inhabitant. She clung to her aunt, because she would miss her; she kissed the hand of her uncle with struggling sobs, because she had displeased him; and as for Edmund, she could neither speak, nor look, nor

homecoming she experiences shows her Mansfield Park in a new light. She not only appreciates the propriety and formality that once made her uncomfortable, but also ceases to consider significant the discomfort of her inferior position or to regret not being the kind of object of affection that she had anticipated being in Portsmouth.

Fanny's quick shift from idealizing Portsmouth to idealizing Mansfield Park strikes many readers as a fatal weakness. Her shifting idealizations show her judgments of both Portsmouth and Mansfield Park to be inconsistent and dependent on her position.[37] This inconsistency and dependence, I submit, is the narrative's point. Fanny's judgment has never been consistent, infallible, or free from various types of interest. At the same time, her commitment to judging disinterestedly, however short she may fall of her ideal, prevents her from hurting others and assures a self-reflection conducive to improvement. The drastic change in perspective that occurs when Fanny returns to Portsmouth therefore indicates not only the inescapable effects of one's particular position on one's judgment, but also the resources that might balance these effects.

Fanny first judges Portsmouth in the light of Mansfield Park, and then Mansfield Park in the light of Portsmouth. She is unable to distance herself from both places simultaneously and judge them side by side from an impartial perspective. However, despite the partiality of Fanny's current position, her change in perspective also involves a reorganization of values that the narrator corroborates. Her parents' house not only has none of the emotional comforts that she has anticipated, but also abounds with emotional and material discomforts that she has not anticipated. How could the inferiority of her

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think, when the last moment came with *him*, and it was not till it was over that she knew he was giving her the affectionate farewell of a brother" (254).

[37] Fleishman considers Fanny weak and finds her judgment inconsistent, characterizing her judgments of Portsmouth and her parents as snobbish and jealous (45).

position at Mansfield Park not appear more desirable than her lack of importance in Portsmouth?[38]

V. Partiality, Ideals, and Judgment

Fanny's disappointment in Portsmouth and negative judgment of her parents does not change her behavior. She attempts to be of use however she can, just as she always has at Mansfield Park. These attempts are generally not valued in either place, but Fanny's limited success in Portsmouth contributes to a sense of self that has never accompanied her role as helpmate at Mansfield Park. In Portsmouth, Fanny learns that she is capable of influencing others.

The danger of Fanny's idealization of Mansfield Park is thus countered by the use to which she puts all that she has acquired or developed there in advising and guiding Susan. She uses the economic resources supplied by Mansfield Park to resolve an ongoing dispute between her sisters as well as to subscribe, "*in propria persona*" (271), to a library.[39] Her subscription not only satisfies Fanny's longing to read, but also makes her a teacher to Susan. She is amazed "to be having any one's improvement in view in her choice! But so it was. Susan had read nothing, and Fanny longed to give her a share in her own first pleasures, and inspire a taste for the biography and poetry which she delighted in herself" (271). The education she acquired at Mansfield Park allows Fanny to guide Susan in a way reminiscent

[38] Canuel makes a similar point by contrasting the upper-class system of pains and mortifications of Mansfield Park with the more formidable pain of exclusion that Fanny suffers in Portsmouth.
[39] Despotopoulou reads this as an example of Fanny's agency and freedom from male influence (583). Mandal associates Fanny's economic ability to settle a familial dispute with Evangelical representations of charity (112), and her subscription to the library as a recognition of her moral independence (122).

of Edmund's guidance of Fanny.[40] This activity makes Fanny aware in a new way of her involvement with and possible influence on other people. While Henry's courtship first made Fanny the object of attention, her relationship with Susan makes Fanny an actor in her own world. She and Susan withdraw from the others to read together, but Fanny no longer observes her surroundings from an aesthetisized distance. She overcomes her reluctance to act and is rewarded with a relationship with Susan that is a "material advantage to each" (270). The education that Fanny receives at Mansfield Park is utilized in a new way in Portsmouth.

Henry's arrival there constitutes another test of her judgment, as well as an interesting comparison between different types of partiality and idealization. In Portsmouth, Fanny judges Henry to be improved without "considering in how different a circle she had been just seeing him, [or] how much might be owing to contrast" (281). Her judgment, in other words, is partial. When they were in Mansfield Park, Henry and Mary appeared to Fanny to represent the problematic values of London and fall very short of the standards of Mansfield Park. In Portsmouth, conversely, Henry is so different from her family that he appears similar to the inhabitants of Mansfield Park (whom Fanny idealizes from a distance), and is aligned, rather than contrasted, with them.[41]

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[40] Duffy also notes this similarity in his somewhat inconsistent discussion of the relationship between environment and natural character (78). Marshall interprets Fanny's amazement at playing the role of Edmund in educating Susan as stemming from her amazement about "the act of subscribing herself as herself, the act of signing her name" (87). His reading emphasizes the ambiguity and even impossibility of appearing in *propia persona*.

[41] Wainwright, who considers Fanny's character flaws in terms of Lockean ideals, sees Fanny as unreservedly judging Henry improved, but unable to communicate this judgment due to her "extreme reserve" (66-7). I find Fanny's judgment of Henry's improvement to be both tempered and presented as partial. Additionally, I do not think Fanny ever wants to encourage Henry in any way or that encouragement of Henry is presented as positive in any way.

Despite Fanny's judgment that Henry is improved, she is steadfast in her refusal to consider marrying him.[42] The incompleteness of her judgment of Henry's improvement is complemented by whatever prevents her from accepting him. Her continued refusal and its basis in her emotions can be seen in a negative or positive light. On the one hand, her inability to master her feelings for Edmund can be seen as an obstacle to a marriage not only materially advantageous, but also recommended by her judgment that Henry is improved. On the other hand, her refusal to consider marrying someone whom she does not love can be seen as adherence to a principle that protects her from her flawed judgment of Henry's improvement.

Readers' evaluations of Fanny's judgments of Henry are of course determined in part by how they judge Henry, and how they judge Henry is determined by the narrator's depiction of his partiality and idealizations, which come across as more problematic than those of Fanny. Readers' judgments of Fanny's and Henry's relative flaws are complicated, however, by the kind of partiality and idealization that the interaction of the novel's two plots encourages in readers. I will return to novel's invitations to judge partially and impartially as well as to idealize both it and its characters after examining its depiction of Henry's partiality and idealization.

The narrator introduces Henry's intentions towards Fanny as irresponsible and somewhat cruel, but depicts the change in his intentions more ambiguously. His initial plan to amuse himself by engaging Fanny's heart is fueled, firstly, by the challenge of her cold response and, secondly, by the feeling he perceives in her spirited interaction with William.

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[42] In Grenberg's analysis of Fanny as exemplifying Kantian courageous humility, Fanny's refusal of Henry shows her moral agency. Henry, on the other hand, shows how Kant's radical evil exists in genteel society.

Henry observes Fanny listening to William's stories of danger at sea, and the siblings form

> 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. (161-2)

The passage begins by characterizing Henry's position of observation as both aesthetic and moral. He contemplates "a picture" (161) of Fanny absorbed in William's stories, a picture his moral taste qualifies him to value. Fraternal love,[43] the narrator suggests, cannot be appreciated without moral taste. Henry has the taste to appreciate the moral scene of Fanny's love for her brother, but this moral taste does not, as becomes clear in the continuation, prevent him from wishing to toy with Fanny's feelings.

In an aesthetic context, Henry's moral taste corresponds to that of Edmund and Fanny; he is able to appreciate the beauty of fraternal love as well as of a good sermon. The

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[43] The narrator places a high value on fraternal love and attaches importance to the ability to appreciate this bond in others: "An advantage this, a strengthener of love, in which even the conjugal tie is beneath the fraternal. Children of the same family, the same blood, with the same first associations and habits, have some means of enjoyment in their power, which no subsequent connections can supply; and it must be by a long and unnatural estrangement, by a divorce which no subsequent connection can justify, if such precious remains of the earliest attachments are ever entirely outlived. Too often, alas! it is so. – Fraternal love, sometimes almost every thing, is at others worse than nothing. But with William and Fanny Price, it was still a sentiment in all its prime and freshness, wounded by no opposition of interest, cooled by no separate attachment, and feeling the influence of time and absence only in its increase.
An affection so amiable was advancing each in the opinion of all who had hearts to value any thing good. Henry Crawford was as much struck with it as any." (161)
Ryle identifies the relationship between fraternal and conjugal ties as *Mansfield Park*'s "theme-notion" (292), and discusses how the novel compares the characters in terms of their abilities to fill their family roles.

moral taste with which he contemplates Fanny has no effect, however, on his real intentions towards her. His aesthetic appreciation of her sensibility is, in fact, so separated from his real behavior that he recognizes the pleasure it might afford him "to be loved by such a girl" without thinking of how her "genuine feeling" and "unsophisticated mind" (162) might be affected by heartbreak and disappointment. The proof of her strong feelings that so attracts Henry also increases the irresponsibility of exciting ardours that he has no intention of reciprocating. Henry may be able to appreciate Fanny's virtues, but he has not learned to apply his moral taste to his interactions with real people.

As I mentioned in Chapter Five, the narrator singles out Fanny's tenderness and taste as the qualities that make her most susceptible to Henry. Henry's moral taste and the good sense that allows him to appreciate her virtues make him unexpectedly susceptible to Fanny. He proclaims himself "'fairly caught'" (199), announces his plans to marry her, and refuses to take "no" for an answer. What began as, in Mary's words, a "'wicked project upon [Fanny's] peace'" (201), becomes real feeling and serious intention. But what motivates Henry?[44]

The narrator makes clear Henry's capacity to appreciate Fanny's virtues, his possession of talents irresistible to Fanny's taste, and his intentions to treat her with love and consideration.[45] At the same time, his flaws are revealed to expose the similarity between his

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[44] Garson calls the question of Henry's sincerity "undecidable" (138), noting that readers are never given Henry's own perspective. She attributes to Henry aristocratic natural taste that makes him Fanny's complement as well as her opposite (138).

[45] The narrator describes Henry's sense: "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" (201). The talents that are irresistible to Fanny's taste include his acting and his reading of Shakespeare. She tries to ignore him, "but taste was too strong in her. She could

initial plan to toy with Fanny and his serious courtship. Not only does Henry's moral taste and good sense make him susceptible to Fanny's (unsuspected) charms, his "disposition to persevere" (221) is fueled by Fanny's refusal. The good qualities that enable him to appreciate Fanny are countered by morally ambiguous qualities that prevent him from being dissuaded from his purpose.[46] The narrator mentions the role that his vanity plays in maintaining his optimism and describes his feelings for Fanny in terms that call into question the role that she plays in them. Henry thinks more about his own attractions than the possible reasons for Fanny's relative immunity to them. The strength of his love corresponds to a lack of consideration: "it was a love which, operating on an active, sanguine spirit, of more warmth than delicacy, made her affection appear of greater consequence, because it was withheld, and determined him to have the glory, as well as the felicity, of forcing her to love him" (221). Henry's pursuit of Fanny is motivated by a pleasure in the chase that overlooks Fanny's feelings. He may have the ability to appreciate her good qualities, but his vanity and love of novelty and role-playing motivate and qualify his perseverance.[47]

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not abstract her mind five minutes: she was forced to listen; his reading was capital, and her pleasure in good reading extreme" (228). Henry expresses his consideration in vowing not to take her from Northampton and in thinking of the pleasure he will get from being "'the person to give the consequence so justly her due'" (203).

[46] Henry's perseverance in the face of her refusal angers Fanny, and reminds her and readers of why she has judged him harshly: "Now she was angry. Some resentment did arise at a perseverance so selfish and ungenerous. Here was again a want of delicacy and regard for others which had formerly so struck and disgusted her. Here was again a something of the same Mr. Crawford whom she had so reprobated before. How evidently was there a gross want of feeling and humanity where his own pleasure was concerned – And, alas! how always known no principle to supply as a duty what the heart was deficient in. Had her own affections been as free – as perhaps they ought to have been – he never could have engaged them" (222-3).

[47] Also: "Love such as his, in a man like himself, must with perseverance secure a return, and at no great distance; and he had so much delight in the idea of obliging her to love him in a very short time, that her not loving him now was scarcely regretted. A little difficulty to be overcome, was no evil to Henry Crawford. He rather derived spirits from it. He had been apt to gain hearts too easily. His situation was new and animating" (221).

Henry's idealization of Fanny and his attempts to impress her superficially improve his behavior. When he is near her or focused entirely on impressing her, he acts according to her standards. While in Mansfield Park, this behavior succeeds only in making Fanny treat him with greater politeness than his previous behavior had warranted. He is more successful in Portsmouth, but his appeal to her judgment betrays his superficial adherence to the values that he appreciates in Fanny. After impressing her with his tales of being a responsible landowner, he asks Fanny to advise him about how to proceed. In addition to her customary refusal to take the position of advisor, Fanny adds a maxim about judgment in the following dialogue:

> "I advise! – You know very well what is right."
>
> "Yes. When you give me your opinion, I always know what is right. Your judgment is my rule of right."
>
> "Oh, no! – do not say so. We have all a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it, than any other person can be." (280)[48]

Henry idealizes Fanny in a way that betrays his flawed understanding of the values he tries to adopt. In appealing to Fanny as a "rule of right" (280), Henry thinks he is improving himself, but he takes no responsibility for the process. He does not want to judge for himself, a responsibility that Fanny insists everyone has.[49]

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[48] Despotopoulou cites these lines in her reading of Fanny as embodying Adam Smith's impartial spectator. Although the comparison to Smith is useful, I remain unconvinced of Despotopoulou's argument that Fanny's feminine gaze creates a space of female agency in *Mansfield Park*.

[49] Fanny takes this responsibility seriously. She does, however, make use of external standards. When she feels herself "incapable of judging impartially" (295) whether to accept Mary's offer that she and Henry return Fanny to Mansfield Park Fanny considers her obligation to Sir Thomas "a rule…which settled everything" (296). Instead of being "left to weigh and decide between opposite inclinations and doubtful notions of right" (296) – her desire to return to Mansfield and her wish to prevent Mary and Edmund from being together – Fanny's "awe of her uncle, and her dread of taking a liberty with him, made it

Henry, Fanny, and Sir Thomas all display partial and interested judgments. None of them can attain a complete view or prevent their interests from influencing them. The novel, I propose, distinguishes among their different kinds of partiality and interestedness in terms of their different relationships to ideals. Fanny and Sir Thomas take ideals seriously, but fall short of them in different ways. Neither attains the complete view that both value, nor are they able to prevent personal and emotional interests from affecting their judgments. Although Fanny doubts and questions herself, she is unable to see these interests clearly and thus to neutralize their influence. Sir Thomas does not doubt himself or his adherence to his ideals; his certainty that he embodies them precludes any possibility that he acknowledge the influence of material interests that he considers beneath him. Neither Fanny's profound, nor Sir Thomas's superficial, relationship to ideals is ideal. Fanny's mistakes, however, require a less dramatic corrective than do Sir Thomas's.

But Sir Thomas's shortcomings compare favorably to Henry's late and lazy relationship to ideals. Henry's failure to internalize the ideal that he sees in Fanny has more severe consequences and less potential for correction than Sir Thomas's superficial relationship to his ideals, let alone Fanny's failure to live up to hers. Though Fanny does not always see her failures clearly, her acknowledgment that she does not live up to her ideals motivates self-correction and improvement. Because Sir Thomas takes ideals seriously, he can be shown his failures to adhere to them and therewith improve his efforts to do so. Henry's potential for improvement, by contrast, is limited to his relationship to Fanny and

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instantly plain to her, what she had to do. She must absolutely decline the proposal" (296). While Henry wants Fanny to supply the judgment he is too lazy to develop in himself, Fanny avoids deciding between questionable personal desires by appealing to a duty to Sir Thomas of which she has no doubts.

the ideal he sees in her. He can play the role of her ideal suitor only insofar as he understands the part, which he relies on Fanny to define for him.

The novel's characters thus display different relationships to ideals and different types of partial and interested judgment. The novel's conclusion, as I will discuss in the next chapter, passes definitive judgment on these differences. The interaction of the novel's two plots leading up to this conclusion, however, complicates readers' judgments of these differences. This interaction makes it difficult for readers to access the more complete picture offered by their position outside the fictional world and accordingly to judge the characters from this perspective of completeness, a perspective unavailable within the fictional world. The position plot invites readers to enter into Fanny's mind and share her perspective. This partiality and interestedness encouraged by the position plot are countered by the critical distance from Fanny often taken by the narrator as well as by the idealization of her encouraged by the marriage plot. Neither the proximate partiality encouraged by the position plot nor the distanced idealization encouraged by the marriage plot offers readers a comfortable position in relation to its characters. Instead, the plots work together to suggest an alternative position in which the distance and proximity offered by each inform one another.

The novel's portrayal of its characters' partiality, interestedness, and idealizations thus raises questions about how readers might judge it and its characters. Should readers aspire to a complete, impartial perspective on this – or for that matter, any – novel's characters? How might this perspective distinguish readers' judgment of the characters from that of characters' judgments of one another? What makes a novel's characters into ideals and how does this status affect the way readers judge them? What causes readers to be

emotionally interested in characters and how does emotional interest affect readers' judgments of characters and novels?

Mansfield Park's depiction of the partiality, interestedness, and idealization of its characters suggests that judgment is determined by the quality and interaction of these factors. According to the novel, because individuals cannot see their own interests or remove themselves from the particular situations in which they make judgments, disinterested judgment is an impossible ideal. The relative successes of the characters in approaching this ideal are, however, determined by the sincerity of their relationships to it. Readers, in turn, are challenged to determine the ideal way in which to judge the characters and the novel. This ideal, I suggest, requires a constant balancing of partiality and distance that strives for completeness that is not an idealization.

Chapter Seven: Concluding Judgments

I. *Mansfield Park*'s Idealized Ending: Fictionality and Realism

The final chapter of this study of *Mansfield Park* turns to the final chapter of the novel. In novel's last chapter, the narrator takes on a new voice that involves new distances from both characters and readers. Instead of unobtrusively relating the actions and thoughts of the characters, the narrator passes judgment on them and places them in final positions. The narrator's somewhat abrupt resolution of the novel's instabilities in its final chapter, I argue, emphasizes its fictionality in a way that also resolves the tension it has created with readers about what they should hope for the characters as well as about the kind of novel that they are reading.

The events that transpire before the final chapter while Fanny is in Portsmouth begin to resolve the position plot: Fanny gains a sense of self-worth and realizes that Mansfield Park is her home while the inhabitants of Mansfield Park realize not only that Fanny belongs with them, but also that the Crawfords do not. Henry and Maria's behavior rules out the possibility of the alternate ending to the marriage plot suggested by Henry's proposal to Fanny. Fanny's return to Mansfield Park, in the antepenultimate chapter of the novel, thus promises that the position plot and the marriage plot will both ultimately be resolved by her eventual marriage to Edmund. The penultimate chapter increases the expectation of this ending by putting it off and exemplifying Rabinowitz's rule of chutzpah with its insistence on the agreement of Fanny and Edmund that he will never get over Mary. The ultimate chapter's terse treatment of the expected resolution, however, asks readers to imagine for themselves both Edmund's transfer of affection to Fanny and the change in Fanny that enables her to think of herself as his wife rather than his cousin. Though this

conclusion remains unsatisfactory for many readers, it emphasizes the difference between fiction and life in a way that resolves the questions raised by the novel's two plots.

Austen is in good company when her conclusions are considered weak.[1] Conclusions are notoriously difficult, partly due to the inevitable transition from fiction to life when a novel ends. My reading of *Mansfield Park* has emphasized how the novel raises different kinds of questions about the relationship between fiction and life throughout, especially at the levels of plot, character, voice, and syntax. That these issues come to the forefront at the novel's conclusion should come as no surprise. It should also come as no surprise that, after Fanny, the conclusion is the novel's most hotly contested element.[2]

The battle-lines pitting didacticism and romance against irony and realism are by now familiar. On the one hand, critics condemn the conclusion of the novel as an inartistic lapse into moralizing that undermines Austen's realist project,[3] while on the other hand, champions of a radical Austen insist on the irony of the happy ending, an irony that resists both literary and social conventions.[4] The seemingly endless configurations of these commitments and judgments of the novel overlap with theories and assumptions about how novels can and should end.

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[1] Cottom considers Austen's endings generally weak, and unable to resolve what comes before. He reads this weakness as a sign of the impossibility of fixing meaning in Austen's world. Halperin suggests that Austen's endings fall short because she is unable to satisfactorily imagine a marital state she has not experienced. Somewhat surprisingly, Tauchert makes a similar connection in giving biographical context to her reading of Austen's use of romance plots to convey female knowledge. Haggerty also finds Austen's endings generally unsatisfying, though he commends her ability to stretch the romance plot.
[2] Rabinowitz ("Reading Beginnings and Endings") helpfully cites I.A. Richards on the inevitability of imposing interested interpretations and the intentionality of this kind of misreading (310).
[3] Duffy's limited view of realism and Mudrick's of irony lead each to this type of negative judgment. Gard's sensitive reading finds the end problematic, but "not so much bad art, as art limited by its ambitious success" (141).
[4] M. Anderson, for example, argues that the conclusion of *Mansfield Park* is a "revolt against the politics of closure that hermetically seals the heroine's fate at the moment of marriage" (181).

In *Secular Scripture*, Frye offers a useful jumping off point. Austen's "characters are believable," he comments, "yet every so often we become aware of the tension between them and the outlines of the story into which they are obliged to fit. This is particularly true of endings, where the right men get married to the right women, although the inherent unlikelihood of these unions has been the main theme of the story" (39). Frye here brings together two central issues in the critical literature on *Mansfield Park*'s conclusion: one, the realism of the characters versus the romanticism or idealism of the plot, and two, the conflict between what drives a story and its conclusion.

This tension between a novel's "principles of production" and its "claims of closure to a resolved meaning" (xi) is what interests D.A. Miller in *Narrative and its Discontents*, where he defines the former as the narratable and the latter as the unnarratable. For Miller, this relationship is interesting in Austen because the ideological closure imposed at the end of the novels should not allow the kind of moral lapses that move the narrative forward. Austen's narratives can only proceed, therefore, "in a mode of negation. A moral negation exculpates the novelist from the sin of narrating, and hence permits the act of narration to go forward" (63). Miller's theoretical interest aligns him with interpretations of *Mansfield Park* that emphasize the conflict between the novel's content and its form, a conflict that becomes most violent at the novel's conclusion. Galperin, for example, reads the narrative voice of the ending of *Mansfield Park* as a "transgression," and the "miserable trajectory" of its story as a "foreclosure on 'real life'" ("Missed Opportunities" 129). Miller's own interpretation of *Mansfield Park*'s conclusion as a "moral-ideological fiat" (25) emphasizes the necessary reduction of fixing meaning.[5] Though Galperin argues for an oppositional Austen and Miller

[5] Miller's emphasis on the reductiveness of closure does not, however, prevent him from finding, particularly in Austen's dramatization of the act of closure, a questioning of its completeness.

is seduced by her style,[6] both critics read the end of *Mansfield Park* as a closing off of possibilities.[7]

Hinnant, in contrast, reads the tension between the realism of the characters and the idealism of the courtship plot as productive. The idealism of the happy ending is meant not to reinforce courtship conventions, but rather to expose and question them. Tandon's study of Austen also highlights a tension between form and content that overlaps with the interests of Miller and Galperin. He argues, however, that the formal didacticism of *Mansfield Park*'s conclusion is countered by the suggestion of happy accident, a suggestion that "emphasizes humans' limited power to locate and dictate meaning" (224). While Tandon links this picture of human limitation to *Mansfield Park*'s expression of Austen's religious sensibility,[8] Doody's reading of the last chapter as "diffusing 'an appearance of amiable sensibility' over an unpalatable ending" (179) connects the artificiality of this ending to Austen's portrayal of the fallibility of language.[9]

Mansfield Park's idealized happy ending can thus be seen as a failure in itself or as more or less successfully expressing a different failure, be it literary, societal, or human. The happy ending can be seen as artificial in a negative way, or falling short in a way that is successful. These varying interpretations depend on what readers and critics take to be at stake at the end of the novel.

Will the marriage plot fulfill its promise of an idealized happy ending? What constitutes a happy ending within the world of the novel? What kind of happy ending can readers of the novel accept for its characters, characters who fail to live up to their own

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[6] See Galperin's *The Historical Austen* and Miller's *Jane Austen, or, the Secret of Style*.
[7] Hardy also sees the end as a closing off of possibilities.
[8] Tauchert also makes this connection in her reading of Fanny's ending as providential.
[9] Edwards and Fleishman also read the conclusion as painting a picture of limitation. For Edwards, it is Fanny and Edmund who are limited; for Fleishman, it is society as a whole.

ideals as well as to the ideal types expected in marriage comedies? The idealism of the marriage plot together with the realism of the position plot complicate readers' expectations for the characters and for the novel. The novel complicates expectations in this way, I submit, in order to both portray the difficulty of attaining disinterested judgment and engage readers in this difficulty. In the novel's final chapter, the characters that have failed to have a sincere relationship with this ideal are condemned, while those that have failed to live up to this ideal but have taken it seriously are rewarded with an idealized happy ending. This idealized happy ending confronts readers simultaneously with the fictionality and the realism of the characters.[10] These characters whose minds readers have entered and with whom they may or may not have sympathized are, in the end, subject not to the laws governing readers, but rather to those governing fiction. Readers who have been unable to sympathize with the characters' struggles or who cannot accept the imposition of an idealized happy ending on the novel's realistic characters find the novel unsatisfactory, whereas those who engage with the novel's challenge to examine the grounds of their own judgment are rewarded with an experience of reading fiction that has relevance to their real lives. In this chapter, I analyze the narrative voice of the novel's conclusion as well as the judgments passed on the characters in order to clarify the novel's claims about the relationships among the real, the ideal, and the represented.

II. Authoritative Distance: The Narrative Voice of *Mansfield Park*'s Final Chapter

The final chapter of *Mansfield Park* opens with an explicit description of the narrator's activity. After having detailed in the previous chapter a conversation between

[10] Graham reads the final chapter as a "foregrounding of fictionality" that "encourages readerly interrogation" (889). He gives an ethical, pragmatic, and "contextually literary" answer to the question of why Austen chose to end with a union between a mentor and mentee rather than that between a rake and the good woman who reforms him (889).

Edmund and Fanny in which he describes his disappointment in Mary,[11] the narrator, in the final chapter, changes tone and declares: "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest" (312).[12] This declaration not only refers explicitly to the narrator as writer, but also to the writer's power over the characters. This impatient and authoritative narrative voice forms a stark contrast with the narrative voice typical of the rest of the novel. The latter has generally remained unobtrusive, rarely indicating an authorial presence even when exposing the characters in ways that contradicted their own beliefs and assertions. This unobtrusive voice, sometimes encouraging proximity to and sometimes distance from the characters, has influenced readers' judgments subtly. The narrative voice of the final chapter, in contrast, speaks to readers directly, asserting its authority and its intention of wrapping up loose ends to supply a happy ending.

The narrator's new authority and explicit intention creates new distances among the narrator, the other characters, and readers. The use of a narrative "I" distances the narrator from readers by indicating an explicit speaker in a particular position.[13] This speaker

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[11] I will return to the narrative's treatment of this disappointment below.

[12] J. Donohue reads this opening as an "arresting" invocation of the novel's governing comic principle, a principle that he argues is applied to material that is not traditionally comic (171). In her analysis of theatre in *Mansfield Park*, Lott calls the sentence a "narrative deus ex machina" and likens Austen's use of such a mechanism to "Sir Thomas's similar but inadequate attempts to enforce his will" (283). Graham calls the author of these sentences a "cool ironist" compared to the "earnest moralist" more common in the rest of the novel (889), a characterization that critics who read the end of the novel as didactic would reverse. Lynch ("'Young Ladies'") reads the line as a reminder "of the *force* of novelistic form itself" and of Austen's own role as artist (719).

[13] For a contrasting interpretation, see Doody's impression of the final chapter's opening sentence as a troubling instance of "'novel slang'" that "seeks to identify the author's feeling and the reader's, even in advance of complete narration" (178). Of course, this attempt to identify the reader and author may fail and create distance instead. I refer to a different

unambiguously stands between readers and characters, negotiating their relationship. The distance between this narrator and the characters is thus also distinct from that between the characters and the narrator of the body of the novel, a narrator who often conveys the characters' thoughts in their own words and who, as I discussed in Chapter Five, does not take authorial responsibility for them even when expressing explicit opinions about their futures.

The narrator of the novel's final chapter not only admits to having some control over the characters' fates, but also refers to Fanny affectionately in the possessive: "my Fanny" (312). This explicit and affectionate ownership begins a paragraph that resolves a major part of the position plot by establishing Fanny's happiness; that qualifies the narrator's newly asserted omniscience and omnipotence;[14] and that touches on, only to put off until the end of the chapter, the expected resolution of the marriage comedy. After having established a new, authoritative narrative role, the narrator describes Fanny's state upon returning to Mansfield Park and learning of Edmund's disappointment in Mary:

> My Fanny indeed at this very time, I have the satisfaction of knowing, must have been happy in spite of everything. She must have been a happy creature in spite of all that she felt or thought she felt, for the distress of those around her. She had sources of delight that must force their way. She was returned to Mansfield Park, she was useful, she was beloved; she was safe from Mr. Crawford, and when Sir Thomas came back she had every proof that could be given in his then melancholy state of spirits, of his

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distance between readers and a specific "I," a distance I contrast with that between readers and the unspecified and unobtrusive narrator more common in *Mansfield Park*.

[14] See Nelles's argument that Austen's narrators should be considered infallible rather than omniscient. Nelles uses the opening of *Mansfield Park*'s final chapter and the quote below to argue that even when Austen's narrators "approach the rhetoric of omnipotence, most often when they step forward on the final pages to wrap things up at an accelerated pace," they nonetheless suggest a limited and human, rather than omnipotent, perspective (121).

> perfect approbation and increased regard; and happy as all this must make her, she would still have been happy without any of it, for Edmund was no longer the dupe of Miss Crawford. (312-3)[15]

The first sentence of this passage attests to Fanny's happiness in a way that complicates the newly asserted authority of the narrative voice and its relationship to the novel's heroine. Does the narrator refer to "my Fanny" (312) as an author to her creation or merely as a writer to her, possibly real, subject? Is the narrator's satisfaction in Fanny's happiness based on direct knowledge of her feelings or on a familiarity with her that merely suggests that she "must have been happy" (312)? The next sentence does not answer, but instead complicates these questions by undermining Fanny's knowledge of her own feelings: the narrator doubts that Fanny is as affected by the distress of others as Fanny thinks that she is. Throughout the novel, the narrator has both taken a special interest in Fanny and revealed more to readers about Fanny than Fanny is able to see in herself. This interest and exposure, however, has rarely been as explicit as it is in the passage under discussion. Readers must consider this intervention more directly than the more subtle influence of the less obtrusive narrator of the bulk of the novel. In spite of intervening explicitly as a writer, the relationship of the narrator of the novel's final chapter to the characters remains ambiguous. This ambiguity is caused, I suggest, by the narrator's task of securing an idealized happy ending for the novel's realistic characters.

The coincidence between the happiness of some characters and the unhappiness of others is an important part of the combination of idealism and realism central to the novel's conclusion. This coincidence takes various forms and is mentioned several times by the

[15] N. Auerbach reads this passage as exhibiting the "cannibalistic undercurrents" (110) of Fanny's final acceptance at Mansfield Park. Though she notes the dependence of Fanny's happiness "on the wounds and disappointments of others" (111), she reads this dependence as related to Fanny's Romantic monstrosity rather than to the novel's realism.

narrator in the final chapters of the novel. An idealized happy ending normally depends on both the happiness, or reward, of the characters "not greatly in fault themselves" (312) and the unhappiness, or punishment, of the guiltier parties (I will return to the narrator's establishment of this coincidence below). Less typical is the coincidence of Fanny's happiness with the unhappiness of the Bertrams, especially that of Edmund.[16] The most salient factor of Fanny's happiness is her knowledge that "Edmund was no longer the dupe of Miss Crawford" (312). The narrator immediately contrasts Fanny's happiness in this knowledge with the suffering it causes Edmund: "It is true, that Edmund was very far from happy himself. He was suffering from disappointment and regret, grieving over what was, and wishing for what could never be" (313). But Edmund's disappointment and regret, the clarity with which he now sees Mary's faults is precisely what makes Fanny so happy. The narrator continues: "She knew it was so, and was sorry; but it was with a sorrow so founded on satisfaction, so tending to ease, and so much in harmony with every dearest sensation, that there are few who might not have been glad to exchange their greatest gaiety for it" (313). Though Fanny is sorry that Edmund is unhappy, she is happy about the reasons for his unhappiness. The satisfaction, ease, and dearest sensations founding the sorrow that

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[16] This coincidence is also mentioned when Fanny learns of her imminent return to Mansfield Park: "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. To be going so soon, sent for so kindly, sent for as a comfort, and with leave to take Susan, was altogether such a combination of blessings as set her heart in a glow, and for a time, seemed to distance every pain, and make her incapable of suitably sharing the distress even of those whose distress she thought of most" (301). Here, the narrator's comment about what Fanny feels about her own state is complemented by Fanny's own words and emphasizes her ability, rather than inability, to acknowledge how her happiness outweighs the suffering of others with which it coincides. Duane characterizes Fanny as Austen's "most deeply compromised heroine" because her success depends on being able to "reap benefits from her own discomfort" (410).

Fanny does feel can be interpreted more or less generously.[17] Is it Fanny's regard for Edmund or her romantic feelings for him that make her so happy in his disappointment? The narrator's description of Fanny's sorrow, a sorrow that most would readily exchange for their greatest gaiety, simultaneously tempers her happiness and presents it as complete. At this point, Fanny has obtained everything that she has admitted to desiring: a secure home at Mansfield Park and safety for both herself and Edmund from the dangers posed by Henry and Mary Crawford. Readers, however, know that she also desires the marriage to Edmund promised her by the marriage plot. Instead of addressing this desire, the narrator turns to the punishments and rewards of the other characters.

The opening paragraphs of the novel's final chapter thus establish an authoritative narrative voice that asserts its responsibility for the characters while at the same time refusing to address directly readers' expectations for the heroine and hero of the marriage plot. The narrator's promise to tie up loose ends, reward the good, and punish the bad anticipates an idealized happy ending only to postpone its essential element: the marriage of the heroine to the hero. Before reaching this conclusion, the narrator passes judgment on the other characters in a way that provides idealized endings to their stories without overlooking the realism with which they have been portrayed. These judgments are therefore essential prefaces to the conclusion of the marriage plot.

III. The Narrator's Judgment and the Responsibility of the Characters

What kind of conclusion is promised by the narrator's stated intention to "quit such odious subjects" as "guilt and misery," and "to restore everybody, not greatly in fault

[17] Edwards, who approves of Fanny as well as the novel, cites this passage as an example of the kind of criticism of Fanny that makes her Austen's most "vulnerable" and "human" heroine (64). I have mentioned N. Auerbach's conflicting interpretation of Fanny as monstrous.

themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest" (312)? Does having done with the guiltier parties mean merely no longer writing about them or establishing them in some relatively undesirable state that complements the "tolerable comfort" (312) promised for the others?[18] The idea of restoring the less guilty characters to only "tolerable comfort" (312) suggests that the anticipated happy ending will not be the idealized ending of a marriage comedy, but rather a more realistic ending in which not all hopes are satisfied or dreams fulfilled. While initially the suggestion that guilt and misery will be left behind as soon as possible might seem to look backwards at the previous chapter's detailing of Julia and Yates's elopement, Maria and Henry's adultery, and Edmund's disappointment in Mary, readers soon learn that it also looks forward to the meting out of punishments in the final chapter. By what standards does the narrator decide who is more and who less guilty? By what standards does the narrator determine the appropriate rewards for the less guilty and punishments for the guiltier?

I have already suggested that the narrator complicatedly combines the standards of idealism and realism in rewarding and punishing the novel's characters. These standards have been developed through the interaction of the novel's two plots. The marriage plot, on the one hand, has suggested ideal types to which the novel's realistic characters have failed to conform. The position plot, on the other hand, has introduced ideals of judgment that the characters have realistically failed to actualize. The novel, I have argued, distinguishes among the characters in terms of both their different kinds of ideals and of their relationships to these ideals. These distinctions have privileged the characters who take high ideals seriously

[18] Miller's reading connects the meting out of just deserts with the imposition of closure. Instabilities, like Henry and Mary, are finally fixed, even in their narratability: Henry, argues Miller, "may still be a narratable character at the end of *Mansfield Park*, but the ending of the novel irrevocably changes the status of his narratability. Whether explicitly or not, closure in Jane Austen provides a complete set of nominations for all that needs to be named" (26).

over those who do not, though also emphasizing both the failures of these characters to live up to their ideals and their lack of self-awareness. In passing judgment on the characters, the novel's conclusion both maintains and complicates these distinctions. The narrator's final judgments maintain the realism of the position plot by punishing most of both the more and the less guilty characters primarily with an awareness of their faults. At the same time, Fanny receives the idealized reward promised by the marriage comedy, a reward complemented by the idealized banishment of all the characters who might remind the inhabitants of Mansfield park of their past mistakes.

The narrator first addresses Sir Thomas as "the longest to suffer" (313). Readers will soon learn, however, of the equally long suffering of other, guiltier characters. Either Sir Thomas's suffering is of a different sort than that of these guiltier characters, or it is considered the longest only in comparison with that of the other characters "not greatly in fault themselves" (312). Sir Thomas is the guiltiest of these characters due to "errors in his own conduct as a parent" (313). He takes responsibility for allowing Maria's unfortunate marriage, and though "comfort was to be found greater than he had supposed, in his other children" (313), "the anguish arising from the conviction of his own errors in the education of his daughters, was never to be entirely done away" (314). Sir Thomas suffers primarily from a consciousness of his mistakes. He has learned that he has not lived up to the ideals he has espoused and has therefore failed to instill these ideals in his daughters.

Sir Thomas suffers acutely from his awareness that "he had brought up his daughters, without their understanding their first duties, or his being acquainted with their character and temper" (314).[19] The narrator, however, shifts the blame for the only irreparable damage, Maria's adultery, to Mrs. Norris, who lacks the good intentions Sir

[19] See Mandal for a discussion of this passage, and others, as using phrases from Evangelical discourse (114).

Thomas brought to the faulty education of his daughters as well as his capacity for self-knowledge and regret. While Sir Thomas's mistakes affect his two daughters equally, Mrs. Norris's negative influence is as lopsided as her affection: "That Julia escaped better than Maria was owing," the narrator indicates, "in some measure, to a favourable difference of disposition and circumstance, but in a greater to her having been less the darling of that very aunt, less flattered and less spoilt…education had not given her so very hurtful a degree of self-consequence" (316). Both Julia's innate characteristics and her position as inferior to her sister mitigate the influence of Mrs. Norris. She is able to avoid Maria's mistakes and return to Mansfield Park in spite of her elopement.

Sir Thomas's sons fare better than his daughters, but they repeat the basic pattern of their sisters: Tom's inclinations towards self-gratification are encouraged by his position as eldest son, whereas Edmund's need to provide for himself complements his more serious nature. The illness that Tom contracts in his careless pleasure-seeking provides the remedy for his "thoughtlessness and selfishness" (313). After having "suffered" and "learnt to think" he reproaches himself as an "accessory" to Maria's adultery "by all the dangerous intimacy of his unjustifiable theatre," and becomes "what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself" (313). Both Tom and Julia have learned to take seriously the high ideals of which they previously thought little. Edmund, as I mentioned above, suffers from his disappointment in Mary, a suffering to which I will return below before addressing his reward.

Maria, who commits the most blatant sin, receives the harshest punishment. She refuses to leave Henry; he refuses to marry her, and they become "for a while each other's punishment" (314). The narrator stresses Maria's failure to get what she wants from Henry together with her inability to learn from her mistakes: "She had lived with him 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" (314-5). In the narrator's question, "misery" (315) both describes Maria's internal experience and constitutes an external judgment on her lack of redeeming qualities.[20] The misery that Maria feels in being rejected is mirrored by the miserable state of someone able to take consolation in the unhappiness that she has caused the man who rejects her.

Maria, Mr. Rushworth, and Mrs. Norris share the inability to suffer from the consciousness of wrongdoing. Their punishments, accordingly, involve the unhappiness of not getting what they want[21] and, in the case of Maria and Mrs. Norris, being banished to

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[20] The narrator makes several comments about Maria's shortcomings earlier in the novel that prefigure this judgment. The narrator comments on Maria's response to the news that Sir Thomas will be home by November: "Maria was more to be pitied than Julia, for to her the father brought a husband, and the return of the friend most solicitous for her happiness, would unite her to the lover, on whom she had chosen that happiness should depend. It was a gloomy prospect, and all she could do was to throw a mist over it, and hope when the mist cleared away, she should see something else. It would hardly be *early* in November, there were generally delays, a bad passage or *something*; that favouring *something* which every body who shuts their eyes while they look, or their understandings while they reason, feels the comfort of" (76). After detailing the ease with which Sir Thomas accepts Maria's assurance that she wants to marry Rushworth, the narrator clarifies Maria's feelings and motives: "To her the conference closed as satisfactorily as to him. She was in a state of mind to be glad that she had secured her fate beyond recall—that she had pledged herself anew to Sotherton—that she was safe from the possibility of giving Crawford the triumph of governing her actions, and destroying her prospects; and retired in proud resolve, determined only to behave more cautiously to Mr. Rushworth in future, that her father might not be again suspecting her.
Had Sir Thomas applied to his daughter within the first three or four days after Henry Crawford's leaving Mansfield, before her feelings were at all tranquillized, before she had given up every hope of him, or absolutely resolved on enduring his rival, her answer might have been different; but after another three or four days, when there was no return, no letter, no message—no symptom of a softened heart—no hope of advantage from separation—her mind became cool enough to seek all the comfort that pride and self-revenge could give" (138-9).

[21] The narrator compares the potential, the mistakes, and the concomitant punishments of Maria and Mr. Rushworth: "Mr. Rushworth had no difficulty in procuring a divorce and so ended a marriage contracted under such circumstances as to make any better end, the effect of good luck, not to be reckoned on. She had despised him, and loved another – and he had been very much aware that it was so. The indignities of stupidity, and the disappointments of

"another country – remote and private, where, shut up together with little society, on one side no affection, on the other, no judgment, it may be reasonably supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment" (315).[22] The banishment of Maria and Mrs. Norris not only punishes the two characters in the novel who are given no redeeming qualities, but also changes the landscape of Mansfield Park.[23] The superficial virtue of Maria and Mrs. Norris, which held precedence until Sir Thomas's return from Antigua, is replaced by Sir Thomas's improved understanding of his values and Fanny's complete embodiment of them. The banishment of Maria and Mrs. Norris thus complements Fanny's final idealized elevation by contributing to a final idealization of Mansfield Park.[24]

The banishment of Maria and Mrs. Norris idealizes the novel's closing picture of Mansfield Park because it removes the guilt together with the guilty parties from its remaining inhabitants. The narrator tempers this idealization, however, with hints that all reminders of guilt cannot be eradicated. Moreover, the narrator insists that the idealized happiness achieved by the less guilty characters depends on their own suffering and privation as well as on the guilt and unhappiness of others. The narrator's description of Sir

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selfish passion, can excite little pity. His punishment followed his conduct, as did a deeper punishment, the deeper guilt of his wife. *He* was released from the engagement to be mortified and unhappy, till some other pretty girl could attract him into matrimony again, and he might set forward on a second, and it is to be hoped, more prosperous trial of the state – if duped, to be duped at least with good humour and good luck; while *she* must withdraw with infinitely stronger feelings to a retirement and reproach, which could allow no second spring of hope or character" (315). Mr. Rushworth's comparatively light punishment can be compared to that of Henry, to which I will return below. Societal rules do not punish either man for his irresponsible, and in Henry's case, sinful, behavior with Maria, but Mr. Rushworth, unlike Henry, has too little sense to understand his mistake.

[22] Sir Thomas refuses to let Maria return to Mansfield Park as Mrs. Norris wishes, and the latter "resolv[es] to quit Mansfield, and devote herself to her unfortunate Maria" (315).

[23] See K. Anderson for an argument that Mrs. Norris is a more complicated character than is usually acknowledged. Anderson interestingly contrasts the influence of Mrs. Norris's vigor and Lady Bertram's languor on Fanny's physical development. She also characterizes Mrs. Norris's willingness to be banished with Maria as an act of selflessness (350).

[24] Hall's reading of the novel's gothic elements considers Fanny as winning out in a passive-aggressive way typical of gothic heroines (215).

Thomas's relief at being rid of Mrs. Norris exhibits this combination and echoes the description, quoted in note fifteen above, of Fanny's happiness upon learning that she will be returned to Mansfield Park. Both Fanny and Sir Thomas find themselves in "danger" of deemphasizing the evils that bring them such happiness:

> Mrs. Norris's removal from Mansfield was the great supplementary comfort of Sir Thomas's life. His opinion of her had been sinking from the day of his return from Antigua…He had felt her as an hourly evil, which was so much the worse, as there seemed no chance of its ceasing but with life; she seemed a part of himself, that must be borne for ever. To be relieved from her, therefore, was so great a felicity, that had she not left bitter remembrances behind her, there might have been danger of his learning almost to approve the evil which produced such a good. (315-6)

Although Mrs. Norris's removal affords Sir Thomas merely "supplementary" (315) comfort, in contrast to the more central and positive comfort that he finds in the improvement of his children and in his relationship with Fanny, this comfort threatens to overshadow the guilt of his faulty education of his daughters. The narrator's description of how Sir Thomas considers Mrs. Norris an evil that "seemed a part of himself" (316) suggests that she not only reminds him of his own shortcomings, but even begins to embody his guilt. This suggestion is strengthened by the description of his relief at being rid of her: because he had thought he could never escape her, his relief in doing so is so great that it almost makes its cause – Maria's guilt and his own complicity in it – worthwhile. Just as Sir Thomas could not get rid of Mrs. Norris without the extreme circumstances produced by Maria's adultery, he could not experience the "felicity" (316) of being relieved from his guilt without having incurred it in the first place. The narrator emphasizes this connection between evil and good by parenthetically insisting that, though Sir Thomas is rid of Mrs. Norris, he cannot be rid of

the "bitter remembrances" (316) that she leaves behind. By not specifying these "bitter remembrances," the narrator inserts a bit of vague and realistic discomfort into the ideal happiness finally achieved at Mansfield Park.

The punishment of the Crawfords also contributes to the idealized conclusion of *Mansfield Park*, but is restrained by the realism of the novel's position plot. Both Henry and Mary are punished primarily through a consciousness of having lost out on a type of life that they learned to appreciate without being able to exemplify and so merit. In contrast to Sir Thomas, Tom, and probably Julia, however, Henry and Mary are not improved by, but instead only suffer from, a consciousness of their mistakes. In describing this consciousness, the conclusion of the novel returns to the question of whether Fanny could have ended up with Henry and Edmund with Mary. The narrator makes it clear that Henry and Mary both learn that this outcome would have been preferable for them; but it is also clear, I submit, that neither of them could have deserved it.

Although the narrator's concluding treatment of Henry dwells on the happiness he could have had with Fanny, it emphasizes the impossibility of his achieving this happiness by presenting it in a series of conditionals and explicitly qualifying his potential:

> Henry Crawford, ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long. Once it had, by an opening undesigned and unmerited, led him into the way of happiness. Could he have been satisfied with the conquest of one amiable woman's affections, could he have found sufficient exultation in overcoming the reluctance, in working himself into the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, there would have been every probability of success and felicity for him. His affection had already done something. Her influence over him had already given him some influence over her. Would he have deserved more, there can

> be no doubt that more would have been obtained; especially when that marriage had taken place, which would have given him the assistance of her conscience in subduing her first inclination, and brought them very often together. Would he have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward – and a reward very voluntarily bestowed – within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary. (316-7)

The narrator begins by characterizing Henry as already ruined by his early life. Any potential Henry might have had, this characterization suggests, has already been lost. The effects of his early independence and the bad domestic example of his uncle and aunt prevent him from meeting the conditions that could have "led him into the way of happiness" (316-7). The fact that this path is open to him at all is due not to any positive characteristic he possesses, but rather to the vanity that motivates his pursuit of Fanny. It is thus more surprising that he is able to be influenced by and influence Fanny at all than that he should be unable to be satisfied with his progress, to deserve more, or to persevere uprightly in his pursuit. The narrator's comment that he would have won Fanny emphasizes, therefore, not his potential to achieve such happiness, but rather his lack of such potential and the corresponding impossibility of his achieving such happiness.[25]

If Henry and Mary had been different kinds of people, or had benefited from better upbringings, then the alternative ending of their marriages to Fanny and Edmund respectively would have been a real possibility. These conditions were not met. The novel, then, tells a story not of how Henry and Mary are, or even might have been, improved, but rather how Edmund and the Bertrams learn that they are unimproveable, and, in so doing,

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[25] Edwards reads this passage differently, as suggesting that Henry could have been redeemed, a suggestion he finds out of sync with the rest of the novel (65). Both Edwards and Graham take issue with characterizing Henry's vanity as "cold-blooded." Koppel, in his argument about the contingency of *Mansfield Park*'s conclusion, also reads this passage as suggesting that Henry could have won Fanny (306).

learn about themselves and their values. The narrator's insistence that Fanny would have happily married Henry if he had deserved her, had persevered, and Edmund had married Mary, furthermore, vindicates her refusal of Henry. She was right to refuse him not only because he did not deserve her, but also because she could not marry him with a clear conscience without her "first inclination" (317) for Edmund having been subdued by his marriage to Mary. Fanny's judgment of Henry may have faltered, but her awareness of her inability to love him prevented the negative consequences that this failure could have caused: two unhappy marriages.

After detailing the effects of Henry's weakness in having to "make Mrs. Rushworth Maria Bertram again in her treatment of himself" (317), the narrator turns to his punishment:

> That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend *his* share of the offence is, we know, not one of the barriers, which society gives to virtue. In this world, the penalty is less equal than could be wished; but without presuming to look forward to a juster appointment hereafter, we may fairly consider a man of sense like Henry Crawford, to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret – vexation that must rise sometimes to self-reproach, and regret to wretchedness – in having so requited hospitality, so injured family peace, so forfeited his best, most estimable and endeared acquaintance, and so lost the woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved. (318)

Henry's punishment conforms to the demands of realism.[26] The narrator neither makes society impose an unrealistic penalty nor relies on the future possibility of divine punishment. Instead, the narrator assumes that readers share this realistic perspective by

[26] Canuel also cites this passage in claiming that the novel does not, finally, present marriage ideally. He contrasts the idealism of the traditional marriage plot not with realism, but instead with an emphasis on error.

twice using the first-person plural in the passage. "We" (318) are asked, first, to acknowledge that public punishment does not discourage behavior such as Henry's, and, second, to contemplate the internal punishment that a man like Henry must suffer from the knowledge of his mistakes. This realistic punishment requires that Henry's lack of potential for improvement be balanced by the sense to understand what he has lost. The narrator describes two levels of discomfort that Henry must suffer: on the one hand, relatively mild though material vexation and regret; on the other hand, more severe and less frequent self-reproach and wretchedness. These two registers of suffering reflect Henry's unfortunate combination of positive and negative qualities and the uncomfortable degree of self-awareness that he is able to attain. Having bumbled his way into potential happiness with Fanny, Henry began to appreciate what he had found and was able to play the role of deserving suitor for a time. Having fallen back into his old ways and lost this opportunity for happiness, Henry can appreciate the harm he has done to himself as well as others. He knows enough to suffer in this knowledge, but the narrator gives no indication that he knows himself well enough to understand why he has made the mistakes he has or to prevent him from making similar mistakes in the future.

Although Mary commits no offence such as the ones her brother or Maria have wrought, she, like Henry, is punished with a consciousness of her mistakes and, like Maria, ends up living with an older female relative instead of marrying.[27] Maria's lack of self-knowledge and restraint leads her into a prestigious marriage to a man she does not love; an

[27] The fact that Mary's punishment for her lack of self-knowledge is more like Maria's punishment for adultery than Henry's for either reflects the different social standards applied to men and women within the fictional world as well as within Austen's own world. Brooke comments on the difference between Maria's and Henry's punishments in his historical contextualization of Austen's portrayal of the place of women (161-4). He argues, in his epilogue on Austen's feminism, that "the novels as a whole suggest an obsession with the inferior rights and opportunities of women – softened for her readers by the happy and successful marriages with which she endows her heroines" (203).

unsuccessful and sinful attempt to escape it with a man who does not love her; and finally to a miserable residence with Mrs. Norris. In contrast, Mary's lack of self-knowledge, together with the behavior of Maria and Henry, prevent her from marrying the man she loves; the experience of loving and losing him prevents her from entering into a prestigious but loveless marriage; and she ends up in a relatively comfortable situation with Mrs. Grant, but one colored, nonetheless, by regret. "For Mary," the narrator specifies,

> though perfectly resolved against ever attaching herself to a younger brother again, was long in finding among the dashing representatives, or idle heir-apparents, who were at the command of her beauty, and her 20,000*l.* any one who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, whose character and manners could authorise a hope of the domestic happiness she had there learned to estimate, or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head. (318)

This description of Mary's failure to achieve her goal of an advantageous marriage reveals the incompleteness of the lessons she has learned at Mansfield Park. Although she has acquired "better taste" and "learned to estimate" "domestic happiness" (318), she has not learned how to find suitors who will meet these standards. Instead, she expects to find a man who can offer her both the wealth and prestige that she has always wanted and the uprightness and dedication that she, despite herself, finds attractive in Edmund. Her failure to understand the unlikeliness of this combination reflects her lack of self-knowledge. She has learned to appreciate the values of Mansfield Park without seeing their incompatibility with those of London, to which she still subscribes.

IV. The Disappointed Hero: Edmund's Loss of Mary

Before turning to how the last chapter of *Mansfield Park* finally unites Edmund and Fanny, I must discuss Edmund's loss of Mary. The dissolution of this half of the alternative ending to the marriage comedy is much less straightforward than that of the potential marriage between Fanny and Henry. While the possibility of a marriage between Fanny and Henry is nullified by his behavior in a way that vindicates Fanny's refusal of him, the possibility of a marriage between Edmund and Mary is nullified by the behavior of their siblings and friends in a way that leaves their own feelings up in the air. Before Henry and Maria ruin the possibility of a union between Edmund and Mary, the narrative builds tension by establishing, on the one hand, the strength of Edmund's feelings for her and, on the other hand, her unsuitability for him. After Henry and Maria make it impossible for Edmund to propose to Mary, the narrative builds tension by making readers wait, along with Fanny, to find out his reaction to his loss.

In Portsmouth, Fanny receives letters from both Edmund and Mary that convince her that the marriage she dreads will take place. Edmund's letter to Fanny after having been in London to see Mary makes clear both his pessimism about her answer and his intention to persevere. He despairs over the "'influence of the fashionable world'" (286), but insists that he "'cannot give her up'" (286). Mary's letters to Fanny around this time do nothing to clarify her intentions towards Edmund, but they do make clear her unsuitability for him. She appeals to Fanny for news of Tom's illness, an illness she considers in light of the "'wealth and consequence'" (294) its ending fatally could bestow upon Edmund. She is frank[28] about

[28] She writes, in part: "'To have such a fine young man cut off in the flower of his days, is most melancholy. Poor Sir Thomas will feel it dreadfully. I really am quite agitated on the subject. 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 would I say to any one, that wealth and consequence could fall into no hands more deserving of them. It was a foolish precipitation last Christmas, but the evil of a few days may be blotted out in part. Varnish

the positive effect this change in status would have on her willingness to marry Edmund, but does not clarify what her decision would be if Tom survives and Edmund remains both a clergyman and a younger son, a decision with which she would most likely have been faced had Maria and Henry not run away together.

Henry and Maria's behavior have consequences for Edmund and Mary that are clear to Sir Thomas, Fanny, and readers:[29] "Edmund must be for ever divided from Miss Crawford" (307). Edmund's reaction to this certainty, however, is obscure. Fanny worries that Edmund might not be as convinced of his loss of Mary as she is, but thinks that Sir Thomas, distressed over all his other children, must at least be able to take comfort in Edmund. Sir Thomas, however, worries about Edmund's well-being following the loss of "the woman, whom he had been pursuing with undoubted attachment, and strong probability of success" (307). The narrator piques readers' curiosity about Edmund's state of mind by highlighting the complementary nature of the information Fanny and Sir Thomas lack, at the same time as indicating that Mary's true character has been revealed to Edmund:

> Fanny was not in the secret of her uncle's feelings, Sir Thomas not in the secret of Miss Crawford's character. Had he been privy to her conversation with his son, he would not have wished her to belong to him, though her twenty thousand pounds had been forty. (307)

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and gilding hide many stains. It will be but the loss of the Esquire after his name. With real affection, Fanny, like mine, more might be overlooked. Write to me by return of post, judge of my anxiety, and do not trifle with it. Tell me the real truth, as you have it from the fountain head. And now, do not trouble yourself to be ashamed of either my feelings or your own. Believe me, they are not only natural, they are philanthropic and virtuous. I put it to your conscience, whether "Sir Edmund" would not do more good with all the Bertram property, than any other possible "Sir"" (294-5).

[29] It is not clear that Mary, who, readers will soon find out, regards Henry and Maria's action as mere "'folly'" (308), understands that their behavior cuts her off definitively from Edmund. Her insistence that, if Henry can be convinced to marry Maria "'she may recover her footing in society to a certain degree'" (310) suggests that she does not.

By placing Fanny and Mary at opposite ends of what would be a chiasmus if not for their non-identity (Fanny – Sir Thomas – Sir Thomas – Mary), the narrator opposes Fanny's and Sir Thomas's ignorance at the same time as implying a contrast between the relationship of father-in-law that Sir Thomas mistakenly regrets not being able to have with Mary, and the one that he has not yet seen the possibility of having with Fanny. Edmund's disillusionment with Mary is necessary for his future union with Fanny. In disappointing the expectation set up by the rhetorical figure to relate Sir Thomas to Fanny, therefore, the narrator encourages the expectation that Fanny will be related as daughter-in-law to Sir Thomas, taking the place next to Edmund that Sir Thomas still regrets Mary cannot occupy.

Readers, however, must wait along with Fanny to learn more about Edmund's attitude towards his break with Mary.[30] Edmund loses Mary, first, through the behavior of his sister and friend. This loss creates an interesting relationship between the novel's overlapping love triangles. One of the obstacles preventing Fanny's marriage to Henry is her impossible love for Edmund, of which only she and readers are aware. One of the obstacles preventing Fanny's marriage to Edmund is his love, and potential marriage to, Mary. When Edmund loses Mary because of Henry and Maria, the potential marriage to Fanny that readers expect is put into question by his now-impossible love for Mary. Before becoming disillusioned with Mary, Edmund is cast as a heart-broken hero, destined to mourn forever for his lost love. Once disillusioned, he may still be heart-broken, but instead of suffering endless regret for what could have been, he is positioned to learn from his mistake with Mary and potentially love again. Although readers have already been given a hint that

[30] The narrator emphasizes readers' anticipation by poking fun at Fanny's conviction that "long, long would it be ere Miss Crawford's name passed his lips again, or she could hope for a renewal of such confidential intercourse as had been" (307) by insisting that the time between Thursday, when Edmund and Fanny arrive at Mansfield, and Sunday evening, when Edmund confides in Fanny, "*was* long" (307).

Edmund has seen Mary's true character and Fanny still refuses to contemplate the possibility of marrying Edmund, this difference between Edmund as forever broken-hearted and Edmund as able to love again is at stake for both readers and Fanny as they await more information about Edmund's reaction to his final meeting with Mary.

When the narrator treats, in the novel's penultimate chapter, the conversation Edmund and Fanny have about this last meeting, there is an uncomfortable overlap between the marriage that Fanny still refuses to contemplate and that readers are now certain will take place. While Edmund is unequivocal about his disillusionment with Mary, the chapter ends by insisting on the perfect agreement between Fanny and Edmund, first, about Mary, and, second, about "the lasting effect, the indelible impression, which such a disappointment must make on his mind" (312). The preceding conversation Edmund and Fanny have about Mary, however, presents a more complicated picture of their respective attitudes towards her. Furthermore, the narrator's use of free indirect speech to express Fanny's belief in the impossibility of him ever falling in love again activates, as I mentioned above, Rabinowitz's rule of chutzpah. "Time would undoubtedly abate somewhat of his sufferings," the narrator begins, "but still it was a sort of thing which he never could get entirely the better of; and as to his ever meeting with any other woman who could—it was too impossible to be named but with indignation. Fanny's friendship was all that he had to cling to" (312). The aposiopesis signals Fanny's inability to confront the possibility that Edmund's loss of Mary affords. The narrator further highlights Fanny's continued refusal to acknowledge her romantic desires by emphasizing the importance of the friendly relationship that she has always insisted is enough for her, a relationship that has now become Edmund's only consolation.

Before maintaining that Fanny and Edmund think "exactly the same" (312) about Mary, the narrator provides a conversation that reveals their differences. Edmund and Fanny may come to an agreement about Mary, but their different positions in relation to her make it impossible for them to think about her in exactly the same way. Edmund's judgment of Mary is influenced by the experience of having loved her, even a mistaken idea of her, while Fanny's judgment of Mary cannot take this experience into account. Edmund's disillusionment is complete. "'The charm is broken,'" he proclaims, "'my eyes are opened'" (309). His new discovery that she has been "'spoilt'" (308) by the world, however, rests on his continued belief that she is "'a woman whom nature had so richly endowed'" (308). Although he must give up his mistaken idea of who Mary is, he cannot believe that this idea was entirely unfounded. He continues to insist on the very potential he always invoked when excusing faults that he imagined could in her case be corrected.[31] Edmund professes that he

[31] When Edmund and Fanny discuss Mary soon after her arrival at Mansfield Park he defends her against Fanny's charge of ungratefulness: "'Ungrateful is a strong word. I do not know that her uncle has any claim to her *gratitude*; his wife certainly had; and it is the warmth of her respect for her aunt's memory which misleads her here. She is awkwardly circumstanced. With such warm feelings and lively spirits it must be difficult to do justice to her affection for Mrs. Crawford, without throwing a shade on the admiral. I do not pretend to know which was most to blame in their disagreements, though the admiral's present conduct might incline one to the side of his wife: but it is natural and amiable that Miss Crawford should acquit her aunt entirely. I do not censure her *opinions*; but there certainly *is* impropriety in making them public'" (46). When Fanny blames Mary's impropriety on the aunt who has educated her, Edmund agrees: "'That is a fair remark. Yes, we must suppose the faults of the niece to have been those of the aunt; and it makes one more sensible of the disadvantages she has been under. But I think her present home must do her good. Mrs. Grant's manners are just what they ought to be. She speaks of her brother with a very pleasing affection'" (46). When Fanny asks what right Mary has to assume that Edmund would be as remiss as Henry is in writing letters, Edmund responds: "'The right of a lively mind, Fanny, seizing whatever may contribute to its own amusement or that of others; perfectly allowable, when untinctured by ill humour or roughness; and there is not a shadow of either in the countenance or manner of Miss Crawford, nothing sharp, or loud, or coarse. 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'" (47). Here, Edmund assumes an agreement that his conversation with Fanny has not entirely justified, and which the narrator goes on to doubt.

would have preferred the pain of being separated by circumstances from the Mary he loved to being forced to give up this mistaken idea of Mary along with the real person. He reconstructs for Fanny what he told Mary:

> "That, perhaps it was best for me; I had less to regret in sacrificing a friendship – feelings – hopes which must, at any rate, have been torn from me now. And yet, that I must and would confess, that, could I have restored her to what she had appeared to me before, I would infinitely prefer any increase of the pain of parting, for the sake of carrying with me the right of tenderness and esteem." (311)

His disappointment fresh, Edmund wishes he could have been the heart-broken hero who was torn from a real love rather than the heart-broken hero who loved not a real woman but instead a "'creature of [his] own imagination'" (311).

Fanny has less interest than Edmund in Mary's spoiled potential. She has never considered Mary improveable and she has always seen Mary's good qualities as overshadowed by her bad ones. Though she continues to talk with Edmund about Mary and "how delightful nature had made her, and how excellent she would have been, had she fallen into good hands earlier," Fanny feels "more than justified in adding to his knowledge of her real character, by some hint of what share his brother's state of health might be supposed to have in her wish for a complete reconciliation" (312).[32] Whereas Edmund's concern is with the idea of Mary that he has lost, an idea that he tries to recapture by dwelling on how she might have fulfilled it, Fanny's concern is how undeserving Mary actually is of Edmund. She does not want Edmund to be deceived by his emphasis on Mary's potential any more than

[32] Critics condemn this confidence as a cruel expression of Fanny's jealousy. For example, see Edwards, who finds Fanny admirable though imperfect, and faults Fanny here, seeing the episode as evidence of the narrator's distance from her (64). Mandal, who approves of Fanny as a "human being with her own desires and failings" (121) cites this as an example of the latter which displays "a certain moral superiority that verges on the sadistic" (120).

she wanted him to be deceived by Mary herself. Edmund struggles against Fanny's hint, but ends up "submit[ing] to believe, that Tom's illness had influenced [Mary]" (312).[33] Nonetheless, he "reserv[es] for himself this consoling thought, that considering the many counteractions of opposing habits, she had certainly been *more* attached to him than could have been expected, and for his sake been more near doing right. Fanny thought exactly the same" (312). Edmund and Fanny can agree that Mary's affection for him showed her in the best possible light, but their very different relationships to Mary, I submit, preclude a perfect accord. For Edmund, Mary's unlikely development of feelings for someone in his position consoles him for the loss of the woman he thought she was. This consolation allows him to see himself and Mary in the best light. For Fanny, in contrast, Mary's ability to feel for Edmund demonstrates the strength of his good qualities rather than any redeeming qualities in Mary. Mary's feelings for Edmund may have been her best quality, but for Fanny, always convinced that she was incapable of being improved by him, this quality only emphasizes her shortcomings.

The narrator's contentions that Fanny and Edmund "thought exactly the same" (312) about Mary and "were quite agreed" (312) about the effects of his loss of her anticipate the novel's idealized happy ending in different ways: the first asserts that Fanny and Edmund are compatible in a particular way and the second suggests that they can agree without being right. The idealized compatibility of Edmund and Fanny, the proposal that they think alike, is first introduced through his early participation in her education. They begin to think differently, as I discussed in Chapter Two, when Mary enters the picture. The conversation Edmund and Fanny have about his final meeting with Mary qualifies the narrator's explicit

[33] Wright reads Fanny's correction and Edmund's submission to it as a recognition of Mary as a "cautionary wretch" (389) and part of Fanny's success in preventing Edmund from being deceived by her.

assertion at the end of the chapter that they return to perfect accord in their final estimations of her. They no longer disagree, but because their positions in relation to Mary are different, their judgments of her cannot be identical. This discrepancy anticipates the distinct narrative voice of the novel's final chapter and its summary resolution of the marriage comedy. The final union of Fanny and Edmund is idealized as the perfect culmination of a marriage plot. The inevitable and realistic imperfection of their agreement together with the narrator's lack of interest in detailing their perfect happiness or the changes of heart which make it possible, however, contrast the idealization of this ending with the realism of the novel's imperfect, yet deserving, characters.

V. Real Idealism: The Accomplishment of the Novel's Happy Ending

After detailing the characters' punishments, the narrator of *Mansfield Park*'s final chapter turns to the rewards of the more deserving characters: primarily the happy marriage between Fanny and Edmund that the novel's marriage plot promises. The narrator's summary treatment of this anticipated union emphasizes both its realistic and idealized qualities. The new distance that the narrator takes from the characters means giving only general information about their thoughts and feelings, thereby leaving readers to imagine for themselves Edmund's transfer of affection to Fanny, her acknowledgement of his feelings for her, and the happiness of them both on being finally united. By passing the responsibility of filling in these details to readers, the narrator avoids the danger of providing details that readers would find unrealistic while at the same time emphasizing that the union is the idealized ending of a marriage comedy. Readers, in other words, are challenged to make the idealized ending realistic for themselves. This final challenge concludes the challenge presented by the novel's two plots by emphasizing the difference between reality and

representation, and, at the same time, asking readers to forge their own connections between these spheres. Readers' judgments of the characters and of the novel might, in this way, inform how they make judgments in real life.

The most explicit example of the narrator's transfer of responsibility to readers for the details of the novel's happy ending is the comment about how long it takes Edmund to get over his disappointment in Mary and begin to love Fanny.[34] "I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion," announces the narrator,

> that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people. – I only intreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire. (319)

Although the chapter began with a narrating "I" whose intentions towards the characters are explicit, judgments are passed on them without explicit reference to the narrator or this new role. Here, the role of responsible narrator is again made explicit, but only in order to transfer responsibility to readers.[35] In giving readers the "liberty to fix their own" (319) dates for Edmund's transfer of affection from Mary to Fanny, the narrator asks readers to

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[34] E. Auerbach comments on this passage as well as other examples of what she calls "narrative vagueness," arguing that Austen avoids "the sound of full omnipotence" (192), "perhaps…to remind readers that none of us can really enter into the private recesses of another human mind" (193). I suggest that the occasional and emphatic vagueness of Austen's narrator is used differently at different moments to contrast realism with idealism, and the narrator's responsibility with that of the reader.

[35] Tanner also discusses this passage as an explicit transfer "from the obligation of the author to the discretion (or fantasy of the reader). We may fill in the blank or gap…as we please" (172). Tanner, however, identifies the gap as the "whole realm of sexual feeling," an area Austen is generally unwilling to represent, but especially so in the case of Edmund and Fanny, whom he characterizes as "as far from the realm of the sexual as is compatible with their getting married" (172-3).

establish the details of a transfer that she then ironically characterizes as impossible by describing Edmund's passion for Mary as "unconquerable" and his attachment to her as "unchanging" (319). These descriptions emphasize the narrator's omission of more important information than exactly how long it took Edmund to get over his disappointment in Mary and to start loving Fanny. How exactly the "unchanging" changed and the "unconquerable" (319) was conquered are more crucial than exactly how long this process took.[36] If the narrator gave the same kind of detailed depiction of these changes as has been given to other important events in the novel (e.g., Henry's developing feelings for Fanny and her changing judgments of him), readers would not care about exactly how long they took. The liberty to choose one's own dates for Edmund's transfer of affection does not help readers who cannot imagine how that transfer took place, information for which the narrator implicitly makes them responsible.[37]

Moreover, the narrator's stated reason for not specifying how long it takes Edmund to get over Mary and start loving Fanny – that these changes "must vary much as to time in different people" (319) – contains an interesting ambiguity. Although the sentence itself talks about the difference in the people undergoing the changes, the paragraph addresses itself to differences in readers who judge the people undergoing the changes. Surely Edmund is

[36] The narrator also abstains from providing exact dates when discussing how long Fanny thinks that it will take Henry to get over her. In this case, it is not how long the change will take that is in question, but rather how long Fanny thinks the change will take. And, at stake is not the reader's sense of realism, but Fanny's modesty: "She could not, though only eighteen, suppose Mr. Crawford's attachment would hold out for ever; she could not but imagine that steady, unceasing discouragement from herself would put an end to it in time. How much time she might, in her own fancy, allot for its dominion, is another concern. It would not be fair to enquire into a young lady's exact estimate of her own perfections." (224)

[37] The narrator's brief discussion of how Edmund learns to love Fanny stresses the naturalness of the change given his role as her mentor and protector, the same role that first inspired Fanny's love for him. His infatuation with Mary becomes a misstep on the "road to happiness" (319) directing him towards Fanny. Graham categorizes *Mansfield Park* as using the conventional marriage comedy plot of mentor/mentee.

known well enough to both the narrator and readers for either to determine how long it might take him to undergo such changes. Readers' different beliefs about how long such changes might take, however, cannot be similarly fixed. Is the narrator giving readers the interpretive freedom to decide what kind of person they think Edmund is in determining how long it will take him to get over Mary and to start loving Fanny? Or, is the narrator giving each reader the freedom to decide how long it will take Edmund to undergo such changes by looking inward and consulting her own beliefs about how long such changes would take her? Which decision gives readers more freedom or responsibility? The narrator thus asks readers not only to determine for themselves the details of the novel's happy ending, but also to negotiate the relationship between the narrator's responsibility and their own.

What is the difference between being free to determine details about a narrative and having to do so? What is the difference between determining how long emotional changes take and determining how emotional changes take place? What factors contribute to the narrator's willingness to call such emotional changes "natural" (319) and readers' ability to perceive them as such?[38] What is the relationship between readers' freedom or obligation to fill in textual gaps and their sense of the realism or idealism of a narrative? As the narrator of *Mansfield Park* hints in the quotation above, readers fill in narrative gaps by combining their own beliefs with the narrative's standards of realism.[39] But, as I have discussed, the novel's two plots work together to complicate how readers ascertain its standards of realism. The narrator's announcement that readers are free to determine for themselves how long it takes

[38] Lynch ("'Young Ladies'") notes the narrator's refusal to describe Edmund's "so-called 'natural change of heart,'" linking this absence to the novel's problematization of natural development (718).
[39] Rabinowitz cites the quotation above as an example of playing "to comic effect" with the realism rule readers use to fill in textual gaps (152).

Edmund to get over Mary and to fall in love with Fanny makes readers responsible for synthesizing the novel's realistic portrayal of its characters with the idealized outcome it provides for them.

The feelings of Edmund and Fanny upon achieving their idealized union are also left to readers to imagine for themselves. The narrator presents this task, however, in different terms than those used for the task of setting the dates for Edmund's transfer of affection. Edmund's "happiness," (319) the narrator speculates, "must have been great enough to warrant any strength of language in which he could clothe it to [Fanny] or to himself; it must have been a delightful happiness" (320).[40] The narrator claims perfect knowledge neither of Edmund's happiness nor of how he expresses it. Though readers are assured that Edmund's happiness can be described as "delightful" (320), readers are left, along with Edmund, to determine the actual language in which his happiness can be expressed. While Edmund's happiness warrants the strongest imaginable language, Fanny's happiness is of a sort "which no description can reach" (320). The narrator clarifies that to attempt such a description would be inappropriate: "Let no one presume to give the feelings of a young woman on receiving the assurance of that affection of which she has scarcely allowed herself to entertain a hope" (320). Edmund's happiness is described in idealized terms, but Fanny's is idealized to the extent that it can be neither described nor expressed. The marriage comedy must make the impossible somehow possible, but the description of how its realistic characters feel when this impossible possibility happens does not, the narrator insists, fall

[40] Burdan enlists the numerous "must's" of the novel's final chapter in her argument that it should be taken ironically. The conclusion of the novel fails, argues Burdan, not because Austen sacrifices realism to didacticism, but instead because Fanny fails to be the Christian heroine she appears to be. Though Burdan's claim that Fanny's failures can encourage readers to question their expectations superficially aligns with my own, we take different approaches to the kinds of expectations that might be questioned and how.

within the novel's scope. The narrator has established the anticipated ending; readers must decide for themselves how to fill in its details in a way that makes it viable.

The narrator's description of Sir Thomas's attitude towards a marriage between Edmund and Fanny provides a hint about how readers might respond to the novel's idealized ending. Sir Thomas, "sick of ambitious and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper, and chiefly anxious to bind by the strongest securities all that remained to him of domestic felicity" (320), rejoices at the prospect of a marriage between Fanny and Edmund. His "joyful consent," the narrator goes on, "formed just such a contrast with his early opinion on the subject when the poor little girl's coming had been first agitated, as time is for ever producing between the plans and decisions of mortals, for their own instruction, and their neighbours' entertainment" (320).[41] The contrast between Sir Thomas's initial and final opinions exemplifies the marriage comedy's trajectory of making the impossible somehow possible. Instead of taking responsibility for this trajectory, however, the narrator attributes Sir Thomas's change of heart to "time" (320). From the narrator's distant and generalizing perspective, the changes wrought by time are both inevitable and inscrutable to mere "mortals" (320). By referring to the characters as "mortals" subject to the vicissitudes of "time," the narrator obscures their particularity and emphasizes their general characteristics. The characters are no longer the realistic representations with whom readers have been encouraged to sympathize and empathize. Instead of struggling along with the characters as they learn from their mistakes,

[41] E. Auerbach comments on this passage in the context of her claim that in *Mansfield Park*, "Austen reserves the language of character transformation and moral journey for three male characters: Sir Thomas Bertram and his two sons, Tom and Edmund" (183). Although Auerbach also acknowledges the importance of Fanny's changing sense of self-worth, she focuses on the potential for human growth evidenced by Sir Thomas's change of heart and Austen's reminder "of her own dual mission as a moral but comic novelist" (186). I suggest that Austen not only reminds readers of her role as a novelist, but also encourages them to consider both the role of novels in their own lives and their own responsibilities as readers.

readers are now associated with the neighbors who are entertained by the contrast between the character's initial plans and their final decisions.

The fact that the narrator mentions neighbors rather than readers as those who are entertained by the edifying workings of time on mortals is somewhat surprising. The change in register effected by the narrator's use of the terms "time" and "mortals" (320) positions the characters as generalized examples within the realm of representation, while the idea that the instruction of these mortals is entertaining to their neighbors suggests that they serve as examples not for readers removed from them by aesthetic distance, but rather for neighbors who share with them a realistic world. The narrator, I propose, mentions neighbors instead of readers to emphasize the connection, as well as the difference, between representation and reality. Real neighbors and represented characters can both be entertaining. Both can be judged according to realistic or idealistic standards. Judgments of representations, however, do not have the same consequences as do judgments of reality. But they can, nevertheless, inform judgments of reality in meaningful ways.

VI. Conclusion

The conclusion of *Mansfield Park*, I have argued, both resolves its double plot and transfers a particular kind of responsibility to readers to consider their judgments of the novel as well as its potential relevance to their everyday lives. This move from the realm of fiction to that of life changes the stakes of making judgments. A plot must come to an end, an end which in the case of a marriage comedy is known from the outset. The novel is the delay of this inevitable conclusion. In *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode connects this literary tension between an unknown path and a known destination with the basic human problem of making sense of a reality marked by a beginning and an end.

For Kermode, fiction humanizes the passage of time. He uses "fiction," it is important to note, to cover not only literature, which can help us make sense of our world, but also everyday fictions, which we need to help us make sense of our world. This expansive view of fiction starts with a contrast between human fictions and inhuman reality. Only against this larger contrast and its insistence on the fictionality of all human narratives about reality does Kermode distinguish among different ways of relating to fictions. The necessity of fictions makes the question of how we relate to and use them crucial. According to Kermode, fictions can be used for "finding things out" about oneself and the world (39), or for personal escape and real violence. Kermode calls the latter kind of fictions "myths." The contrast between myth and fiction is not fixed; rather, "fictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive" (39). Kermode, like Arendt, connects this degeneration, this lack of awareness and responsibility towards a sense-making fiction as such, to the possibility of radical evil.

The real-life stakes of turning fiction to myth, of imposing an absolute truth rather than telling an evolving story, are obviously much higher than those of confusing reality and representation in either the fictional world of *Mansfield Park* or in readers' potential engagement with it. Both characters' experiences within the fictional world and readers' experiences of the novel, however, have the potential to inform how readers relate to everyday sense-making fictions and help them prevent these fictions from degenerating into myth.

Kermode's distinction between fiction and myth highlights *Mansfield Park*'s contributions to questions of philosophical aesthetics. These contributions, as I have demonstrated throughout this work, have chiefly to do with disinterested judgment, aesthetic distance, and relationships to standards and ideals. For Kermode, the fictionality of ideals

means that they could potentially be treated as myths, that "people will live by that which was designed only to know by" (112). *Mansfield Park* presents interesting questions and problems about the difference between ideals as useful fictions or stultifying myths: how the characters relate to ideals within the fictional world; how the plot structure and use of irony and free indirect speech encourage different standards of judging the characters; and, how the novel itself might be judged differently according to different generic standards and ideals.

In the world of *Mansfield Park*, I have argued, disinterested judgment is an impossible, but nonetheless desirable, ideal. The characters' failures to achieve disinterested judgment show how their particular perspectives, positions, and interests influence their judgments. The Crawfords' indulgence of their own interests ends up harming both themselves and others. At the same time, the difficulties of countering both particularity and interest are shown by the different admirable and self-serving ways Fanny, Edmund, and Sir Thomas appeal to standards and ideals. Moreover, the various ways in which Fanny and Mary are and are not able to sympathize and empathize with others reveal the ease with which individuals universalize their own perspectives, as well as how impartiality can be compromised by two kinds of partiality: partiality as both incompleteness and as bias. I hope to have given a picture of how the characters' different ways of relating to an ideal of disinterested judgment is related to the different, and sometimes competing, ways in which the novel interests readers in these characters.

Mansfield Park's contributions to questions of philosophical aesthetics complement the opportunity it offers any individual reader to both have an enjoyable reading experience and to encounter the Bakhtinian challenge to make art and life answerable. My reading of *Mansfield Park* emphasizes the importance of clearly distinguishing the realms of art and life,

of representation and reality. The challenge of making art and life answerable can only be met when the two realms are clearly differentiated. Aesthetic distance affords readers imaginative freedom, play, and experiment. Freed from the constraints involved in real-world interactions, readers can try out many different ways of thinking and feeling about the characters, knowing all the while the impossibility of affecting the characters or any part of the fictional world. The narrator's transfer of responsibility to readers at the end of *Mansfield Park*, I hope my readers now appreciate, is a challenge to bring the fruits of that imaginative freedom into the real world.

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