

# Mansfield Park

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***Mansfield Park*** is a novel by Jane Austen, written at Chawton Cottage between 1812 and 1814. It was published in July 1814 by Thomas Egerton, who published Jane Austen's two earlier novels, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. When the novel reached a second edition, its publication was taken over by John Murray, who also published its successor, *Emma*.

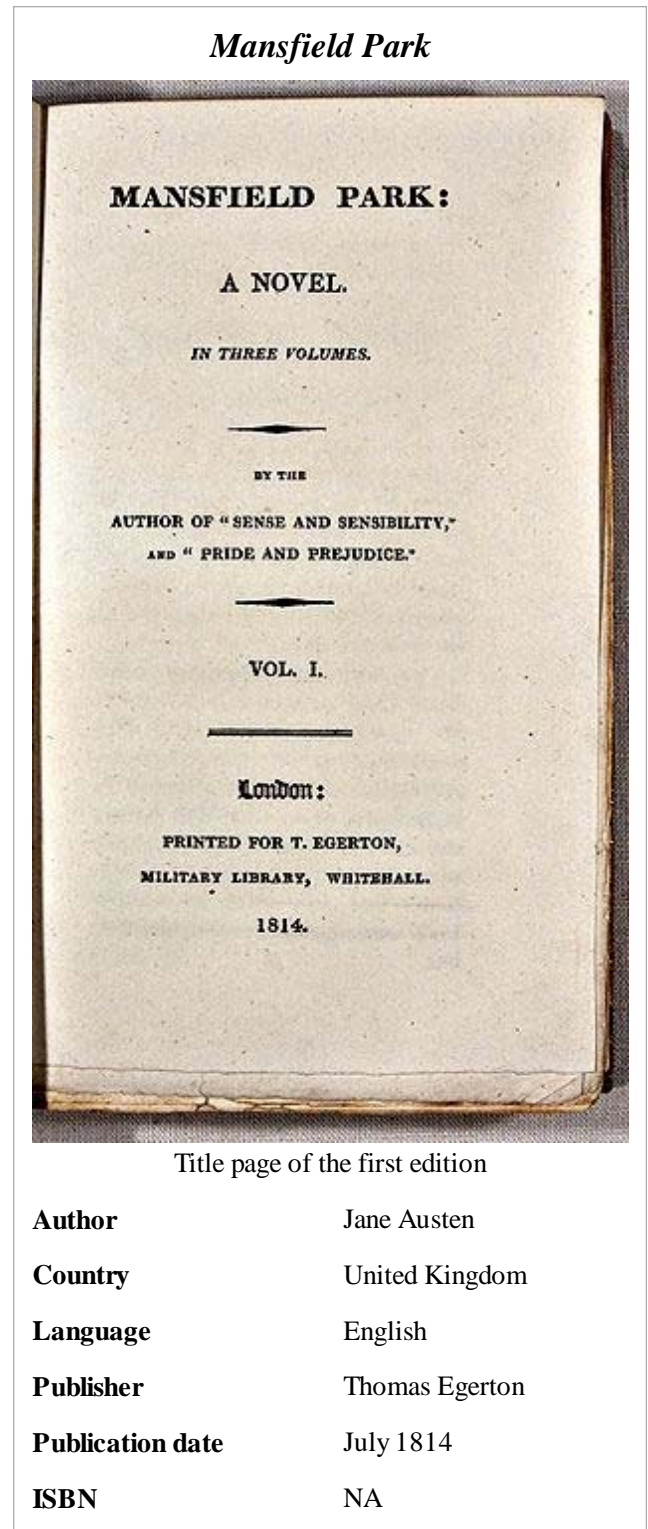
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## Plot summary

The main character, Fanny Price, is a young girl from a relatively poor family, raised by her rich uncle and aunt, Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, at Mansfield Park. She grows up with her four cousins, Tom Bertram, Edmund Bertram, Maria Bertram and Julia, but is always treated as inferior to them; only Edmund shows his real kindness. He is also the most virtuous of the siblings: Maria and Julia are vain and spoiled, while Tom is an irresponsible gambler. Over time, Fanny's gratitude for Edmund's kindness secretly grows into romantic love.

When the children have grown up, the stern patriarch Sir Thomas leaves for a year so he can deal with problems on his plantation in Antigua. The fashionable and worldly Henry Crawford and his sister Mary Crawford arrive in the village, and stay with their sister, the Parson's wife. The arrival of the Crawfords disrupts the staid world of Mansfield and sparks a series of romantic entanglements. Mary and Edmund begin to form an attachment, though Edmund often worries that her manners are fashionable and her conversation often cynical, masking a lack of firm principle. However, she is engaging, beautiful and charming, and goes out of her way to befriend Fanny. Fanny fears that Mary has enchanted Edmund, and love has blinded him to her flaws. Henry plays with the affections of



Title page of the first edition

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both Maria and Julia, despite Maria being already engaged to the dull, but very rich, Mr. Rushworth. Maria believes that Henry is really in love with her, and treats Mr Rushworth coldly, invoking his jealousy. Fanny is little observed in the family circle - her presence is often overlooked and she frequently witnesses Maria and Henry in compromising situations.

Encouraged by Tom and his friend Mr. Yates, the young people decide to put on Elizabeth Inchbald's play *Lovers' Vows*; Edmund and Fanny both initially oppose the plan, believing Sir Thomas would disapprove and feeling that the subject matter of the play is not appropriate. Edmund is eventually swayed, offering to play the part of Anhalt, the lover of the character played by Mary Crawford. As well as giving Mary and Edmund a vehicle to talk about love and marriage, the play provides a pretext for Henry and Maria to flirt in public. Sir Thomas arrives unexpectedly in the middle of a rehearsal, which ends the plan. Henry leaves, and Maria is crushed; realising that Henry does not love her, she marries Mr. Rushworth and they leave for Brighton, taking Julia with them. Meanwhile, Fanny's improved looks and pleasant temper endear her to Sir Thomas, who pays more attention to her care.

Henry returns to Mansfield Park and decides to amuse himself by making Fanny fall in love with him. However, her genuine gentleness and kindness cause him to fall in love with her instead. When he proposes marriage, Fanny's disgust at his improper flirtations with her cousins, as well as her love for Edmund, cause her to reject him. The Bertrams are dismayed, since it is an extremely advantageous match for a poor girl like Fanny. Sir Thomas rebukes her for ingratitude. Henry decides he will continue to pursue Fanny, hoping that in time she will change her mind by coming to believe he is constant. Sir Thomas supports a plan for Fanny to pay a visit to her relatively poor family in Portsmouth, hoping that as Fanny suffers from the lack of comforts there, she will realize the usefulness of a good income. Henry pays Fanny a visit in Portsmouth, to convince her that he has changed and is worthy of her affection. Fanny's attitude begins to soften but she still maintains that she will not marry him.

Henry leaves for London, and shortly afterward, Fanny learns of a scandal involving Henry and Maria. The two had met again and rekindled their flirtation, which quickly had developed into an affair. The affair is discovered and hinted at in a national newspaper; Maria leaves her husband's house and elopes with Henry. The scandal is terrible and the affair results in Maria's divorce; however Henry refuses to marry her. To make matters worse, the dissolute Tom has taken ill, and Julia has eloped with Mr. Yates. Fanny returns to Mansfield Park to comfort her aunt and uncle and to help take care of Tom.

Although Edmund knows that marriage to Mary is now impossible because of the scandal between their relations, he goes to see her one last time. During the interview, it becomes clear that Mary does not condemn Henry and Maria's adultery, only that they got caught. Her main concern is covering it up and she implies that if Fanny had accepted Henry, he would have been too busy and happy to have an affair, and would have been content with merely a flirtation. This reveals Mary's true nature to Edmund, who realises he had idealised her as someone she is not. He tells her so and returns to Mansfield and his living as a Parson at Thornton Lacey. "At exactly the time it should be so, and not a week sooner." Edmund realises how important Fanny is to him, declares his love for her and they are married. Tom recovers from his illness, a steadier and better man for it, and Julia's elopement turns out to be not such a desperate business after all. Austen points out that if only Crawford had persisted in being steadfast to Fanny, and not succumbed to the affair with Maria, Fanny eventually would have accepted his marriage proposal—especially after Edmund had married Mary.

## Characters in "Mansfield Park"

### Fanny Price

The second eldest of nine children who is sent to live with her mother's sisters at Mansfield Park. Her mother married a poor lieutenant of marines for love. Mrs Price's alcoholic husband was disabled and

released from the service on half pay, and she had to settle for a life far less comfortable than those of her sisters. Fanny is sensitive, shy, intelligent, seemingly virtuous, with a good sense of morals; and her status at Mansfield Park as a dependent poor relation only intensifies these traits. The bulk of the novel takes place when she is eighteen and nineteen. She has been in love with her cousin Edmund since she was young and when both realise their feelings, they get married. Fanny is pursued by Mr. Henry Crawford.

#### Lady Bertram

Sister of Fanny Price's mother who is married to the wealthy Sir Thomas Bertram. She is perpetually vague and distracted. Born "Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds [...]" <sup>[1]</sup>.

#### Mrs Norris

The officious, skinflint sister of Lady Bertram who lives near Mansfield Park. Her husband, Mr. Norris, was the parson at Mansfield Park until his death. She dislikes Fanny and takes every opportunity to put her down and make a distinction between Fanny's treatment and that of her wealthier cousins. Mrs. Norris also takes every opportunity to save money, such as taking jellies and sewing materials from the main house for her own home.

#### Sir Thomas Bertram

The husband of Fanny's aunt, Lady Bertram. He owns the Mansfield Park estate and an estate in Antigua. He is initially stern and correct. He later realises his behaviour may have caused the ruin of his eldest daughter. He wishes his own children were more like his niece and nephew, Fanny and William Price.

#### Tom Bertram

The older son of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram; he is seven years older than Fanny. Tom is principally interested in carousing in London society and enjoying the pleasures of the theatre with his friend, Mr. Yates. Tom incurs large debts, forcing Sir Thomas to sell the church position that would have gone to Tom's younger brother, Edmund. One celebratory journey leaves Tom with a fever and he later learns the error of his ways.

#### Edmund Bertram

The younger son of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram; he is six years older than Fanny. He plans to be a clergyman. He alone among his family has any consideration for Fanny's feelings. As her protector and friend, he has a great deal of influence over her and helps form her character. Edmund becomes attracted to Miss Crawford, but her opinions on the scandal involving Mrs. Rushworth and Mr. Crawford mortify him. He later realizes he is in love with Fanny and they are married.

#### Maria Bertram

The very beautiful elder daughter of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram; she is three years older than Fanny. She becomes engaged to Mr. Rushworth but she becomes attached to Henry Crawford. She expects Mr. Crawford to propose and when he doesn't, she marries Mr. Rushworth for his £12,000 a year, despite knowing him to be a boorish young man with little but his money to recommend him. Mr. Crawford returns to her life soon after her marriage and they elope together. Rushworth divorces her and she is left to the mercy of her family because Mr. Crawford refuses to marry her. She ends up living with her aunt Norris.

#### Julia Bertram

The younger daughter of Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram; she is two years older than Fanny. She has strong feelings toward Mr. Crawford, but soon learns that he prefers Maria, despite, or because of, her sister's engagement. Mr. Yates pursues her, which is swiftly ended when Sir Thomas returns to the house. Julia later goes with Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth on their honeymoon and to their house in town. About the same time Maria runs away with Mr Crawford, Julia elopes with Mr. Yates, ostensibly to avoid being blamed by her father for Maria's elopement with Mr. Crawford .

**Dr. Grant**

The current parson at the Mansfield Park parsonage, he is a large man who greatly enjoys food and drink.

**Mrs. Grant**

The wife of Mr. Grant, and half-sister of Henry and Mary Crawford.

**Mr. Henry Crawford**

Brother of Mrs. Grant and Miss Crawford. A charming, extremely intelligent and eligible bachelor who plays with the emotions of Maria and Julia. This is observed by Fanny. After Maria's marriage, he decides to make Fanny fall in love with him but instead falls in love with her. He loses any chance with her after he and Maria elope together.

**Miss Mary Crawford**

The pretty and charming sister of Mr. Crawford and Mrs Grant, who takes a keen interest in Edmund Bertram in spite of his being a second son. However, though she seems charming, she has certain views and opinions which mean, in the end, she loses Edmund. She is often kind to Fanny Price, but is not a reliable friend since she is aware of her brother Henry's plan to toy with Fanny's heart, but does nothing to discourage him.

**Mr. Rushworth**

A wealthy but boring man who becomes engaged to Maria Bertram. He divorces her after she runs away with Henry Crawford.

**The Hon. John Yates**

A good friend of Tom Bertram. Tom and Yates carouse in London society and bring their love of the theatre to Mansfield Park. Yates expresses interest in Julia Bertram. He elopes with Julia around the time Mr. Crawford and Maria run away together.

**William Price**

Fanny's brother, a naval midshipman, with whom she is very close. Mr. Crawford seeks to ingratiate himself with Fanny by helping William in his profession. He is polite and kind and Fanny's only correspondent in her family until she visits them.

**Mr. Price**

Fanny's father, an officer in the Marines who lives in Portsmouth. Mr. Price drinks too much and is foul-mouthed, and seems to have little to no affection for his daughters.

**Mrs. Price**

Fanny's mother, sister of Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram. She resembles Lady Bertram in her weak character and laziness, but under the pressure of a large family and a low income she has become slatternly and thoughtless. Like her husband, she seems to care little for Fanny.

**Susan Price**

Fanny's younger sister with whom Fanny first becomes close on a visit home. She returns with Fanny to Mansfield Park and takes Fanny's place helping her aunt when Fanny marries Edmund. Her character is better than many of her siblings.

**Lady Stornoway**

a society woman, who is complicit in Mr Crawford and Maria's flirtation. They meet at her parties and eventually run away together from her home.

**Mrs. Rushworth**

Mr. Rushworth's mother and Maria's mother-in-law. Mr. Rushworth is on his way to fetch her at Easter

when Mr. Crawford and Maria increase their flirtation and eventually run away together. Mrs. Rushworth is noted to not be particularly fond of her daughter-in-law.

## Literary significance & criticism

*Mansfield Park* is the most controversial and perhaps the least popular of Austen's major novels. Regency critics praised the novel's wholesome morality, but many modern readers find Fanny's timidity and disapproval of the theatricals difficult to sympathise with and reject the idea (made explicit in the final chapter) that she is a better person for the relative privations of her childhood. Jane Austen's own mother thought Fanny "insipid",<sup>[2]</sup> and many other readers have found her priggish and unlikeable.<sup>[3]</sup> Other critics point out that she is a complex personality, perceptive yet given to wishful thinking, and that she shows courage and grows in self-esteem during the latter part of the story. Austen biographer Claire Tomalin, who is generally rather critical of Fanny, argues that "it is in rejecting obedience in favour of the higher dictate of remaining true to her own conscience that Fanny rises to her moment of heroism."<sup>[4]</sup> But Tomalin reflects the ambivalence that many readers feel towards Fanny when she also writes: "More is made of Fanny Price's faith, which gives her the courage to resist what she thinks is wrong; it also makes her intolerant of sinners, whom she is ready to cast aside."

The story contains much social satire, targeted particularly at the two aunts. It is perhaps the most socially realistic Austen novel, with Fanny's family of origin, the Prices, coming from a much lower echelon of society than most Austen characters.

## Symbols

The world of the novel draws heavily upon the symbolic meaning of locations and events. The first critic to raise this aspect was Virginia Woolf.

For instance, the *ha ha* in Sotherton Court is a boundary which some will cross, while others will not, thus indicating the future moral infringements of Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford. Later on in the novel, the theatricals (based upon *Lovers' Vows*) in which the company is involved at the request of Tom Bertram (with the exception of Fanny Price) is further indication of real life future behaviours.

Even the game of speculation has been viewed as a symbol, a 'metaphor for the game Mary Crawford is playing, with Edmund as stake', according to David Selwyn<sup>[5]</sup>.

## Controversy over slavery

At one point, Edward Said implicated the novel in western culture's casual acceptance of the material benefits of slavery and imperialism, citing Austen's omission to mention that the estate of Mansfield Park was made possible only through slave labour. At another point, however, he seems to have acknowledged that Jane Austen disapproved of slavery:

- "All the evidence says that even the most routine aspects of holding slaves on a West Indian sugar plantation were cruel stuff. And everything we know about Jane Austen and her values is at odds with the cruelty of slavery. Fanny Price reminds her cousin that after asking Sir Thomas about the slave trade, "there was such a dead silence" as to suggest that one world could not be connected with the other since there simply is no common language for both. That is true." [1] ([http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/frm/8722/sec\\_id/8722](http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/frm/8722/sec_id/8722))

Critics such as Gabrielle White, have criticised Said's condemnation of Jane Austen and western culture,

maintaining that Austen and other writers, including Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke, opposed slavery and helped make its eventual abolition possible. Claire Tomalin, following literary critic Brian Southam, claims that Fanny, usually so timid, questions her uncle about the slave trade and receives no answer, suggesting that her vision of the trade's immorality is clearer than his.<sup>[6]</sup> However, Ellen Moody has challenged Southam's interpretation, arguing that Fanny's uncle would not have been "pleased" (as the text suggests) to be questioned on the subject if Southam's reading of the scene were correct.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Film, TV or theatrical adaptations

*Mansfield Park* has been the subject of a number of adaptations:

- 1983: *Mansfield Park*, BBC series directed by David Giles, starring Sylvestra Le Touzel as Fanny Price, Nicholas Farrell as Edmund Bertram and Anna Massey as Mrs Norris.
- 1999: *Mansfield Park*, film directed by Patricia Rozema, starring Frances O'Connor as Fanny Price and Jonny Lee Miller as Edmund Bertram (interestingly, he also featured in the 1983 version, playing one of Fanny's brothers). This film alters several major elements of the story and depicts Fanny as author of some of Austen's actual letters as well as her children's history of England. It emphasizes Austen's disapproval of slavery.
- 2007: *Mansfield Park*, a television adaptation produced by Company Pictures and starring Billie Piper, was screened on ITV1 in the UK on 18 March 2007.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Related Works

- *Playfulness* (ASIN B002ACZTSO), by Helen Baker, is a continuation relating how Mary Crawford searched for a worthy gentleman to appreciate her for those very qualities which Edmund Bertram deplored.

The film, *Metropolitan* (1990) takes much of *Mansfield Park's* plot and transfers it to New York. Audrey Rouget, the film's heroine, is an Austen admirer who resembles Fanny in her morals and personality. She falls in love with Tom, who is attracted to the vivacious and beautiful Serena in ways that parallel Edmund's attraction to Mary Crawford. Conversations between Tom and Audrey include discussions of Austen's *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* both.

- *Mansfield Park and Mummies: Monster Mayhem, Matrimony, Ancient Curses, True Love, and Other Dire Delights* (2009) by Vera Nazarian, a mashup which introduces Egyptology and a third romantic interest, Lord Eastwind, a resurrected ancient Egyptian pharaoh who takes on the form of a Regency gentleman to woo Fanny Price.
- *Murder at Mansfield Park* by Lynn Shepherd ([2010]), recreates Fanny Price as a rich heiress who is spoiled, condescending, and generally hated throughout the county. Mary Crawford, on the other hand, is the virtuous one. When Fanny is brutally killed at Mansfield Park, Mary takes it upon herself to solve Fanny's murder.

## Notes

- The value of the novel as literature was a subject of contention between the two main characters in Whit Stillman's film *Metropolitan*, one of the characters being devoted to the work of Jane Austen, the other

having read only an essay critical of the book by Lionel Trilling. The film is also an updated retelling of *Mansfield Park* with New York City as the backdrop.

- *The True Darcy Spirit* (2007) a *Pride and Prejudice* spin-off by Elizabeth Aston places the main character "Cassandra Darcy" with the option to go live with "Mrs. Norris" of *Mansfield Park* after ruining her reputation.
- *Mansfield Revisited* (1985) by Joan Aiken was written as a sequel to Austen's novel.
- The name of the cat, Mrs. Norris, in *Harry Potter* is author J.K. Rowling's nod to Jane Austen's influence in her writing.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Footnotes

1. ^ p.3
2. ^ "Early opinions of *Mansfield Park*" (<http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/opmansfp.html>) . <http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/opmansfp.html>. Retrieved 2006-05-16.
3. ^ "Controversy over Fanny Price, from the AUSTEN-L mailing list" (<http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/austen-1.html#X12>) . <http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/austen-1.html#X12>. Retrieved 2006-05-16.
4. ^ Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life* (New York: Vintage, 1997), p. 230.
5. ^ Janet Todd, *Jane Austen in Context*, 341
6. ^ Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p.230.
7. ^ Moody, Ellen. "'A Commentary on Brian Southam's exegesis in *TLS*'" (<http://www.jimandellen.org/mp/ACommentaryonBrianSouthamsexegesisinemTlSemsenttoC18L22595.html>) . <http://www.jimandellen.org/mp/ACommentaryonBrianSouthamsexegesisinemTlSemsenttoC18L22595.html>. Retrieved 2006-12-19.
8. ^ Dooks, Brian (2006-08-16). "Historic hall to host Austen adaptation" (<http://www.yorkshiretoday.co.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?SectionID=55&ArticleID=1698316>) . *Yorkshire Post*. <http://www.yorkshiretoday.co.uk/ViewArticle2.aspx?SectionID=55&ArticleID=1698316>. Retrieved 2006-08-16.
9. ^ Lydon, Christopher. "J.K. Rowling interview transcript, The Connection (WBUR Radio), 12 October, 1999 (<http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/1999/1099-connectiontransc2.htm#p3>) ." Retrieved on 2008-08-09.

## External links

- *Mansfield Park* (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/141>) at Project Gutenberg
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- Mansfield Park Map ([http://www.communitywalk.com/mansfield\\_park\\_map/map/245786](http://www.communitywalk.com/mansfield_park_map/map/245786))
- *Mansfield Park* (<http://www.shmoop.com/mansfield-park/>) study guide, themes, quotes, literary devices, & teacher guide

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