

Mansfield Park — some guidelines for A Level revision

The notes which follow are taken from the overhead projector transparencies used during a revision day for A Level students in 2001 organised by A-Grades Conferences. They are not the complete text of the talk but intended to highlight the key points which were being made. I hope that they are helpful. The main focus for these notes is AQA/AEB 0660 English Literature Paper 2, the set texts paper.

Students were also given some sheets of general revision guidance and a sheet containing extracts from Chapter 9. This is provided separately in a version which includes sections picked out for special attention. The sections which follow concentrate on a few key points about the novel.

Mansfield Park — examination questions

- ? Mary: '... everything is to be got by money...' — part played by money in the novel
- ? Importance of the 'theatricals' (1996)
- ? How does Jane Austen use the three 'worlds' of Mansfield Park, Portsmouth and London?
- ? What do you find interesting about Austen's presentation of Fanny in *Mansfield Park*? (Jan 1997)
- ? Presentation of the three Ward sisters
- ? Chapter 38: Portsmouth — importance to novel as a whole (1997)
- ? Presentation of Edmund — Chapter 2 as preparation
- ? Presentation of Bertram and Price families (1998)
- ? Presentation of Fanny's changes and development
- ? Chapter 21: presentation of marriage of Maria & Mr Rushworth typical of novel as a whole? (1999)
- ? What you found interesting in ways in which Austen presents the relationship between Edmund and Mary
- ? Importance of Chapter 10 — Sotherton visit (2000)
- ? Presentation of marriage (at least 2 partnerships)
- ? Chapter 24: presentation of Henry and Fanny (January 2001)

Mansfield Park

You know how interesting the purchase of a sponge cake is to me.

Jane Austen in a letter to Cassandra

Can you believe her? We detect the ironic tone — but need to remember that it's just such seeming-trivial details that she is able to use to great effect. What the reader needs to do is to listen for Jane Austen's voice.

Jane Austen can in fact get more drama out of morality than most other writers can get from shipwreck, battle, murder, or mayhem.

Ronald Blythe

Chapter 48

Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can,

impatient to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort and to have done with all the rest.

Can we believe her here?

Mansfield Park Chapter 21

Maria Bertram

In all the important preparations of the mind she was complete: being prepared for matrimony by an hatred of home, restraint, and tranquillity; by the misery of disappointed affection, and contempt of the man she was to marry. The rest might wait.

We can certainly here the author's voice here — and she's still being ironic!

Fanny and the silence of the family circle

'You are one of those who are too silent in the evening circle.'

'But I do talk to him more than I used. I am sure I do. Did not you hear me ask him about the slave-trade last night?'

'I did — and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others. It would have pleased your uncle to be inquired of farther.'

"And I longed to do it — but there was such a dead silence! And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject, I did not like — I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel."

"Miss Crawford was very right in what she said of you the other day: that you seemed almost as fearful of notice and praise as other women were of neglect. We were talking of you at the Parsonage, and those were her words. She has great discernment. I know nobody who distinguishes characters better. For so young a woman it is remarkable!

Notice how here Jane Austen exposes the Bertram children for having nothing serious to say; slavery, for all that it appears to produce the wealth they enjoy, is not something they choose to discuss or perhaps even bother to know about. Notice how both Edmund and Mary are also the subject of the author's irony. What are we expected to imagine Fanny thinking as she hears these words?

What do we, as readers who now know the whole novel, think?

Mansfield Park — the subject

The subject of the book is ordination.

Jane Austen in a letter

See Chapter 9 — see the handout with extracts from the chapter.

What might she mean by this?

Mansfield Park and money

'I shall understand all your ways in time; but, coming down with the true London

maxim, that everything is to be got with money, I was a little embarrassed at first by the sturdy independence of your country customs. However, I am to have my harp fetched to-morrow...'

Chapter 6

Mansfield Park

Key incidents

- Sotherton visit — Chapters 8–10
- The 'theatricals' — Chapters 13–18
- Speculation — Chapter 25
- Portsmouth — Chapters 38–46

Speculation — Chapter 25

'There, I will stake my last like a woman of spirit. No cold prudence for me. I am not born to sit still and do nothing. If I lose the game, it shall not be from not striving for it.'

Mary Crawford

Speculation — Mary

All the agreeable of *her* speculation was over for that hour. It was time to have done with cards, if sermons prevailed; and she was glad to find it necessary to come to a conclusion, and be able to refresh her spirits by a change of place and neighbour.

Characters

after Tony Tanner

- Guardians
 - Sir Thomas Bertram
 - Lady Bertram
 - Mrs Norris
- Inheritors
 - Tom
 - Maria
 - Julia
 - Edmund
- Interlopers
 - Henry Crawford
 - Mary Crawford
- Fanny

'There must be a sort of shyness.'

Fanny might seem passive — but in this book the reader becomes aware that the 'doers' come to a variety of bad or sad ends.

Places

- Mansfield
- Portsmouth
- London

Further reading

Tony Tanner: *Jane Austen*, Macmillan, 1986 — expensive but illuminating