

The Frailties of Fanny: *Mansfield Park* and the Evangelical Movement

Mary Waldron

She is never, ever, wrong." This estimate of Fanny Price, made by Tony Tanner in 1966 in his Introduction to the Penguin edition, is often taken for granted by critics writing about *Mansfield Park* and is frequently assumed as the basis for her present-day position as Austen's most unpopular heroine. Not all, it is true, take up exactly the same unequivocal position. For instance, in 1967 Robert A. Colby found some faults in Fanny—she is occasionally jealous and uncharitable. Avrom Fleishman, in the same year, suggested that "Fanny is presented not as a paragon of virtue, but as a weak woman with self-defensive and self-aggrandizing impulses." Kenneth Moler in 1968 said "Jane Austen did not intend Fanny to be ... the moral paragon that many readers take her to be." At least one other more recent critic has seen imperfections in Fanny but has considered them unintended fallout from the author's struggles with her material: Bernard Paris (1978) says "It is difficult to feel as positively about Fanny's goodness as Jane Austen wants us to ... it is rigid, desperate, compulsive. Fanny is not actively loving or benevolent." Nina Auerbach, in a very unusual view of Fanny, relates her to most of the predatory villains of literature from Grendel to Dracula.¹ Alongside such as these, however, a more traditional view of Fanny persists: in 1975

1 Tony Tanner, ed., *Mansfield Park* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), Introduction, p. 8; Robert A. Colby, "Mansfield Park: Fanny Price and the Christian Heroine" in *Fiction with a Purpose: Major and Minor Nineteenth-Century Novels* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1967), pp. 66–104; Avrom Fleishman, *A Reading of "Mansfield Park": An Essay in Critical Synthesis* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), p. 46; Kenneth Moler, *Jane Austen's*

Marilyn Butler called her "an exemplary heroine" and bases her radical criticism of the novel's structure upon this assessment, which is not modified in the reissue of her book in 1987. In that year Park Honan still regarded Fanny as "a potent, deeply effective redeemer of Mansfield." Sometimes critics see faults but excuse them. In 1988 Claudia L. Johnson saw that in Fanny Austen criticizes too great a reliance on the patriarchal system of family organization—she blinds herself to the inadequacy of the men in her life, but is not to blame for the outcome. Oliver MacDonagh (1991) asserts that "Fanny is no saint or ranter ... within limits ... her principles can be overborne, though it is also made clear that her inner citadel is inviolable." For MacDonagh, Fanny's principles remain superior to those of others in the novel despite the assaults made on them. Recently Roger Gard has noted "Fanny's half-misleading reputation for moral rigour"² but, having pointed out incidents in which Fanny behaves less than perfectly, he attributes them to a vulnerability built into the plot to emphasize the moral dilemmas which she finally resolves. These references must necessarily be selective; in the great mass of comment on this essentially puzzling novel there are many shades in the assessment of the character of Fanny, but the great majority of critics finally see her as guiltless in a venal world. Even Claudia Johnson, who otherwise seriously questions the more common estimates of the novel, sees Fanny as ultimately triumphing over the errors of the deluded males, remaining innocent herself. I believe this represents an inadequate reading of a prismatic and complex work. This essay will examine these conflicting views in more detail and with closer reference to the action, and will offer, in the light of this novel's probable genesis and its interaction with some aspects of contemporary ethical and religious thought, a less confused and more justifiable assessment of the character of its heroine.

From the time of its first appearance in 1814, *Mansfield Park* has attracted controversy and criticism. Some contemporary readers objected

Art of Allusion (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968; reprinted, Landmark, 1977), p. 146; Bernard Paris, *Character and Conflict in Jane Austen's Novels: A Psychological Approach* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1978) p. 49; Nina Auerbach, "Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm—Feeling As One Ought about Fanny Price" in Janet Todd, ed., *Jane Austen: New Perspectives* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1983) pp. 208–23.

2 Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975; reprinted, with new Introduction, 1987), pp. 248–49; Park Honan, *Jane Austen: Her Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), p. 339; Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 94–120; Oliver MacDonagh, *Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 12; Roger Gard, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Art of Clarity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 136.

to the charm of the "bad" characters; and although we do not now find this charm morally reprehensible, we often find it odd: whose side are we supposed to be on? Fanny Price exasperates because she appears to conform to a contemporary womanly ideal which certainly does not satisfy the modern reader, and which Austen had seemed to reject, or at least vigorously modify, in her three earlier novels; Mary Crawford at first seems to have more in common with Elizabeth Bennet than the declared heroine of *Mansfield Park*; and the reader is puzzled by the apparent primness of the authorial presence—what Isobel Armstrong, in her very interesting essay of 1988, calls the "difficult gravitas of the text."³ A link with contemporary popular conduct-books such as James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1776), Dr John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), and Thomas Gisborne's *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1794) cannot well be avoided in a consideration of Fanny Price. From poking fun at Fordyce in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen seems almost to have joined forces with him. Elizabeth Bennet, Marianne Dashwood, and Catherine Morland are delightfully misguided, they have spirit and energy; Fordyce, Gregory, and Gisborne are unlikely to have approved of *them*—at least until their trials have taught them compromise. Even Elinor Dashwood wavers in her perfect response to the received code of social morality. Fanny, in contrast, is passive and submissive, fond of silence and anonymity—everything the conduct-books recommend. These qualities appear to triumph unchanged at the end of the novel, thus defeating our expectations of an Austen heroine, who typically has to modify her natural, but unacceptable, reactions to reach an accommodation which eventually brings her happiness. So far, in the first three novels, the interest has lain in the difficulties of the compromise, and also in the attractiveness of the non-conformity, which is never entirely abandoned. After *Mansfield Park*, Austen appears to return to this model in *Emma*. *Persuasion* is rather different; Anne Elliot is also a "good" heroine, but she has already discovered, at the beginning of the novel, that submission is not an adequate response to life. This does not seem, on the surface at least, ever to be the case for Fanny Price. Many critics attribute the differences in *Mansfield Park* to a change of heart on the part of the author about true womanly excellence, and a wish to make the central figure an ideal woman, on the lines of the conduct-books, to atone for the flawed heroines of the three earlier novels. This

3 Isobel Armstrong, *Jane Austen: "Mansfield Park"* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 99. In section 3 of this critical study, Armstrong surveys the balance of views on Jane Austen's conservatism (pp. 95–104).

change has often been seen as part of a shift by Austen towards a conservative and paternalistic ideology which was gaining ground at the turn of the century as a reaction against radical, democratic ideas associated with the French Revolution. This view might be acceptable if the three earlier novels could be described as in any way democratic or radical. But this is not so; in all the novels, including *Mansfield Park*, the heroines operate within a social structure which they accept. Nor, evidently, was it the wish of the author to depart from her habit and present a woman without flaw in a novel: she later, in 1817, tells her niece Fanny that "pictures of perfection" made her "sick and wicked"; and in 1814, the year in which *Mansfield Park* was published, she criticizes her other niece Anna's own novel-character, Cecilia, for being "too solemn and good."⁴ Is it credible, then, that she should at that precise time produce just such a heroine?

I should like to show that *Mansfield Park* actually questions, in a new and much more challenging way, the validity of some favourite contemporary moral and social assumptions. In the first three novels the heroines make silly but ultimately harmless mistakes; authority figures such as parents are shown to be in error, but good sense finally comes to the rescue. Fanny, on the contrary, is caught up in a dangerous and damaging ethical system from which there is no real escape at all. This essay will explore the reasons for Austen's apparent break with her custom here, on the basis of her own acknowledgment, especially in her letters, of concern about popular notions of social morality and her remarks about the books that people were reading when she was considering the plot of *Mansfield Park*.



One of the strongest and most obvious features of the reaction to political radicalism in the nineties was the Evangelical movement (that movement within the Anglican church which included the "Clapham Sect"), which clearly both repelled and attracted Austen. It was dedicated to the revival of "serious" and "active" Christianity, partly as a defensive reaction to Methodism, which, with its outdoor meetings, public conversions, and extempore prayer, was regarded as politically subversive, especially after the outbreak of war in 1793, and partly to galvanize a decadent clergy into carrying out its proper duties. It was in the main

4 R.W. Chapman, ed., *Jane Austen's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 486-87, 402. References are to this edition.

bourgeois-led and aimed at social control through paternalism; it was to that extent a political movement. At its centre was the doctrine that individual submission to duty would, by example, act as a corrective to what was seen as contemporary moral corruption.⁵ It produced in the early 1800s a spate of didactic works. In 1809, in a letter to her sister Cassandra, Austen states categorically, apropos of one of these, Hannah More's *Cælebs in Search of a Wife*,⁶ just published and very much in demand, that Evangelicalism did not appeal to her. The novel was an imperfectly fictionalized conduct-book by the chief literary proponent of the movement; it was a compendium of Evangelical ideas touching all ranks and generations, setting out their duties and responsibilities—particularly those of young women. Austen was reluctant to read it. Her comments are typically oblique and sardonic, but leave one in little doubt as to the reasons for her reluctance:

You have by no means raised my curiosity after Caleb [*sic*];— My disinclination for it before was affected, but now it is real; I do not like the Evangelicals.— Of course I shall be delighted, when I read it, like other people, but till I do I dislike it. (*Letters*, p. 256)

The implication is that the appeal of *Cælebs* was popular, superficial and therefore, to Austen, suspect. She was wearying, perhaps, of this genre. Clearly she would not react "like other people." In her correspondence with her niece Fanny Knight in 1814, however, we find a different view in her recommendation of a modest and unassuming young man as a suitor. Fanny seems to be in some doubt about him, chiefly on the grounds of his "goodness," which she thinks might lean towards Evangelicalism (Fanny appears to assume that her aunt will agree that this is altogether undesirable). Austen replies:

5 See Peter Garside and Elizabeth McDonald, "Evangelicalism and *Mansfield Park*," *Trivium* 10 (1975) 34–50. This summarizes the seminal text of Evangelicalism, William Wilberforce's *Practical View of the Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1797). See also Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 81–95 and Oliver MacDonagh, chap. 1, *passim*, for accounts of Anglican Evangelicalism. Marilyn Butler sees the movement as partly supported by the aristocracy ("History, Politics, and Religion" in *The Jane Austen Handbook with a Dictionary of Jane Austen's Life and Works*, ed. J. David Grey [London: Athlone Press, 1986], p. 104), but most of its leaders, though rich, were rather short on ancestry and much involved in respectable trade. Hannah More, for instance, was very much a self-made woman; see my essay "Ann Yearsley and the Clifton Records," *Age of Johnson* 3 (1990), 311.

6 Hannah More, *Cælebs in Search of a Wife, comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1808). References are to this edition.

And as to there being any objection from his *Goodness*, from the danger of his becoming even Evangelical, I cannot admit *that*. I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals, and am at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason and Feeling, must be happiest and safest. (*Letters*, p. 410)

Later in the correspondence, presumably in answer to Fanny's protest about this, she says:

I cannot suppose we differ in our ideas of the Christian Religion. You have given an excellent description of it. We only affix a different meaning to the Word *Evangelical*. (*Letters*, p. 420)

This change in Austen's way of referring to Evangelicalism needs some consideration, for her approval may not be as wholehearted as it at first appears. During the period 1809 to 1814, she seems to have reached an accommodation with the movement, but only by dint of modifying her definition of it to suit her own rational and intellectual tastes. She does not appear to have accepted the whole package. She may have approved of its political thrust—no doubt agreeing that social control of this sort was necessary to a healthy society. But there is a suggestion of compromise about the words "happiest and safest"; the implication is that she liked the cosy personal relationship with the creator which the movement offered, but set aside the "enthusiasm," the reforming zeal. In its missionary aspect she must have seen clearly a deep contradiction which is evident in most of the didactic works of the time—they enjoin quietism and submission to duty in the rank to which you had been called together with firmness in the face of error and a steady opposition to sin. This would, they aver, finally call others from their evil ways. But in real life it is difficult, not to say impossible, thus to combine subjection and assertiveness.⁷ Populist Evangelical propaganda paid little attention to actualities. Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* certainly show a fine disregard for them. They offer Evangelicalism packaged in primary colours for the masses. They set up a totally unreal model for the lowly and weak to follow, which promises unflinching reward for "right" action—obey the rules and you will get modest reward on earth as well as lay up treasure in heaven.⁸ The heavenly treasure

7 Davidoff and Hall point out the contradiction I refer to in their discussion of More's message in *Cælebs*: "On the one hand she confined women to the sphere of the private and domestic, on the other she argued for the central importance of women's influence in nurturing morality in an amoral world" (p. 171).

8 See especially *The History of Tom White the Postilion*: "He soon found out that there was some

may or may not have been sure, but the reward on earth, as More must have been aware, was at the mercy of economics. The tracts are intrinsically dishonest, for, while apparently recommending social progress, they aim at stasis. *Cælebs*, to which Austen seems to object in 1809, brings together the whole range of Evangelical maxims designed to keep people operating in the stations to which they had been called, and is particularly insistent about the duty of young girls. Cælebs, an extremely eligible young man, goes in search of the perfect life-partner. He visits several families with nubile daughters, only to find them frivolous, superficially religious, and educationally deficient. At last, in a family which exemplifies the Evangelical domestic ideal of duty happily accepted by all, he meets Lucilla Stanley, who presents an altogether improbable combination of right female submission with a lively capacity to speak her mind on subjects concerning religion and propriety—but only when asked to do so. For most of the novel she remains decorously silent. Lucilla is the living embodiment of More's *Strictures on the Present System of Female Education* (1799), in which, in chapter 1, "The Effects of Influence," she deplors the propensity of women to "defend the cause of religion ... in a faint tone, a studied ambiguity of phrase" but at the same time insists on proper deference and silence—girls should not be argumentative. The *Strictures* makes heavy demands on the reader's willingness to reconcile contradictions. The novel also advocates the cultivation of mutually exclusive virtues, a mixture of prudential caution and large-minded generosity. A properly educated young man will want a sensible, morally upright wife with Evangelical principles, who is not interested in fashion and frippery, who is innocent and deferential and silent, but confident enough to engage in abstruse moral discussions when required and to speak up for her beliefs when they are attacked. This is so patently a caricature of real life that it is a wonder that anyone listened to it; but *Cælebs* was spectacularly popular, going into many editions. All the same its failure to take into account so much about human relationships would have worried Austen; she criticizes Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1810)—another attempt at fictionalizing the ideals of Evangelicalism—for being "excellently-meant ... without anything of Nature or Probability in it" (*Letters*, p. 344). Austen's correspondence with her sister and nieces during the gestation of her novel has led twentieth-century critics to see the Austen

meaning in that text which says, that *Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come*: for the same principles which make a man sober and honest, have also a natural tendency to make him healthy and rich."

of *Mansfield Park* as writing under the "shadow" of Evangelicalism. In 1943 Sheila Kaye-Smith proposed this reading in *Talking of Jane Austen*; Q.D. Leavis's Introduction in 1957 agreed that *Mansfield Park* has imperfections which are due to the influence of Evangelicalism.⁹ Through the 1960s and 1970s there was a reaction: more critics—notably Fleishman and David Monaghan—saw the novel as critical of the movement. Colby, however, in 1967, regarded Austen as "sharing Miss More's ethical views."¹⁰ In 1986 Marilyn Butler directly challenged Fleishman on this topic, and Oliver MacDonagh in 1991 also saw Austen as mainly approving of the movement.¹¹ It seems more likely that her initial reservations remained, that she never really became comfortable with all the aims of Evangelicalism, and that *Mansfield Park* is an exploration of her dissatisfaction in a story which deals with the application of some of its ideals in everyday life. Stanley Grove, the abode of Lucilla, is safe in its moral complacencies. In Austen's novel, duty and submission fail to prevent a series of calamities involving the near destruction of a whole family.



What is not often remarked upon in discussion of *Mansfield Park* is the almost unmitigated disaster of the ending. Claudia Johnson refers to it as "unsettling" and later explains this by noting how "conservative ideologues" are "obliged to discredit themselves with their own voices"; though Gene Koppel says that the conclusion "almost shatters the novel," he also sees it as offering alternatives—"the reader must choose" whether to see the ending as destructive or as the initiation of a "positive vision."¹² Fleishman seems at one point aware of the destructiveness and of the ending as a deadly compromise—"a feeling of peace

9 Sheila Kaye-Smith and G.B. Sterne, *Talking of Jane Austen* (London: Cassell, 1943), p. 108; Q.D. Leavis, ed., *Mansfield Park* (London: Macdonald, 1957), p. xii.

10 Fleishman, p. 22; David Monaghan, "Mansfield Park and Evangelicalism: A Reassessment," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 3 (1978), 215–30. This essay surveys the critical work on *Mansfield Park* from 1943 to 1978, noting the disagreements and fine distinctions among treatments of Austen's attitude to Evangelicalism; Colby, p. 85.

11 Butler, "History, Politics, and Religion," pp. 190–208, esp. p. 206: "Fleishman argues that Austen cannot be considered an Evangelical because the details of Edmund's ordination do not fit current Evangelical precept. This is to miss the underlying goal of the movement. ... The novel unmistakably refers to a range of issues that the contemporary reader would identify as Evangelical ... nonresidence; family worship; private self-examination; slavery ... and amateur acting"; MacDonagh, chap. 1.

12 Johnson, p. 120; Gene Koppel, "The Role of Contingency in *Mansfield Park*: The Necessity of an Ambiguous Conclusion," *Southern Review* 15 (1982), 306–13.

after loss of vitality"—but reverts to the more usual view, referring to Fanny as "the child who inherits the future and justifies the sufferings of the past."¹³ Johnson comes closest to my view of the ending as calamitous. All three critics see the conclusion as essentially ambiguous. There is undoubtedly ambiguity in the language, but it is ironic ambiguity, for the choice is not really open. Though Fanny is rescued and Edmund at least patched up, nothing much else is saved from the wreck. It is customary to attribute the chastisement meted out to a kind of chill and brutal retribution on the part of the author towards the characters she disapproves of, and to make it evidence of a change in moral attitude, for she has not previously handed down harsh punishments even to the most culpable (consider, for instance, the fate of Maria in contrast to that of Lydia Bennet or Willoughby). But the tragedy for the parents and their disappointment in their potentially fine family is not given much critical prominence, though it is unquestionably present in the text. Sir Thomas cannot credibly be satisfied with the substitution of the Price children for his own, however much he may finally blame himself for the outcome. The triumphal language of the conclusion conceals another message—Fanny will have to live with the knowledge that though *she* is to be rewarded, almost everyone around her is suffering and will continue to suffer. It is difficult to imagine that her comfort will be unalloyed. Either, as Koppel suggests, Austen is caught up in the "contingency" of the realism of the novel and nearly "shatters" it in her efforts to end it, or the language of the conclusion is ironically seeking to direct the reader to the real state of affairs. Claudia Johnson puts this well—the surface meaning "will not bear the scrutiny Austen's own style is always inviting."¹⁴ I would go further: the message is that the brand of "goodness" embodied in Fanny, Edmund, and, to some extent, Sir Thomas has not prevailed. It exists, but has been impotent. The power of example, as proffered in the work of Hannah More, has, in this realist novel, failed, because it has largely rescued those who were never really in danger. In *Cælebs*, a dissolute neighbour of Lucilla's father, Mr Carlton, is turned from his evil ways by the visible piety of his wife (2:258–63). *Mansfield Park* deliberately rejects this stereotype; good example fails to avert a shipwreck; and a reading which is unbiased by assumptions about Austen's accommodationism to contemporary ethics must reveal not only that the subscription to Evangelical notions in Edmund and Sir

13 Fleishman, pp. 68–69.

14 Koppel, p. 310; Johnson, p. 119.

Thomas is hollow and powerless, but that Fanny, the chief representative of the Evangelical ideal, is responsible for the shipwreck, because her kind of goodness is by definition cautious and passive. Its quietism can rarely be combined with active intervention in the cause of moral reform; on the contrary, it leads to a loss of energy, negativism, failure of generosity, and ultimately a concentration on self. She is the reality—Lucilla Stanley a phantasm. Austen may be tender to “my Fanny,” but this does not mean that she is presenting her as having done much to avert the moral chaos at Mansfield—indeed, she herself is part of it.

These aspects of Fanny’s character are clearly present in the text of the novel, but become more obvious if we have Hannah More’s novel in mind.¹⁵ A number of crucial incidents show Fanny, not as a perfectly good Lucilla-type, but as entangled in her Evangelical piety to the extent that she falls spectacularly from grace, and not only fails to exert any moral influence upon anyone except her sister, Susan, but herself becomes a destructive force.

Sir Thomas Bertram’s regime at Mansfield is typical of the way in which Christianity operated among the rich and powerful. Attention to the virtues of kindness, good manners, obedience to authority, and religious observance went alongside the more or less unrestricted enjoyment of the good things of life if you happened to have access to them. Sir Thomas has imbibed some Evangelical ideas—he believes in residence for the clergy, for instance, submissive behaviour in young women, and the exclusion of “noisy pleasures” from the domestic scene, but it is clear from the start that these ideas have had minimal effect on most of his children. Unlike Mr Stanley in *Cælebs* he has not managed to govern his household so that all the inhabitants consciously and dutifully adapt their behaviour to a pious ideal. Moreover, it is made clear from the start that Sir Thomas is quite unaware of his failure. Self-denial has very little place in the real education of the young Bertrams, whatever may have happened in the schoolroom. Horse-racing and debt are the natural propensities of a young heir; balls and the marriage-market the proper duties of the daughters. Edmund, the younger son, destined without real choice for the church, turns out differently; he finds out early that his father’s somewhat selective adherence to Evangelical principles has some relevance for him. He decides to be a proper parson, with all that it entails in moral concern for his flock and consciousness of responsibility for the moral health (that is, stasis) of society as a whole. Fanny, from childhood

¹⁵ Austen must have overcome her repugnance and read *Cælebs*; there are more oblique allusions than can be attributed to coincidence.

dependent upon Edmund, also builds her life on the Evangelical ideal of active duty. The sociable joys of Maria and Julia and Tom are replaced in Fanny and Edmund by the satisfactions of conscious virtue. From the start they have a problem, for their ideals necessarily imply criticism of what they observe around them; and yet the very code by which they mean to live excludes the possibility of its expression, especially to their elders.

A telling example is Edmund's advice to Fanny when she thinks she may have to go and live with Aunt Norris—both know very well how mean and selfish she is, but their principles will not allow them to rebel, and they make the best of it; Edmund mouths some pious untruths about Mrs Norris's upright nature which, he says, is only cloaked by an unfortunate manner, and Fanny escapes from actually criticizing her aunt by blaming herself for "foolishness and awkwardness."¹⁶ Already we are shown piety, obedience, and respect for elders leading to a distortion of the truth and a deliberate dilution of any realities which conflict with their code. There is no authorial comment—no blame is assigned, only a signal given of the contradictions inherent in the system within which Edmund and Fanny are trying to operate.

But neither experiences any real strain until the arrival of the Crawfords, who are completely oblivious to Evangelical principles in religion or anything else. Their extreme insouciance is highly attractive to all the young people living under a comfortable but rather dull social order. The older members see nothing in them to object to; Sir Thomas is absent, in any case, in Antigua. It is usual to regard the Crawfords as representatives of the outer, more wicked, world which is about to attack the moral stronghold of Mansfield. But it should be remembered that there is in fact nothing much to attack. No one at Mansfield is in possession of an unassailable set of principles. Fanny is not strong in her principles—she only thinks she is, because she has learned a set of rules which she supposes will guide her in any crisis. Edmund is much the same. The difference between the Crawfords and the Bertrams lies not so much in their respective moral standards as in the fact that the Crawfords are accustomed to a much more sophisticated and complex metropolitan version of the sexual game than the young Bertrams have any notion of; their ignorance in this respect adds spice to the Crawfords' usual round of shallow flirtation. Austen proceeds from this point to demonstrate how *all* the

16 *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R.W. Chapman, 5 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 3:25-26. References are to this edition.

inhabitants of Mansfield, in different ways, fall victim to the unfamiliar game-strategy of the Crawfords—except perhaps Tom, who is in any case part of their world and clearly quite skilled himself. Maria, already engaged to the booby Rushworth, and Julia are fascinated by Henry, who deliberately sets out to entrap them. Both Fanny and Edmund are precipitated into a situation for which their “active Christianity” has given them no guidelines—Edmund begins to fall in love, and Fanny, who is, without quite realizing it, in love already, to experience jealousy. Significantly, Edmund does just what More’s *Cœlebs* does *not* do; he falls for a girl who is the complete opposite of the conduct-book model. The whole episode subverts More in a most interesting way. *Cœlebs* is extremely cautious in his assessment of Lucilla, making sure that he does not fall in love until he has satisfied himself that her virtues accord with his (and his dead mother’s) ideals, and that Lucilla is perfectly “consistent” in them. Then:

I could not persuade myself that either prudence or duty demanded that I should guard my heart against such a combination of aimiable virtues and gentle graces ... [she presented] a fabric of felicity that my heart, not my fancy had erected, and that my taste, judgement, and my principles equally approved, and delighted to contemplate. (*Cœlebs*, 1:232–33)

Edmund’s heart is by no means guarded, and he falls into dreadful error, delighting to contemplate what he can only approve by distorting his principles. The exchange between Edmund and Fanny at this juncture is very significant. This is a sort of Socratic dialogue, in which Miss Crawford’s character takes a beating, but Edmund makes specious excuses for her and is satisfied; Fanny does *not* see it all as he does, and does not say so. Edmund draws her into a discussion of Mary’s character and encourages criticism:

“But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you Fanny, as not quite right?”

“Oh! yes, she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished. An uncle with whom she has been living so many years, and who, whatever his faults may be, is so very fond of her brother, treating him, they say, quite like a son. I could not have believed it!”

“I thought you would be struck. It was very wrong—very indecorous.” (3:63)

But Fanny wants to go farther than this, and charges Mary with ingratitude, one of the blacker eighteenth-century vices. Edmund will not have this, and begins to equivocate by claiming that it is *excess* of gratitude to her aunt which gives her a difficult choice; he does not want to go beyond “impropriety” in his charges. But, says Fanny, perhaps the aunt is

not all that she should be not to have taught Mary better; Edmund leaps on this to hope that she may now be in better hands, and proceeds to admire her affection for her brother; Fanny rather righteously objects to Mary's teasing remarks about the letter-writing habits of brothers. Edmund's reply shows how his growing thralldom is causing him to dwell only on the appearance, not the substance, of female excellence:

"And what right had she to suppose, that *you* would not write long letters when you were absent?"

"The right of a lively mind, Fanny, seizing whatever may contribute to its own amusement or that of others; perfectly allowable, when untinged by ill humour or roughness; and there is not the 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." (3:64)

To the reader it is obvious that Fanny disagrees completely and is suddenly beset by a number of painful conflicts: she must approve of Edmund, but can see that he is bending the rules. Far from having an ideal woman here, we have suddenly a very human girl with a problem.

The situation deepens and intensifies as time passes. While Julia and Maria, differently but just as defectively educated, are allowing that unacknowledged force, sexual passion, to disturb their lives, Fanny and Edmund are essentially doing the same. Throughout the novel there are parallels, particularly between Fanny and Julia, which make clear that Sir Thomas's system has served none of them well.

While Tom is simply getting conventionally into debt, the others are laying up all kinds of trouble for themselves. Mary and Henry are not exempt; they have more experience of sexual tension, but *their* education has left them unprepared for love. Ultimately, not one of the young people knows how to cope with real life. But Fanny has the the most serious problem. Almost every spontaneous feeling that she has conflicts with some duty which is part of her code. She gradually has to acknowledge to herself that she is in love with Edmund, which as a cousin and a dependant she has no right to be. (This idea does not actually surface until later: "Why did such an idea occur to her even enough to be reprobated and forbidden? It ought not to have touched on the confines of her imagination," 3:264-65.) Disgust with Maria and Julia, disappointment in Edmund, jealousy of Mary all lead her into very reprehensible emotions which she tries hard to disguise, or rather to defuse. A small but significant incident exemplifies this. While waiting rather impatiently for Mary to finish her riding lesson, she pretends to herself that she is sorry

for the horse: "if she were forgotten the poor mare should be remembered" (3:68).¹⁷ Then, unable to throw off her "discontent and envy" she lapses into headache and languor on the sofa, does not deny it when asked by Edmund, and stands by mute while her aunts are arguing about whose fault it is (3:74). It is Edmund's fault, and she "had been feeling neglected ... struggling against discontent and envy." The struggle is admirable, but ineffective. Her code allows her to be silent; she does not need to reassure anyone. Lucilla Stanley would not have used her silence to cloak resentment, for she never experiences any. In Fanny, the feminine meekness of demeanour described in the conduct-books only serves to conceal from onlookers (but not from the reader) a mind in very human turmoil. Not for the last time we see Fanny using approved feminine silence to avoid positive generosity; here we have "Nature and Probability," not a moralistic fiction.

As the novel advances there are several episodes which superficially present Fanny as superior to Maria and Julia—particularly Julia—but at another level as very similar. At Sotherton, while Henry is playing one sister off against the other, Julia is described as suffering under the necessity of hiding her feelings of jealousy; when Henry detaches Maria from the party on the terrace and leaves Julia with Mrs Norris and Mrs Rushworth, she, too, has a struggle:

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. (3:91)

But she does manage to conceal her perturbation, just as, shortly afterwards, we find Fanny doing the same; although her manner is different, and she feels more guilt, she suffers "disappointment and depression" for much the same reason, and finds these feelings difficult to control. Fanny may use approved Evangelical self-examination but she still feels unacceptable resentment. The episode also emphasizes, in a symbolic way, the inability of Fanny's moral principles to do anything to help others out of their confusion and moral dilemmas; her habits of submission, respect and obedience make this impossible. Edmund is more culpably ineffective; we cannot avoid remembering that he has just been discoursing piously upon the duty of the clergyman to guide the conduct of others

17 See Butler, *Austen and the War of Ideas*, p. 223n2. Butler sees this as "genuinely objective concern for the horse"; another reading suggests that, on the contrary, Fanny does not really know herself at this time.

(3:93), and is now oblivious to the dangerous game being played out under his nose, dazzled by the company of a pretty girl. The dynamics of the episode make it impossible to believe that Fanny is not sorrowfully conscious of his backsliding. She tries, ineffectually, and from a sitting position, to prevent Maria from going into the park with Henry and to defuse Julia's jealousy. This is symbolic irony: active religion, or Evangelicalism—in this case, Fanny—from its internal contradictions can do little to reform anyone; it can protest weakly while real people blunder on in their own disastrous courses. The easy solutions of *Cælebs* are mere chimeras. More crucially, the system which Fanny has sought to guide her conduct can make its proponents adept at judging people but useless at saving them. Fanny, for all her "goodness," is here quite useless. Her moral standards are ineffective even to herself, because they are too simple to deal with real-life crisis—just as Edmund's are.¹⁸ Austen now shows Fanny almost replicating Julia's behaviour. While attracting sympathy from the reader for her plight, Fanny goes on a parallel pursuit of Edmund and Mary, which results in unspoken, but real, resentment. Fanny has been wanting to see the avenue all morning; now she finds that Edmund and Mary have reached it together and she has been forgotten:

Fanny's best consolation was in being assured that Edmund had wished for her very much ... but this was not quite sufficient to do away the pain of having been left a whole hour. (3:103)

Fanny may exercise more control over the expression of her feelings than Julia does (though even Julia only says what she really thinks about the situation to Fanny herself—someone she is not bound to respect) but the emotional residue is the same.



The episode of the play emphasizes Fanny's moral impotence—she can do nothing to prevent what she sees, rightly in terms of the novel, as an iniquitous proceeding. It also repeats, several times, the Fanny/Julia motif: Fanny feels sorry for her—"could not think of her as under the agitations of *jealousy*, without great pity" (3:136); Fanny recognizes their similar feelings, but judges Julia—"Julia was a sufferer too, but not quite so blamelessly" (3:160); she is conscious of Julia's unhappiness,

18 See Garside and McDonald, where attention is drawn to Fanny's impotence during this episode (p. 229).

and the breach between her and her sister, but "there was no outward fellowship between them. Julia made no communication, and Fanny took no liberties. They were two solitary sufferers" (3:163). Fanny may be "blameless" in one sense, but the episode's chief impact on the reader is the way in which the system under which they all live excludes any possibility of Fanny's "active principle" doing anything to help Julia. And is Fanny really blameless? At Sir Thomas's unexpected arrival Julia actually voices what Fanny has been trying for throughout the episode: "I need not be afraid of appearing before him" (3:175). The clash of their manners only points up the parallel of their situations and blurs the fact that Fanny has fallen short in several ways. She has condoned a moral lapse in Edmund, and she has somehow sufficiently cleared away her earlier conviction that the play *Lovers' Vows* was "improper" and the language "unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty" (3:137) to learn most of it by heart; by 3:165 she believes she derives "as much innocent enjoyment from the play as any of them"; and she is only saved from finally agreeing to take the part (temporarily) of the Cottager's Wife by the arrival of Sir Thomas. Bernard Paris points out that she deceives herself about her involvement in the play when she helps to make Mr Rushworth's cloak: "It is difficult to understand the difference between acting and sewing."¹⁹ Her principles have not stayed firm. The narrative centres on her consciousness of what *ought* to happen; but she is no more able to cause it to do so than Edmund, the only other person who recognizes that anything is amiss.

The play episode also produces a new trial for Fanny. Mary, so far the *bête noire*, the wicked interloper, suddenly shows herself to have spontaneously warm and human feelings which anyone of Fanny's professed Christian beliefs ought to be able to appreciate. Mrs Norris tries to shame Fanny into doing what Tom and the others want, by a crude reference to her inferior status—"I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl ... very ungrateful indeed, considering who and what she is" (3:147). Mary is "astonished," and does everything she can to comfort Fanny after this brutal and vulgar attack. The authorial voice intrudes here to assert that Miss Crawford is "almost purely governed" by "really good feelings." When the next day Edmund announces to Fanny that he is going to rescue Mary from the necessity of having to act with a stranger,

19 Paris, p. 53. Paris cites a number of incidents which reveal Fanny as anything but perfect; but he regards these as almost accidental on the part of the author. He suggests that "the combination of mimetic characterization, comic action and moral theme poses artistic problems which may be insoluble" (p. 19). The implication is that Austen made Fanny more complex than she intended.

Fanny cannot bring herself to acknowledge Mary's "really good feelings"; she tries for "greater warmth of manner" and cannot complete her "generous effusion" (3:155-56). Is she governed by her concern for the doubtful morality of the whole proceeding? Or does she really want Edmund to leave Mary to her fate, thus obeying the rules they both believe in and staying on her side? The final sentences of the chapter answer this question. Fanny is not concerned about generalized right and wrong; it is Mary who is the enemy—"Alas! it was all Miss Crawford's doing." The final words of her internal monologue are: "Things should take their course; she cared not how it ended. ... It was all misery now." Although she is presented as telling herself that his moral consistency is her chief concern, the words convey the fact that it is mainly Edmund's relation to herself that she cares about. What is being demonstrated here is the ease with which unacceptable human feelings can be camouflaged in a system like Evangelicalism—a useful set of moral imperatives can be used to transform and make laudable such things as jealousy and cold-heartedness. When the system fails, an individual is left with an uncomfortable amalgam of self-righteousness and despair. Moreover, in this case, Fanny, for all her "goodness," has no means of helping Edmund to deal honestly with his problems, for her own desires are too much involved.

The play episode takes its course and reaches its conclusion; Maria is disillusioned about Crawford and marries Rushworth. Julia goes away with them and Fanny moves to centre stage. Given every encouragement by Sir Thomas, Edmund, Mary, and later by William and Henry, Fanny reaches a position in which she should be able to bring her principles more definitely into play. Mary's sophistication has already been modified by her feeling for Edmund. In a crucial episode she appeals to Fanny for help; she shows herself to be moving slowly towards an acceptance of the life which Edmund could provide for her and asks for Fanny's agreement. She describes a somewhat modified version of the life she might expect, and the possible enjoyment of country pleasures which she has before derided, saying "One need not envy the new Mrs. Rushworth with such a home as *that*" (3:210).

Fanny is unable to make any relevant response to this. We all recognize this situation. When we do not want to discuss the real subject introduced by our interlocutor, our best escape is to repeat the last remark, however irrelevant. This is what Fanny does—"Envy Mrs. Rushworth!" Her reply is meaningless in context—a refusal to discuss the matter. A chance to influence Mary, to turn her from her corrupt city ways to rural innocence—a dominant theme in *Cælebs*—is missed. Of course it is.

Fanny does not *want* Mary to reconcile herself to the life of the wife of a country parson, and therefore the conversation takes a totally different course, and one more acceptable to Fanny. By the end of the exchange Mary has shifted back to the contemplation of more magnificent enjoyments at Maria's grand establishment in London. The irony of this passage is clear—again silence, the approved female virtue, is used for unworthy motives. Fanny treats Henry's efforts at improvement in the same way. At Mrs Grant's dinner (3:246) Sir Thomas perceives her behaviour as "so proper and modest, so calm and uninviting"; but for the reader it is a rigid determination to do nothing to encourage Henry to find a home near Mansfield or to change in any other respect.

For all her piety she cannot give either Mary or Henry the benefit of any doubt, or credit for changing feeling. Once polluted, always polluted. The kind of religion that Edmund and Fanny have tried to practise serves no moral purpose—it produces at best confusion (Edmund) and at worst a chill intolerance aggravated by intellectual dishonesty (Fanny). Her "proper" behaviour simply cloaks a quite understandable and human desire, but not one that would be at home in an Evangelical novel—to get rid of the Crawfords and have Edmund all to herself again.

During the run-up to the ball, we are shown Fanny's grip on her moral code slipping even further; she is dominated by one thing only—her feeling for Edmund—and all tolerance and charity go out of the window. Her reaction to the gift of the necklace is wary and suspicious (3:260), and when she receives the chain from Edmund, in her haste to exclude the Crawfords from her relationship with both William and Edmund, she falls into real insensitivity to other people's feelings. She wishes to return the necklace because it is "not wanted." She tries to soften her response by suggesting that, since it was originally a gift from her brother, Mary would clearly prefer to keep it. Her suggestion shows the extent of her moral muddle; Edmund himself is shocked and immediately straightens her out; it almost seems as if he has kept a greater hold on charity and loving-kindness than Fanny for the very reason that his Evangelical principles are weaker: "She must not suppose it not wanted, not acceptable at least; and its having been originally her brother's gift makes no difference, for as she was not prevented from offering, nor you from taking it on that account, it ought not to affect your keeping it" (3:263).

After this episode, in which Edmund clearly shows the strength of his feeling for Mary, Fanny is described as trying hard to "regulate" her

feelings by recourse to duty and prayer, in the kind of self-examination so central to the Evangelical system. This she signally fails to do, and the episode is described with all the charm of "Nature and Probability":

She would endeavour to be rational, and to deserve the right of judging of Miss Crawford's character and the privilege of true solicitude for him by a sound intellect and an honest heart.

She had all the heroism of principle, and was determined to do her duty; but having also many of the feelings of youth and nature, let her not be much wondered at if, after making all these good resolutions on the side of self-government, she seized the scrap of paper on which Edmund had begun writing to her, as a treasure beyond all her hopes. (3:265)

In fact, Fanny succeeds only temporarily in accepting what seems to be the inevitable; as the time of the ball approaches and she knows that Edmund is at the Parsonage talking to Mary, she relapses into depression, only managing to cheer up when poor Edmund comes dispiritedly back after a tiff with Mary about his approaching ordination which seems to have ended all his hopes. Fanny is positively glad—"She had felt nothing like it for hours" (3:270). Though understandable in the circumstances, this is hardly the reaction of the exemplary heroine. Tony Tanner says: "We are used to seeing heroes and heroines confused, fallible, error-prone. But Fanny always thinks, feels, speaks, and behaves exactly as she ought."²⁰ Fanny, however, behaving as she does in accordance with nature rather than principle, is very "error-prone." She forgets all about sharing Edmund's pain and disappointment, and is caught up in her own joy at the likelihood of Miss Crawford's final banishment—"Now, every thing was smiling"(3:270).²¹ Does this look like "that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others" which we have been told earlier that *Julia* lacks? Fanny has all of the faults denied by Tanner, and frequently falls into ordinary human error; but unless the reader can stand back from her point of view here, the moral subtleties implied in the sequence of events and conversations, and in Fanny's internal discourse, may be missed.

The ball over, and the three young men temporarily absent, Mary again tries to engage Fanny's sympathetic attention. She is sorry for her behaviour to Edmund about his ordination—"She wished such words unsaid with all her heart" (3:286); she misses him sorely and is worried

²⁰ Tanner, p. 8.

²¹ Paris notes this inappropriate euphoria also occurring at the end of the novel, when Fanny returns to Mansfield from Portsmouth (p. 60).

about his protracted absence and jealous of the daughters of the family with which he is staying. Again we see her softened and ready for a radical change of attitude. Here is a soul to be saved, but Fanny once more fails to overcome her own desires and take the opportunity, confining herself to the shortest possible answers. As Mary tries to prise some reaction, Fanny is forced into an acknowledgment that she does not think him likely to marry one of the "Miss Owens"—or, she hopes, anybody. She is clearly preoccupied with this new danger. Her response is guarded and unsatisfactory (3:287–89). She will do nothing to encourage Mary, nor—more important—will she help in any way to make her more fit, in her terms, to be Edmund's wife. Quite naturally and humanly she would prefer Mary to remain hardened in her materialism and therefore unacceptable to Edmund. The kind of selfless love which would enable her to devote herself to Mary's improvement for Edmund's sake—surely more in line with the ideals of *Cælebs*—is quite alien to Fanny. Moreover, she is alarmed enough at Mary's suggestion to question Edmund about the Miss Owens on his return (3:355).



Henry's decision to marry Fanny provides a slightly different demonstration of Mary's change of heart. Here the reader, not Fanny, is supposed to approve the material disinterestedness of Mary's response; a girl who only a short time ago would not have anyone "throw themselves away" is observed supporting Henry's determination to do exactly that. It may be that she is influenced by a feeling that it will now be easier for her to do what *she* really wants—to marry Edmund—but that, too, betokens a changing attitude. At this point she has clearly decided against materialism.

Austen continually reminds us that it is Fanny's love for Edmund which is the main motive for her determined rejection of Crawford and her dislike and fear of Mary. She can hardly tell Edmund this; in her conversation with him about it, "avoiding a direct answer," she uses Crawford's behaviour at the time of the play to explain her rejection (3:348–49.) She does the same with Mary; she will neither love Mary nor tolerate Henry because, she convinces herself, they are irredeemably *corrupt*; this makes it possible for her to believe that her feelings are independent of her strong wish to banish the Crawfords and have Edmund once again all to herself. But they are not, and her internal discourse betrays how unsubtle—even crude—is her real state of mind—"If Mr.

Crawford would but go away! ... go and take his sister with him" (3:311). We have the support of the narrator that Fanny is wrong both about herself and about the Crawfords; Edmund has returned, and his hopes have revived; he has been able to rid himself—"nobody could tell how"—of "the doubts and hesitations of her ambition." Fanny believes that Mary will now accept his offer. She muses: "and yet, there were bad feelings still remaining which made the prospect of it most sorrowful to her, independently—she believed independently of self" (3:367). The interpolation of "she believed" here must indicate a doubt, even in her own mind. The next sentences of Fanny's internal discourse accuse Mary of something which is at this juncture also applicable to herself: "In their very last conversation, Miss Crawford, 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" (3:367). There is an ironical dimension to this, and to emphasize its message the narrator's voice interrupts, addressing "older sages" who might at this point justly impugn the total enlightenment of Fanny's own mind:

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. (3:367)

This authorial comment strongly enjoins a view of Fanny as biased in her estimate of Mary by her own interest, and the Crawfords as redeemable.

But Fanny is to be tested again—can she become the ideal female, who can set aside her own desires for the good of others, who can be really fair and just in her judgments, or will she continue to be "astray"? She goes to Portsmouth and is there taught a bitter lesson. While she is accusing Mary in her mind of having "learnt to think nothing of consequence but money," she herself is having to learn how dependent upon ease, refinement, and money is the kind of morality she wants to practise. She has great difficulty in maintaining the proper respect for her parents under conditions of privation to which she is not accustomed. And one aspect of her visit shows her mind to be as "astray" as Mary's—her project to save Susan, her sister. In their different ways both Susan and Mary may be regarded as victims of a defective moral and social education, but Fanny sees Mary's mind as "polluted," and therefore unchangeable, while Susan is simply "far from amiable" and a proper subject for reform.

Again her attitude is a disguise for her real wishes. She has no vested interest in keeping Susan in her present unamiable state. When Susan asks for advice, she gives it without stint (3:397). How different from her attitude to Mary! Partly as a result of Fanny's refusal to build on Mary's incipient change of heart, Mary has lapsed into materialism and triviality in London. Henry's efforts are also rejected; on his visit to Portsmouth he tries to interest Fanny in his management of his estate, actually asking for her advice. She refuses to give it, with as chill a reply as it is possible to imagine:

"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. Good bye; I wish you a pleasant journey to-morrow." (3:412)

At the end of the novel Henry's failure to go to Everingham is presented as the result of weakness and vanity; but we can if we choose remember that Fanny had the chance to encourage him and did not do so. Fanny is not altogether innocent; though "without guile" she is not harmless, representing as she does an inflexible system which has little room for generosity and which gives her every opportunity for self-deception. An enthusiastic response to Henry's plans might have given him the final incentive to do the right thing. Instead, he goes to Richmond. The stage is set for the catastrophe.

The well-known first sentence of the last chapter of *Mansfield Park* is apt to distract our attention from the second, which is this: "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." It should be noted that the words are "not greatly in fault," *not* "completely innocent," and these people are to be restored not to great happiness but to "tolerable comfort." That is all that anybody enjoys in the end, and this comfort is built on the wreck of most of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram's hope in their fine family. The language of the dénouement conveys a sense of picking up the pieces: nobody has got quite what he or she wanted—except Fanny, and even she must always remember that she is Edmund's second choice, and that he would have married Mary, faults and all, if events had fallen out differently. We are reminded of the ideal, alternative ending in the last pages:

Would he [Henry] 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. (3:467)

This is a vision of redemption for everyone, which was not to be fulfilled. Who, then, is to blame? On the face of it, it is Henry, but Fanny bears much of the responsibility—for her rejection of Crawford's last appeal is the pivot upon which the novel finally turns towards its calamitous conclusion. And yet, any expectation that she could single-handedly push events in a different direction is unreal. This is why, in spite of everything, she does not come across as a monster of selfishness. Her principles, though rigid, are not strong; her code of good conduct will not bear the pressure of circumstances; but none of this is her fault; she is a victim, not a villain. The fact that Austen chose not to cast Fanny as redeemer shows that her aim was to give the lie to Evangelical certainties, which would have allowed a conventionally happy ending, involving selfless renunciation on the part of Fanny and varying degrees of reformation in all the others. Such things do not happen.

Mansfield Park does not, then, accommodate itself to early nineteenth-century moral and political reaction but can be seen as a serious challenge to its increasing reliance on a system—Anglican Evangelicalism—which made moral and social responsibility a simple matter of duty, quietism, and example, taking far too little account of the complexity of human affairs. The fact that this challenge is presented so obliquely allows it to be overlooked if the reader dwells only on the novel's surface structure. As Sir Thomas contemplates the wreck of most of his hopes, he takes responsibility for it and creates a mood of optimism as the novel closes; but the reader is conscious of the fact that he has no solution to the question of the moral education of those who are *not* "born to struggle and endure," but to enjoy unlimited ease and luxury; or indeed to any of the other intractable problems of human motive and desire the novel has identified and from which no one—certainly not Fanny—has been able to escape. No single answer is offered, but the attentive reader is left in no doubt, in terms of the story, as to the ultimate inadequacy of the "practical piety" of William Wilberforce and Hannah More.

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