

MANSFIELD PARK: I Like to Hear Your Enthusiasm

Jane Austen was not just of the eighteenth century and her world was by no means completely calm. She was thirteen in the summer of 1789 when forces were unleashed in France that set that nation and every nation of the western world on a different course. Life was no longer the same and never would be again, so great were the transformations. This was so in France as in England. The stability of the eighteenth century broke down dramatically. Jane Austen underwent a quite different experience as the stresses and strains of The Revolution entered the rural calm of her world and disrupted its accepted ways. An overall change in the social pattern was overtly noticed. As a result, a large part of the interest of her novel **Mansfield Park** is now thought to lie exactly in the sensitivity of her response to social change.

To examine Austen's response to social change inevitably means considering her lifetime exactly coinciding with a decisive period of change. Avron Fleishman sees **Mansfield Park** appearing at a crucial point in the transition of English society to the modern age, when there was a fear that the French Revolution would spread to England. He

'argues the themes of Mansfield Park grew out of Austen's responses to the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars and their impact on English life' (1970, 68).

The England in which Austen lived was changing in response to the new burdens of the Revolutionary Age. The French Revolution had an immediate impact on England and initiated a political debate that pertained not only to how the Revolution was viewed but also to internal, domestic issues. While not a propagandist, Austen was a participant in that debate. In fact, England's war with France is a theme in **Mansfield Park**.

There is no question that in Austen's final period 1808--17 she was disturbed over past memories. Anyway, the traces of the elements of transitionalism and radicalism in the author abound in the novel, being the first of its kind revealing her new state of mind and outlook as well. The social argument in **Mansfield Park** continues that of the two previous novels but presents it in a way that is new. Austen did not work that argument into an eighteenth-century framework, but placed it in the unstable world of the nineteenth century. The Bertram estate was divided, made up of sound and weak parts. Into its midst came the

Crawfords and Fanny Price, responding differently to questions that, private as they might seem, stood for public issues. This novel could have had 'reform or ruin' as its motto and precisely in the way that Evangelicals regarded that question and reform was necessary publicly and politically as well as individually and spiritually. *Mansfield Park* is not just about the ordination of Edmund Bertram but the ordination of society. And one of its subjects is the improvement of society, in the Burkean sense.

Mansfield Park is a novel that represents a major departure from Austen's earlier fictions. While she introduced a Burkean argument in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, she developed it more fully in *Mansfield Park* and tested in ways that were possible only within the type of narrative that it provided. And this is the first novel to reveal the influence of Evangelicalism on Austen's thinking and writing, just as it is the first to carry an imprint of her wartime experience and her new way of viewing the family. Between all of these parts of *Mansfield Park* there are logical connections. Together, they are parts of an integrated whole, a cluster of ideas, values

and commitments that took shape as a common response to the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars.

By the time Jane Austen wrote **Mansfield Park**, she lived fully in the nineteenth century; by that time her thinking and writing had been deeply affected by the sea change that swept over England as a result of the French Revolution. The novel, according to Q. D. Leavis is 'the first modern novel in England' (Collected Essays,40). It is also a problem novel, marking itself as Jane Austen's great transitional work as well. **Mansfield Park** resolutely disturbs the decorum by which good manners, good appearance, good taste in the arts, intelligence and liveliness and charm accompany, while not being identical with, good people. The Crawfords have all these, but are spiritually inferior. Fanny Price, the heroine, possesses all the good qualities but only in limited and secondary ways. She is, really speaking, the leading edge of Jane Austen's transitional enterprise. She is also made to provoke feelings in critics and scholars that range from constrained and dutiful, pity and admiration to positive repulsion. Fanny is a repressed young woman 'born to struggle and endure', with whose girlhood, unlighted by close affection and endorsement from anyone but Edmund, we

have been led tenderly to sympathize. Fanny's trouble with her unloving environment is so evident that attention to it should prevent an overall identification of her point of view with that of the novel.

Again, Mary Evans' analysis of *Mansfield Park* carries with it a radical reading. Austen emerges as a proponent of radicalism by virtue of the fact that she exposes the cracks in the structure of the establishment, questioning the aristocracy's fitness for government. Sir Thomas Bertram appears as the exponent of a repressive regime. In this regard Evans points out that 'excessive repression merely serves to harbour subversive fantasies and undisciplined desires' (1987,72). In Sir Thomas's absence in *Mansfield Park* these are allowed to flourish. The metaphor of *Mansfield* thus reveals a society where the reliance on male authority and the regulation of behaviour lead to anarchy and Evans pursues this to conclude that the society itself, as depicted by Austen, 'is based on a system of equal wealth and property distribution, which requires redress' (74). From this perspective Austen can be seen as belonging to 'an alternative tradition, which Butler describes as one 'which attacks patriarchal privilege and

appeals for democratic access to the processes of government through the figure of Fanny Price' (1975,224).

Mansfield Park engages itself in a dialogue about gendered behaviour and sexual difference that was itself a pressing topic for intellectual debate in early nineteenth century England. Gender carries weight as an important cultural sign and consequently impacts upon power relations in contemporary society. An insight into Austen-novels reveals to the scholars the fact that the novelist is consciously utilizing the contemporary conduct manual as a negative rather than positive backdrop to her presentation of issues in girl's education. Again, literary texts are not isolated from real events, but are themselves a part of history and should be examined accordingly. As a result, the images of confinement and expansion, which pervade **Mansfield Park**, take on new meaning in relation to the contemporary debates about slavery and colonialist expansion which form part of the novel's extra-literary context. While concentrating on the study of this particular novel, an understanding to the effect that Austen emerged in a period of transition develops. She was an author whose literary career developed in a society where women were becoming a major force in the publishing industry and where the conditions for female

authorship had never before been so favourable. Fergues goes significantly further in placing Austen firmly in the context of the early nineteenth century publishing explosion. In examining the changing economic climate and the associated conditions of literary production for women, Fergues makes links 'between the market economy, authorial independence and the awareness of gender politics' (1991, 145) with which the narrative of **Mansfield Park** is suffused. A sense of power radiates through this novel and this attributes to Austen's new-found professional confidence. The novel is often called a novel by a female about female education. In being so, Jane Austen through this novel criticizes superficial qualities, particularly accomplishments which were too narrowly aimed at giving a girl a higher price in the marriage market; accomplishment and mercenary marriages tended to be coupled together. The Bertram girls' education had been spent not only on their appearance and accomplishments but also on superficial information designed to make them appear clever and well informed in company.

The first part of **Mansfield Park**, until Sir Thomas's return, facilitating Maria's marriage, is about the entry into life of the two Bertram sisters; their education,

their values, and specially their inability to resist the worldly baits proffered by the Crawfords. In the second, slightly longer part, Fanny, the exemplary heroine, encounters in her turn the temptation of Henry's love and Mary's friendship, and prevails. Her endurance sets right the wrongs done at Mansfield by the older girls. Maria Bertram specially, is a girl according to the female moralist's common formula. Having demonstrated her vanity and superficiality in adolescence, she grows up with the typical ambition of marrying for money:

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

This 'duty' is one of the few Maria acknowledges for their father's daughter neither she nor her sister Julia feels any obligation. They are not fond of Sir Thomas Bertram, whose role as parent has so far been a negative one, and

accordingly they feel nothing but a sense of release when he departs for Antigua:

They were relieved by it from all restraint; and without aiming at one gratification that would probably have been by Sir Thomas, they felt themselves immediately at their own disposal and to have every indulgence within their reach (32).

In characterizing her heroine, Fanny, Jane Austen illustrates her ideological disagreement with Maria Edgeworth. Fanny Price is a Christian. The clue lies in those characteristics in which the Bertram girls are deficient.

In *Mansfield Park* a new element is added: the subject matter of a conversation becomes as important as the insight it offers into character, and conversation becomes the occasion for the clash of distinct systems of value. The action of the novel is so entirely bound up with the value system of the various characters that they are always to a greater or lesser extent illustrating, acting out their beliefs. All late-eighteenth century moralists of whatever colouring prefer country to the town, but Jane Austen's Fanny does so as a typical radical: because she associates

it with a community in which individuals have well defined duties towards the group, and because physically it reminds her of the wider ordered universe to which the lesser community belongs. Urban life, on the other hand, has given Mary selfish values: she betrays her egotism when she laughs at the farmers who will not let her have a wagon to move her harp.

A major theme of the novel **Mansfield Park** is the relationship between a conservative cautious and principled world, represented by Sir Thomas, the house itself, Edmund and Fanny and a new lively world of London, fashion, extravagance and lack of principle represented by the Crawfords, Maria and Julia and Tom before his accident. This relationship as shown by Jane Austen in the novel, upholds the author's technique of fusion---a fusion of the conservative and the progressive, represented by an age dying and the other just to come into existence. The eighteenth century life began to break down and new ones of the nineteenth century started taking its place. Hence we can say that Jane Austen is a novelist who works with some traces of transitionalism in dealing with her work of art. Anyway, the broad conflict between the old and the new,

between moral principles and selfish gratification is exemplified through out the novel.

To speak about Jane Austen's radicalism, mention can be made of an ambiguous picture of authority shown in the novel. It is either an artificial position occupied by a fool (Mr. Rushworth) or a solid influence, which orders the world and directs the lives of those under its authority (Sir Thomas). Jane Austen as a radical presents two contrasting emblematic characters---Mr. Rushworth and Sir Thomas. This theme of contrast is built in the seventeenth chapter in the novel *Mansfield Park*. The following extract will exemplify our point:

A man might represent the country with such an estate; a man might escape a profession and represent the country ...I dare say he will be in Parliament soon. When Sir Thomas comes ... keeps every body in their place (133).

Mansfield society falls apart into selfishness. The placing of a discussion of authority within a context of petty squabbles suggests that the disintegration of relationships in *Mansfield* itself is part of a wider social malaise. Jane Austen, as a conscious writer and responsible member of the

society took exception of it. In English society, where a man of authority can give purpose and consequence to weaker characters (as Sir Thomas does for Lady Bertram), it is also possible for a fool (Mr. Rushworth) to represent 'the country'. In the absence of proper authority, people will become preoccupied with selfish pursuits and social cohesion will break down. We know it well that society depends upon affection, which leads people to care enough about 'right' behaviour. The structure Jane Austen uses in **Mansfield Park** is one where minor individual events are related to greater matters. So, the theatricals introduced in the novel are emblematic of the artificiality of appearances: people represent themselves in order to pursue self-interest.

Now, let us turn to the society of the time Jane Austen depicted in her novel **Mansfield Park**. Indeed her novels focus almost exclusively on a narrow stratum of the upper-middle class in rural English settings, and their entire narrative interest is in the 'neighbourhood', made up of a few families of this class and one or two professional people such as clergyman or naval officers who visit each other on a regular basis. The style of social life is that of the end of the eighteenth century and also of the

different forms of behaviour and social interaction that began to become the norm during the nineteenth century. Though the novels do not attempt to depict any other way of life outside that of the class to which Jane Austen herself belonged, Fanny's visit to her family in Portsmouth in **Mansfield Park**, is an exception to this rule. Certainly, the Prices' home is the poorest household Jane Austen describes in any of her novels. On one hand, Mr. Price is a naval officer and Mrs. Price, once a Miss Ward is worth seven thousand pounds. Their life is disorganized, and money is short but they are, or have been members of the 'visitable' class. On the other hand, there are also large landowners or members of the minor aristocracy as Sir Thomas Bertram in the present novel.

References to the West Indies and the slave-trade in the 21st chapter of **Mansfield Park** testify to the change in scheme and scope of Jane Austen's art of writing novels. 'I love to hear my uncle talk of the West Indies. I could listen to him for an hour together ... ask him about the slave trade last night' (164). Jane Austen's depiction of the social world is normally limited to '2 to 3 families in country life'. But in **Mansfield Park** the mention of the slave trade and the West Indies marks a broader perspective

and different or changed viewpoint of Jane Austen's novels. Sir Thomas makes mention of the wider world in the background - the West Indies, and Fanny asks him a question about 'The slave-trade'. First, Fanny accepts that the outside world is man's domain and accepts her female role by taking 'pleasure' in 'information' about it, given to her by a man. We may wonder what 'pleasure' she could get from information about the slave trade. The slave trade was a much-debated issue through out Jane Austen's life. The anti-slavery committee was established in London in 1787 and efforts to abolish the trade were repeatedly put to the Parliament throughout the 1790s. The law in Britain was finally changed in 1808 but the slave trade carried on for several decades, with the open involvement of many British traders and the owner of slaves were awarded heavy compensation when existing British--owned slaves were freed in 1833. Clearly, at the time Jane Austen writes about, slavery was an important political issue, in the process of rapid and often violent change. Similarly, many well-off English families owned land in West Indies. However, at the time Jane Austen writes about, economic changes (particularly the collapse in the price of sugar) had severely reduced profits from these plantations. The reference to Antigua is, therefore, also a reference to

rapid and disturbing economic change. Jane Austen's readers would immediately recognize Sir Thomas's difficulties, connecting them to current stories of economic insecurity and huge financial losses and current arguments over the moral issue of slavery. In this context we can turn to Edward Said's discussion on *Mansfield Park*.

The images of confinement and expansion pervade *Mansfield Park*. They take on new meaning in relation to the contemporary debates about slavery and colonialist expansion that form part of the novel's extra--literary contexts (1993, 99).

Jane Austen has chosen particularly disturbing and morally ambiguous references to the outside world. Her reticence is equally noticeable. She does not reveal Sir Thomas's practice or her attitude in the matter of slaves. But we the readers come to know it carefully well that Jane Austen in her days held a totally different view on the system of slavery. When most of the people initially did not go much against the practice, she even nourished a sympathetic attitude to the slaves and their lots. In the income and in its need for the Bertrams, the novelist, however, parts with her critical consideration. The Bertrams do depend on

the income from Antigua. Tom's extravagances very quickly force Sir Thomas to economize in his plans for Edmund and the visit to Antigua is described as a 'necessity in a pecuniary light' which forces him 'to the effort on quitting the rest of his family' (28). These references then carry disturbing hints that the Bertrams' way of life is under threat, that the world is changing and the economic base of the landed gentry is far from secure. They also imply that there is something artificial about the whole structure of family, house and estate. Sir Thomas has been presented in the novel as the English patriarch and the owner of Antiguan plantations. He is also the owner of the slaves engaged by him for the plantations. When Sir Thomas Bertram returns to England, his niece puts a question to him about the slave trade. Of course, we are not told what the question was nor what answer was given. But the novelist in making Sir Bertram a slave-owner abroad implicitly contrasts Miss Fanny's moral stature in England. Since it is often assumed that Jane Austen could not have thought much about anything, which did not impinge upon her domestic life and familial relations.

As Margaret Kirkham suggests, *Mansfield Park* upholds the ideal of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' (1983, 118). Her

reading leads to the conviction that as a radical Jane Austen wanted to propagare these very ideals, through more relevantly in a feminist context. The equal moral status of women is made clear through exposure of the absurdity of any other belief. In *Mansfield Park* young people, oppressed by the prison-like atmosphere of Mr. Rushworth's house, share 'one impulse, one wish for air and liberty'! Fanny's need for fresh English air is stressed again and again; 'She requires', as Crawford ironically comments, 'constant air and exercise...ought never to be long banished from free air and liberty of the country' (410).

Mansfield Park is also pointedly concerned with fraternity, an ideal that a radical should always fight for. In the novel it is in the relationship between Fanny and her brother William. Fraternity is the paradigm of equal, affectionate relationships between men and women. This is always held as an ideal, having implications beyond the literal meaning of 'brother' and 'sister'. Edmund Bertram treats his inferior little cousin as a sister in the early part of the novel. He does not fall in love with her until the final chapter. This is not because Jane Austen had suddenly and unself-consciously become interested in incest, it is because the marriage which provides the

necessary happy ending of this literary genre (novel) carries implications about the right relationships between men and women, both in marriage as a social institution, and in society at large. Again, Jane Austen in the present novel shows that such an ideal is more readily to be found in contemporary society between brothers and sisters than husbands and wives, though she seeks a transference to the marriage relationship of the ideal with William, Fanny experiences a 'felicity' which she has never known before in an 'unchecked, equal fearless intercourse' (234).

From a close survey of the novel, it comes to appear that *Mansfield Park* embodies Jane Austen's most ambitious and radical criticism of contemporary prejudice in society and in literature. Confining herself to 'two or three families in a village', working within the conventions of the domestic comedy, she enlarges its scope so that it carries philosophical and political resonance far beyond its surface meaning. It is the only novel set in a county she had never visited and through it the novelist attempts to solve the special problem of woman by depicting the ideal patriarch as one who would 'establish and maintain a community which permitted her to take her rightful place'. In *Mansfield Park*, indeed, Jane Austen shows that English

women, even though they lack 'genius or large fortunes, are not to be denied the moral rights' appertaining to such being. A little absurdity here and there is no bar, since 'rational beings' of both sexes are also mortals and uncommonly prone to absurdity, even in their best moments.

It is a known fact that a novel of female education criticizes superficial qualities, particularly accomplishments which are too narrowly aimed at giving a girl a higher price in the marriage market. This debate, to take into account, was linked to the female aspect of the inferiority of 'wit' or 'cleverness' to judgment. This was also a common eighteenth century topic of educationists. In Mansfield Park the Bertram girls' education is not only shown on their appearance and accomplishments but also on superficial information designed to make them appear clever and well informed in company. The structure of the novel itself is severely built round the entry in to life of the two Bertram sisters--their education, their values and specially their inability to resist the worldly habits proffered by the Crawfords. Subsequently, Fanny, the exemplary heroine, encounters in her turn the temptation of Henry's love and Mary's friendship and prevails. Her endurance sets right the wrongs done at Mansfield by the

older girls. Maria Bertram grows up with the typical ambition of marrying for money. In her twenty first year she considers matrimony a duty. Her marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's, as well as ensure her the house in town. As daughters, neither she nor her sister Julia feels any obligation to Sir Thomas Bertram. They are not fond of him whose role as parent has been a negative one and accordingly they feel nothing but a sense of relief when he departs for Antigua:

They were relieved by it from all restraint; and 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 (32).

Fanny prefers the country to the town and associates it with community in which individuals have well-defined duties towards the group. The country reminds her of the wider ordered universe to which the lesser community belongs. Urban life on the other hand, has given Mary selfish values. She betrays her egotism when she laughs at the farmers who will not let her have a wagon to move her

harp. Her materialism is best exposed when she comments that in 'London money buys anything'. This is, as if, a radical outburst of the novelist herself. In **Mansfield Park** religion comes to the forefront in the sequence of things taking place. The scene in the chapel where Mary is offensive about clergyman brings out for the first time in full the gulf between the Crawfords and the religious orthodoxy. 'It is a pity,' cried Fanny, 'that the custom should have been discontinued' (85). Mary in her individualism cannot even begin to apprehend the social value Fanny sees in religion. Of course, Mary is clearly equally indifferent both to the social aspect of religion-- 'duty' and 'morals' and to its spiritual demand of self-knowledge, since she accepts no reality outside her own sensation. The action of the novel is so entirely bound up with the value systems of the various characters that they are always to a greater or lesser extent illustrating, acting out their beliefs.

From our study of the different characters in the Novel, it is found that Jane Austen is not interested in impressions conveyed by the subjective identification with the heroine. Actually, she gives her external world a solidity and scale, which eventually belittles individual characters.

That Jane Austen is a radical, is once again substantiated when the cynical Crawfords in Mansfield Park appear like Satan in the Garden of Eden, hostile to the old ethos of the place and bent on destruction. Every detail of what they say and do suggests their self-willed lawlessness--Mary, irrationally challenging the dimensions of the wilderness because she happens to feel tired, Henry defying the restraint imposed by the limits of the ground and the locked gate. Yet the Crawford's encroachment at Southerton, dangerous though it seems, remains in the end curiously ineffective. To this end, like Burke, Jane Austen not only locates the enemy but also diminishes him. In the Bertram sisters and in Henry there is an odd, willful capacity for self-destruction. They are more likely to reject a momentary restraint than to attack restraints systematically. In escaping into the Park, Henry, Maria and Julia go off in a different direction from their supposed objective, the avenue of oaks, which accordingly survives the threat they originally offered it. Southerton, although an empty hall, remains in tact. By the end of the story it is only individuals, Maria and to a lesser extent Henry, who have destroyed themselves.

Jane Austen's radical aspects are evident enough in her introduction to the play sequence in **Mansfield Park**. The play is Kotzebue's **Lovers Vows**. The play shows that each actor continues to be selfishly absorbed in personal feelings, in spite of the corporate activity he is engaged in. Fanny is not unamused to observe the selfishness, which more or less disguised, seemed to govern all. Maria and Henry are bent on self-gratification of an even more culpable kind. Apparently comic dialogues have a serious level of meaning. For a general judgment of the play--acting Jane Austen takes her side with the common contemporary arguments against amateur acting. By 1814 the increasingly strong Evangelical movement had sufficiently publicized the link between upper-class immorality and the private theatricals. A common and important leading objection is that play--acting tempts girls specially into an unseemly kind of personal display. In his **Enquiry Into the Duties of the Female Sex**, 1797 which Jane Austen read with approval in 1805, Thomas Gisborne declares that acting is 'almost certain to prove injurious to the female sex'. Gisborne believes that acting will harm a young woman through encouraging vanity and destroying diffidence 'by the unrestrained familiarity with the other sex, which inevitably results from being joined with them in the

drama'. What Jane Austen wants to make us understand is that the characters in touching one another (as when Henry holds Maria's hand) or making love to one another on the stage are not just acting but expressing their real feelings. The impropriety lies in the fact that they are not acting, but are finding an indirect means to gratify desires, which are illicit, and should have been contained. The unbridled passions revealed by play-acting has been the purpose of the sequence to bring out. Thus, ideologically Jane Austen's choice of play is crucial. In the sub plot the Baron's daughter, Amelia persuades the clergyman Anhalt to overlook the fact that she is a woman--by convention passive and noble. She is conventionally debarred from marrying a bourgeois. Here, Jane Austen's argument is that in defiance of convention human beings should obey their impulse. Thus Frederick and Amelia are the two characters in the play (*Lovers' Vows*) who expound Kotzebue's message of freedom in sexual matters and defiance of traditional restraints. In *Mansfield Park*, at times it is sufficient that a character who is central to the play's ethos makes a direct challenge to the house and its owner. Even the Crawfords, who have abstained from general discussion of the propriety of acting, know immediately that the father will not permit the play to go on.

The most important of the many themes incorporated into **Mansfield Park** is the fundamental conflict between Fanny's own Christian values and what she perceives as a many sided, anarchic, irreligious modernity. Ideologically the coherence of the novel depends on the reader's being able to make the connection Fanny makes, the subtle association between Portsmouth and London. In both the towns people's lives are dominated by one form or other of materialism. Petty details of life obscure the eternal verities. Worst of all perhaps, there can be no love, no 'natural' family feeling for in a material world, every individual is loud, self assertive, at war with the interest of others. The people in both Portsmouth and London lead characteristic modern lives directed at materialistic ends. The subtle alignment of the two in Fanny's consciousness, illustrates Jane Austen's radical implication. However, in **Mansfield Park** no one talks of revolution. Mr. Price, Fanny's real father, illustrates non-ideal human nature as it commonly is, an ugly way of life led without interest in others, without any sense of order because he does not even perceive the existence of such an ideal. Radically, Fanny's feebleness that modern readers tend particularly to dislike is probably a device of Jane Austen to make Fanny less

perfect but more 'human' and therefore, more appealing. The real significance of her character for the novelist is not its weakness but its strength. Once again, a radical as Jane Austen is, her creation of Crawford's character is a sharp pointer indeed. Indeed, the character is an intrinsic triumph for the novelist. At the same time, Crawford and Mary are drawn as too much creatures 'of the world' to relinquish their established habits. In handling the characters Jane Austen also exposes her other trait i.e. transitionalism. This has been exposed in the way that the period spent by them (Crawford and Mary) at Mansfield and their contact with Fanny and Edmund Bertram brings them nearer than they have ever been to altering their attitudes and their way of life. Crawford slips back into vanity and easy pleasure, Mary cannot clear a judgment that has been clouded too long by worldly influences. Her readiness to suggest that Crawford must be artfully distracted into the paths of virtue is a characteristic symptom of an incurably blunted sensitivity. Apparently it is not in the nature of Crawford or of Mary to change, but there has been a time when they, and we, believed that they might.

In reality the impulse in **Mansfield Park** is not to forgive but to condemn. Its praise is not for social freedom but

for social stasis. Fanny Price is overtly virtuous and consciously virtuous. Our modern literary feeling is very strong against people who, when they mean to be virtuous, believe they know how to reach their goal and do reach it. But in **Mansfield Park** Jane Austen most assuredly makes us feel that the above attributes of virtue do not reconcile to the virtue of Fanny Price. The terrified little creature as Fanny Price is, she grows up to be virtually the mistress of the estate in the long run. Again, to consider Jane Austen's radicalism in this novel, we should closely examine the character of Mary Crawford who is actually another version of Elizabeth Bennet in **Pride and Prejudice**. Mary Crawford is also the antithesis of Fanny Price. The boldness with which the antithesis is contrived is a typical of the uncompromising honesty of **Mansfield Park**. Fanny is a Christian heroine. It is, therefore, not inappropriate that the issue between her and Mary Crawford should be concentrated in the debate over whether or not Edmund Bertram shall become a clergyman.

A product of the period of transition, Jane Austen also imbibes in her certain marks of transitionalism in her handling of the subject matter in the novel. In one of her letters she tells: 'Now, I will try and write something

else and it self be a complete change of subject--
Ordination'. Indeed, in **Mansfield Park** the question of
ordination is of essential importance. It is not really a
religious question but rather a cultural question, having
to do with the meaning and effect of a profession--what
will happen to Edmund as a clergyman? To Mary every
clergyman is the Mr. Collins of **Pride and Prejudice**. She
thinks of ordination as a surrender of manhood. But Fanny
sees the church as a career that claims a man's best manly
energies. Jane Austen held a man's profession to be a
matter of considerable importance. In nineteenth century
England the ideal of a professional commitment inherits a
large part of the moral prestige that an ideal gentleman
has. A man's moral life is bound up with his loyalty to the
discipline of his calling. Right action is typically to be
performed without any pain to the self. In Jane Austen's
days much of the preoccupation with duty was not a love of
law for its own sake, but rather a concern with the hygiene
of the self.

That a rapid change of radical kind in the nature of family
life was an actuality is proved by the evidence to be found
in **Mansfield Park**. Jane Austen could get quite subtle
humour from the contrasts between the manners of the new

generation and the old. The social conventions of Mansfield Park in contrast to the agreeable Regency formality of the new generation are tellingly incarnated at the opening of the Mansfield ball. Actually, the novel under discussion is the turning point in Austen's enquiry into the value of the movement of social life in her own lifetime. There is no doubt about Jane Austen's rejection of the out moded life-style, represented by Sotherton and its insufferable Rushworth family. The house is shown as merely a stifling museum where spontaneous life has died and to which the Regency Improver is quite rightly called to modernize and open a prospect. In contrast to the inhibiting constraints of Sotherton and Mansfield park, the new style represented by Miss Crawford and her setting in the Rectory, recently modernized by her sister, the new Rector's wife, is shown to constitute an irresistible attraction for Edmund Bertram: he escapes from his own house to the freedom of conversation and wit of Miss Crawford and the fascinating novelty of the new life--style that the novelist sympathetically creates for us in the following passage:

A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself, and both placed near a window cut down to the ground, and opening on a little lawn, surrounded by shrubs in the rich foliage of

summer, was enough to catch any man's heart
(189).

The informality of the Rectory is part of the charm we see, in contrast to Mansfield Park where even teatime is a ritual- 'the solemn procession, headed by Baddeley, of tea-board, urn, and cake-bearers'. Life is indeed a ritual there and the novelist appreciates as much as Edmund the enchanting domestic scene the Regency had created with its relaxation and comparatively emancipated conversation, which are inseparable from the aesthetic charm. Edmund is sufficiently the prisoner of his upbringing to feel that Miss Crawford is wrong, almost immoral, in freely expressing her perfectly just opinion of her uncle, since he feels it improper to criticize the older generation who represent parents.

Now, in our conclusion to the present study of Mansfield Park, it can be said that Jane Austen's attitudes are always critical. Her characters are held away from herself and her vocabulary is that of a system of values, which is not emotional but rational and critical. It is interesting to observe that the unique features in Austen as a novelist of a transitional period have nothing to do with the

Romantic Movement except in so far as the new recognition of children as children is concerned. The work of the Romantic poets is something that Jane Austen shows she knew of but unimpressed. In 1794 Jane Austen was in her twentieth year and therefore the revolution in material things and all that implied of inward change, had happened when she was no more a minor. She was capable of developing her own outlook without being influenced by others'. Thus, besides being a radical in her outlook Jane Austen also had in her the traits of an artist essentially belonging to a period of transition and **Mansfield Park** testifies to this.