Mansfield Park

U3A Dunedin, 2017
Comparison with *P&P*

- JA was working on both novels at the same time; called *P&P* “light & bright & sparkling”

- no public reviews of *MP*, so JA solicited “Opinions of Mansfield Park” from friends & family (1816)

- “Edward & George.—Not liked it near as well as P & P.—Edward admired Fanny—George disliked her. … Edmund objected to, as cold & formal … All who think deeply and feel much will give the Preference to Mansfield Park.”
Austen “a profoundly experimental novelist … [her] most daring success” (Claudia Johnson, 1995)

“its ideological programme is both oppressive and puzzling, insistent and yet difficult to pin down” (Kathryn Sutherland, 1996)

but funny as well as serious
Four main sticking points

- *P&P* mostly dialogue, easy to develop film scripts
- Interiority of Fanny Price suffers by contrast with Mary Crawford’s outspoken liveliness
- Theatricals disastrous, so does JA disapprove of theatre?
- JA’s attitude to slavery controversial
“Fanny had never known so much felicity in her life, as in this unchecked, equal, fearless intercourse with [William, her] brother and friend … It was a picture that Henry Crawford had moral taste enough to value. Fanny’s attraction increased—increased two-fold—for the sensibility which beautified her complexion and illumined her countenance … She had feeling, genuine feeling” (ch. 22).
“she wondered that Edmund could forget her, and felt a pang. She could not turn her eyes from the meadow, she could not help watching all that passed…. Edmund was close to her, he was speaking to her, he was evidently directing her management of the bridle, he had hold of her hand; she saw it, or the imagination supplied what the eye could not reach” (ch. 7).
“agitated by the increasing spirit in Edmund’s manner, [Fanny] had once closed the play and turned away exactly as he wanted help. ...when again alone and able to recall the whole, she was inclined to believe that their performance would, indeed, have such nature and feeling in it, as must ensure their credit, and make it a very suffering exhibition to herself” (ch. 18).
Fanny resists: “I could not act any thing if you were to give me the world. No, indeed, I cannot act … I really cannot act … you must excuse me, indeed you must excuse me” (ch. 15).

even criticises Edmund for giving in: “To be acting! After all his objections—objections so just and so public! After all that she heard him say, and seen him look, and known him to be feeling. Could it be possible? Edmund so inconsistent. Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas, it was all Miss Crawford’s doing. She had seen her influence in every speech, and was miserable … it was all misery now” (ch. 17).
Mary Crawford

Mary is “acquainted with a circle of admirals. Of Rears and Vices, I saw enough. Now, do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat you” (ch. 6).

“To have such a young man [Tom Bertram] cut off in the flower of his days, is most melancholy. Fanny, Fanny, I see you smile, and look cunning, but I never bribed a physician in my life. Poor young man!—if he is to die, there will be two poor young men less in the world; and with fearless face and bold voice would I say to any one, that wealth and consequence would fall into no hands more deserving of them” (ch. 45).
Mary calls the elopement of Maria & Henry “a foolish precipitation last Christmas, but the evil of a few days may be blotted out in part. Varnish and gilding hide many stains.”

Mary on possibility of Tom’s death and Edmund’s inheritance: “It will be but the loss of the Esquire after his name. With real affection, like mine, Fanny, more might be overlooked … I put it to your conscience, whether ‘Sir Edmund’ could not do more good with all the Bertram property, than any other possible ‘Sir’” (ch. 45).
JA’s topaz cross

Charles’s gift (1801)
Mary’s deceit: forces gold chain for the cross on Fanny, then admits it was Henry’s gift to herself.

Fanny suspects he “had some concern in the matter,” for “Miss Crawford, complaisant as a sister, was careless as a woman and a friend” (ch. 8).

Edmund gives her a second chain, but urges Mary’s: “‘I would not have the shadow of a coolness…. between the two dearest objects I have an earth’… It was a stab … Till she had shed many tears over this deception, Fanny could not subdue her agitation” (ch. 9).
Mary as city girl, siren, risk-taker, apolitical

“Guess my surprise, when I found that I had been asking the most unreasonable, most impossible thing in the world, had offended all the farmers, all the labourers, all the hay in the parish” (ch. 6).

“A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself” (ch. 7)
plays game of “Speculation”; secures William’s knave “at an exorbitant rate”

“‘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.’ … The game was hers, and only did not pay her for what she had given to secure it” (ch. 25).
- friendship with Lady Lascelles (ch. 34), member of a Yorkshire dynasty made staggeringly wealthy by a corrupt slave-trading ancestor

- husband defeated as MP by Wilberforce; living in Wimpole St., like the Rushworths

- area was home to “nabobs,” wealthy men returned from West Indies

- though JA mentions Repton in *MP*, Lady Lascelles the only example in her work of a real person interacting with a fictional character
Theatricals in *MP*

- disapproval of theatre in *MP*?
- **BUT** JA often acted in family plays
- read plays and quoted from them, esp. Shakespeare
- JA wrote parodic plays as a young woman
- loved going to the theatre
- saw plays in London (staying in Henrietta St., Covent-Garden), Southampton, Canterbury, Bath
- closely followed careers of celebrity actors, actresses
- explosion print culture partly due to theatre
Henry Crawford based on David Garrick (1717–1779), short, versatile in both comedy and tragedy

Crawford: “I could be fool enough … to undertake any character that ever was written, from Shylock to Richard III. down to the singing hero of a farce in his scarlet coat and cocked hat. I feel I could be any thing or every thing, as if I could rant and storm, or sigh, or cut capers in any tragedy or comedy in the English language” (ch. 13).
William Hogarth
(1757–1764)

David & Eva Maria Garrick
“Handsome! Nobody can call such an under-sized man handsome. He is not five foot nine. I should not wonder if he was not more than five foot eight. I think he is an ill-looking fellow” (ch. 10).

“for the life and soul of me, I cannot admire him; ... to see such an undersized, little, mean-looking man, set up for a fine actor, is very ridiculous” (ch. 18).
William Hogarth
(1745)

Garrick’s famous start as Richard III, just before Battle of Bosworth, haunted by ghosts of his victims.
Sir Thomas “found himself on the stage of theatre, and opposed to a ranting young man ... perceiving Sir Thomas, and giving perhaps the very best start he had ever given in the whole course of his rehearsals ... the gradual metamorphosis of the impassioned Baron Wildenhaim into the well-bred and easy Mr. Yates ... was such an exhibition, such a piece of true acting as he would not have lost on any account” (ch. 19).
Amateur versus professional actors

- private theatres exclusive, & necessarily amateur

- Edmund loves “real acting, good hardened real acting, [not] a set of gentlemen and ladies, who have all the disadvantages of education and decorum to struggle through” (ch. 13).

- amateurs typecast themselves
- amateurs confuse performance & reality
- Maria thinks that Henry’s retention of her hand means he loves her
- on-stage intimacy & familiarity inflame real-life passions
- Henry flirts with both Bertram sisters by means of the play
- actors rant
- forget lines
- upstage one another
- care more for clothes & props than performance
- step out of role
traditional distrust of actors

deceivers, hypocrites, demonic shape-changers?

Henry Crawford best actor, but fickle, inconstant, untrustworthy

performs by turns the landscape designer, the clergyman, the sailor, & finally (disastrously) the rake
“I never listened to a distinguished preacher in my life, without a sort of envy. But then, I must have a London audience. I could not preach, but to the educated; to those who were capable of appreciating my composition … [Crawford would preach] “perhaps once or twice in the spring, after being anxiously expected for half a dozen Sundays together; but not for a constancy [regular commitment]” (ch. 34).
“His heart was warmed, his fancy fired … and he wished he had been a William Price, distinguishing himself and working his way to fortune and consequence with so much self-respect and happy ardour, instead of what he was!” (ch. 25).
Theatricals in *MP* as a rehearsal play

- rehearsal play tradition makes it funnier
- cf. mechanicals’ play in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*; inset play in *Hamlet*
- actors show how to act by showing how not to act
“Fanny, being always a courteous listener, and often the only listener at hand, came in for the complaints and distresses of most of them. She knew that Mr. Yates was in general thought to rant dreadfully, that Mr. Yates was disappointed in Henry Crawford, that Tom Bertram spoke so quickly he would be unintelligible, that Mrs. Grant spoiled every thing by laughing, that Edmund was behind-hand with his part, and that it was misery to have any thing to do with Mr. Rushworth, who was wanting a prompter through every speech” (ch. 18).
Slavery in *Mansfield Park*

- Sir Thomas Bertram owns plantation in Antigua
- source of the family’s wealth & comfort
- true of many other British families
- JA’s father was a trustee for a plantation in Antigua
Slave-trade & abolition

- St. Domingo (later Haiti) produced more wealth than all the American colonies put together

- 1791–1804, slave revolt against French; leader Toussaint l’Ouverture abolished slavery

- Revolutionary ideas sweeping Europe and American colonies

- Napoleon invited him to France, then put him in prison, where he died.
Austens & St. Domingo

- 1797, Cassandra’s fiancé, the Rev. Tom Fowles, dies of yellow fever in St. Domingo
- 1806, British take St. Domingo from French, with the help of Francis Austen (& Captain Wentworth)
- both make enough money to come home & look for a wife
There’s not a breathing of the common winds
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man’s unconquerable mind.

(William Wordsworth, *Morning Post*, 1802)
Edward Said
_Culture and Imperialism_ (1993)

- “In her time the British were extremely active in the Caribbean …. Austen seems only vaguely aware of the details of these activities” (106)

- **NO!**

- “everything we know about Austen and her values is at odds with the cruelty of slavery” (115)

- **YES!**
“to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and rule an imperial estate” (Said, 104); patriarchy and imperialism linked

“The Bertrams could not have been possible without the slave trade, sugar, and the colonial planter class” (Said, 112); Sir Thomas an absentee plantation owner

MP “part of the structure of an expanding imperialist culture” (Said, 114)

JA certainly patriotic, but anti-slavery in *MP*
JA’s attitude to slavery?

- favourite authors anti-slavery: Johnson and Cowper
- Fanny’s enquiry about the slave trade
- cf. Jane Fairfax in *Emma*
- newspapers, journals, posters, cartoons, paintings, even ceramics on abolition
Slavery in *MP*

- JA read & admired Thomas Clarkson on abolition
- Fanny enquires about slave-trade
- Austen family’s opinions
- brothers’ first-hand knowledge
- Fanny treated as a slave
“I love to hear my uncle talk of the West Indies. I could listen to him for an hour together ….Did you not hear me ask him about the slave trade last night? … I longed to [ask further, but] there was such a dead silence! … my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject” (ch. 19).

- Fanny curious about colonial activities
- Bertram girls couldn’t care less about the source of their wealth & comfort
JA & Thomas Clarkson

- author of *History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishments of the Abolition of the Slave Trade*

- JA said she had been “in love” with Clarkson (24 January 1813)

- published 1808, three years before JA started on *MP*

- Mrs. Norris in *MP* means “nurse” (irony!) but also name of the most notorious slave-trader in Clarkson
Clarkson’s diagram of slave ship, the *Brookes* (1789)
Slave market
Steps to abolition

The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789)
Wilberforce & abolition

“You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know.”
Hannah More (1745–1803)

“Does then the immortal principle within Change with the casual colour of a skin?” (Slavery, 1788)
“Am I not a man and a brother?”
Josiah Wedgwood
character in anti-slavery play called “Quite dark, but very elegant, like a Wedgwood teapot”

Inkle & Yarico (1787)
William Blake (1757–1827)
Women’s sugar boycott

East India Sugar.

By six families using East India instead of West India Sugar, one Slave less is required: surely to release a fellow-creature from a state of cruel bondage and misery, by so small a sacrifice, is worthy the attention of all.

N.B. The labour of one Slave produces about Ten Cwt. of Sugar annually.

J. Blackwell, Printer, Iris Office, Sheffield.
1772, Lord Mansfield ruled that slaves could not be forced to leave Britain > title of *Mansfield Park*

1789, young James Austen calls slave-trade a “Misery” and a “disgrace” in *The Loiterer*
- in 1807, transatlantic slave trade banned
- in 1811, made a felony
- in 1808, Francis Austen writes, “Slavery however it may be modified is still Slavery.”
Charles Austen

- 1826, Charles “most successful” in “crushing the slave trade” on the Jamaica station
- his wife Fanny from Bermuda, so knew W. Indies well
- Francis Evangelical (pro-abolition), like his friend Admiral Sir Charles Middleton
- cf. Middletons in S&S
Francis Austen

- once chased a Portuguese ship with “714 slaves of both sexes, and all ages” on board a vessel of “about 300 tons!!”

- navy could only intercept British slave ships, so he was “compelled to let the craft proceed on her course”

- 1798, while trade unregulated, largest slaver (371 tons) carried 505 slaves; limit of 440 per boatload

- would surely have told Jane and Cassandra
Fanny Price as a slave

- Fanny (10), torn from home & family
- lack of space in “little white attic” (ch. 16)
- humiliated, bullied, exploited, over-ridden, silenced
- treated as sexual object by Sir Thomas, Edmund, & Henry
- Sir Thomas attempts to sell her off in the marriage market
“Her elder cousins mortified her by reflections on her size, and abashed her by noticing her shyness; Miss Lee wondered at her ignorance, and the maid-servants sneered at her clothes; and when to these sorrows was added the idea of the brothers and sisters among whom she had always been important as play-fellow, instructress, and nurse, the despondence that sunk her little heart was severe” (ch. 2).
Mrs. Norris at bottom of pecking order herself, puts Fanny even lower

“The nonsense and folly of people’s stepping out their rank and trying to appear above themselves, makes me think it right to give you a hint, Fanny … Remember, wherever you are, you must be the lowest and last” (ch. 23).

Mrs. Norris: “I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, is she does not do whatever her aunt and cousins wish her to—very ungrateful indeed, considering who and what she is” (ch. 15).
“That is a very foolish trick, Fanny, to be idling away all the evening upon the sofa … If have no work of your own, I can supply you from the poor-basket … I have been slaving myself till I can hardly stand, to contrive Mr. Rushworth’s cloak” (ch.18).
Mrs. Norris greedy

- “What else have you been spunging?” said Maria ….“Spunging, my dear! It is nothing but four of those beautiful pheasant’s eggs, which Mrs. Whitaker would quite force upon me; she would not take a denial” (ch. 10).

- “The curtain … went off with her to her cottage, where she happened to be particularly in need of green baize” (ch. 20).
Lady Bertram exploits

- Lady Bertram “saw no harm in the poor little thing—and always found her very handy and quick in carrying messages, and fetching what she wanted” (ch. 2).

- “I was out above an hour. I sat three quarters of an hour in the flower garden, while Fanny cut the roses, and very pleasant it was I assure you, but very hot. It was shady enough in the alcove, but I declare I quite dreaded the coming home again” (ch. 6).
“‘What!’ cried Edmund [to Mrs. Norris]; ‘has she been walking as well as cutting roses; walking across the hot park to your house, and doing it twice, ma’am?—no wonder her head aches.’”

[Lady Bertram] “I am very much afraid she caught the headache there, for the heat was enough to kill anybody. It was as much as I could bear myself. Sitting and calling to Pug and trying to keep him from the flower-beds, was almost too much for me” (ch. 6).
Fanny as sexual object

- Sir Thomas “came forward with a kindness which astonished and penetrated her; calling her his dear Fanny, kissing her affectionately, and observing with decided pleasure how much she was grown” (ch. 21).

- Edmund: “Your complexion is so much improved!—and you have gained so much countenance—and your figure!” (ch. 21).
Fanny to be sold off to highest bidder

- Henry: “she is now absolutely pretty …her eyes and mouth … her air, her manner, her tout ensemble is so indescribably improved!” (ch. 24).
- ball = marriage market for Fanny, but she resists marrying Henry
- Sir Thomas: “independence in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence … you have shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse” (ch. 32).
Patricia Rozema’s *MP* (1999)

- influenced by Said, mansion represents the imperial project
- filled with exotic objects, but crumbling structure
- Harold Pinter = patriarchal Sir Thomas Bertram, terrifying!
• focus on slavery & sexuality

• Lindsay Duncan plays both Lady Bertram & Mrs. Price

• shows how circumstances shape women’s lives

• weaves in elements of JA’s own life

• creative adaptation