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THE VIEW OF THE WHOLE PERSON:

The Difference between Appearance and Possession of Virtue in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*

by

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## Abstract

Critics of *Mansfield Park* criticize Austen for not having a clear moral principle or religious belief for the reader to trace throughout the novel. This view, however, betrays a gap between the critics' understanding and Austen's distinction between the appearance and possession of virtue—or even her recognition that virtue is the end goal. These critics that reject the depth of Austen also fail to see that *Mansfield Park* aims to prove the difference between the appearance of virtue, “good etiquette,” and the possession of virtue, “right conduct.” In writing *Mansfield Park*, Austen undertakes an ambitious study of how a person is formed, what forms him, and the impacts of that formation. In order to identify the distinction between appearance and possession of virtue, the reader must look at how Austen is studying the whole person and using these observations to create her characters. When describing the whole person, Austen recognizes that there are several aspects (not just one) that form a person's life as well as his or her virtue. In *Mansfield Park*, there are three different aspects that Austen presents as crucial to the formation of virtue in a character—a character's education, his ability to reflect and remember, and his willfulness versus dutifulness. In this paper I will analyze how Jane Austen distinguishes between the appearance and possession of virtue in the characters in *Mansfield Park* using these three aspects. Austen's position becomes clear when the reader compares the major characters in these categories and distinguishes the endings that befall them.

To my friends and mentors Dr. Marcel Brown and his wife Marlene Brown for all their love and support throughout the years.

## Table of Contents

Introduction vi

Chapter 1: Education 1

Chapter 2: Reflection 22

Chapter 3: Will verses Duty 40

Conclusion 64

Bibliography 67

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## Introduction

Certain critics of Jane Austen have accused her of sloppy writing in *Mansfield Park*. In her other novels, good and bad, virtue and vice, can be distinguished easily by the reader's own favoritism for the charm of Elizabeth Bennet or the openness of Marianne. Such easy distinctions, these critics claim, cannot be made about Fanny Price, and in fact her lack of charm and openness make her not only disagreeable, but less sympathetic than Mary Crawford. Mary Crawford is the interesting one, the engaging one, and it is entirely Austen's fault she does not marry Edmund Bertram. These critics accuse Austen of inconstancy and using her authority to give arbitrary happy endings to those who have not "earned" them. Fanny wins because Austen wants her to win and not because she possesses anything special or different than Mary Crawford.

This view, however, betrays a gap between the critics' understanding and Austen's distinction between the appearance and possession of virtue—or even her recognition that virtue is the end goal. Without being able to identify Austen's end goal, certain critics are left wondering if Austen is careful in her writing or merely following conventions of the time. Kingsley Amis accuses Austen of not being critical in *Mansfield Park* and merely trumpeting the conservative cause. He views Austen as a puppet for convention and wonders, "What became of that Jane Austen (if she ever existed) who set out bravely to correct conventional notions of the desirable and virtuous? From being their critic (if she ever was) she became their slave. That is another way of saying that her judgment and her moral sense were corrupted. *Mansfield Park* is the witness of that corruption."<sup>1</sup> Amis believes that *Mansfield Park* is being used to promote

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<sup>1</sup> Kingsley Amis, "What Became of Jane Austen? (Mansfield Park)" in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 144.

conventional conservative values without questioning their validity. This kind of criticism, however, overlooks the arc of certain characters who exhibit certain “traditional values” and ignores her critique of “manners” versus “conduct.”

In contrast, Peter Leithart observes that “Austen wants our judgments about her characters to be shaped by the *principles* they display, not by their ability to charm.”<sup>2</sup> The reader must judge based on “principles” or “right conduct” not “charm” or “good etiquette.” In pursuing principles, Austen is pursuing a higher law aimed towards virtue. Alasdair MacIntyre, in his work, *After Virtue*, states, “Jane Austen is in a crucial way...the last great representative of the classical tradition of virtues.”<sup>3</sup> He also notes that “charm is the characteristically modern quality which those who lack or simulate the virtues use to get by in the situations of characteristically modern social life....Fanny is charmless; she has only the virtues, the genuine virtues to protect her.”<sup>4</sup> For both of these critics, Austen is leading the reader towards virtue and teaching the reader how to identify it. Sarah Emsley in her work, *Jane Austen’s Philosophy of the Virtues*, analyzes the ethics of Austen based on virtue and notes that “the ethical standpoint that Austen’s novels exemplify, therefore, is best understood in reference to the philosophical tradition in which the full range of the virtues is integral to character, and the process of negotiating the ethical life is challenging, but possible. The virtues are high standards, precise points, but they are also flexible and must be exercised to be learned—they must become habits.”<sup>5</sup> Alastair

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Leithart, Jane Austen, Public Theologian.” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life* 139 (January 2004): 34. Additional critics who see virtue as the proper end of Austen’s novels are Anne Ruderman, Joyce Tarpley, and D. D. Devlin.

<sup>3</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 243. I highly recommend for an in-depth analysis of virtue being the end goal for Austen.

<sup>4</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 242.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Emsley, *Jane Austen’s Philosophy of the Virtues* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2.



Duckworth also observes virtue as the proper end of *Mansfield Park* and in his study, *The Improvement of the Estate*, unites this theoretical idea with the physical estate. He states:

That there is a natural moral order stemming from God, that this order may ideally be incorporated into the historical structure of the estate, that the role of education is to call the individual to an awareness of his duty to God and to his social trust—all these beliefs are present in *Mansfield Park*, but with one further recognition. From the individual himself must come the affirmative response, and the courage to maintain faith in “principles” and “rules of right” even when these are everywhere ignored and debased.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the view of virtue as the proper end of *Mansfield Park*, Duckworth also aligns moral order with action. One must act in accord with virtue as knowledge of the moral order is not enough to attain virtue. These observations seem to nullify the claim of Joel Weinsheimer that “*Mansfield Park* does not make explicit whether religion is the foundation or the footstool of the social ethic, whether it represents a metaphysical basis of interpersonal judgements or is merely the social mandate writ large. For this reason Jane Austen has considerable difficulty in differentiating right conduct from good etiquette.”<sup>7</sup> Even Edwards, who is critical of the novel, recognizes begrudgingly that “in *Mansfield Park*, virtue is its own reward.”<sup>8</sup>

Those critics that reject the depth of Austen also fail to see that *Mansfield Park* aims to prove the difference between the appearance of virtue, “good etiquette,” and the possession of virtue, “right conduct.” In writing *Mansfield Park*, Austen undertakes an ambitious study of how

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<sup>6</sup> Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 80.

<sup>7</sup> Joel C. Weinsheimer, “*Mansfield Park*: Three Problems” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 29, no. 2 (Sep. 1974): 197, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2933291>.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas R. Edwards Jr., “The Difficult Beauty of *Mansfield Park*,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 20, no. 1 (Jun. 1965): 67, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2932492>.

a person is formed, what forms him, and the impacts of that formation. Wiltshire makes the keen observation that the objective of Austen is to distinguish between the appearance and possession of virtue because “*Mansfield Park* is a novel in the mode of the omniscient narrator, and for the first and only time in her novels, Jane Austen continuously allows the narrative to move freely in and out of the consciousnesses of a whole range of characters.”<sup>9</sup> Allowing the reader access to the character’s thoughts clarifies any doubts the reader may have about a character’s motives. Intention is important for differentiating between the appearance and possession of virtue; without access to the characters consciousness, the ability to distinguish between “manners” and “conduct” becomes difficult.

In order to identify the distinction between appearance and possession of virtue, the reader must look at how Austen is studying the whole person and using these observations to create her characters. When describing the whole person, Austen recognizes that there are several aspects (not just one) that form a person’s life as well as his or her virtue. In *Mansfield Park*, there are three different aspects that Austen presents as crucial to the formation of virtue in a character—a character’s education, his ability to reflect and remember, and his willfulness versus dutifulness. These three aspects are a litmus test for a character and determine whether or not a character is virtuous or only appears to be so. These aspects are unique to *Mansfield Park* which makes them stand apart from other novels of Jane Austen. *Mansfield Park* is the only novel that introduces the heroine at a young age or compares the differences in her education to that of others. In addition to education, in *Mansfield Park* the reader has access to a wide array of characters’ thoughts and motives especially during pivotal moments. These moments of

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<sup>9</sup> John Wiltshire, “*Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*,” in *the Cambridge Companion*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 61.

consciousness allow the reader to observe whether or not characters can reflect upon their actions and act properly, or if they refuse and act according to their will. These two aspects highlight the lack or presence of the third aspect duty, in a character. Characters possessing all three aspects are able to achieve virtue and their own happy end. Starting with education, I will demonstrate the role these aspects play in the appearance and possession of virtue.

## Chapter 1:

## Education

In Jane Austen's day, the question of education and what type of education, particularly for ladies, was an important topic and under much debate. There was a large push for the practical education of women and concern about an education that taught only accomplishment or "manners." Austen is interested in the formation of the whole person; part of a person is the type of education he or she receives. In *Mansfield Park*, Austen investigates different models of education and experiments with what kind of education correlates to what kind of outcome, revealing a proper education is one that unites knowledge with action and possesses virtue as its end goal.

Hannah More was a major commentator who wrote on education in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and was someone with whose work Austen was familiar. More's "Thoughts on the Cultivation of the Heart and Temper in the Education of Daughters" addresses this topic because education of the heart "does not appear to have been so much adopted into common practice" despite being much talked about in public.<sup>10</sup> The "heart" to More is synonymous with virtue. Her defense is against the practice of solely cultivating accomplishments. She states at the beginning, "Let the exterior be made a considerable object of attention, but let it not be the principal, let it not be the only one—Let the graces be industriously cultivated, but let them not be cultivated at the expense of the virtues."<sup>11</sup> One must not neglect morals for only the exterior. Her reasoning is that "if the foundation is not secured, in proportion as the building is enlarged, it will be overloaded

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<sup>10</sup> Hannah More, "Thoughts on the Cultivation of the Heart and Temper in the Education of Daughters," in *The works of Miss Hannah More in prose and verse* (Cork: Thomas White and P. Byrne, 1789), 65, Scanned microfilm.

<sup>11</sup> More, "Thoughts on the Cultivation of the Heart and Temper in the Education of Daughters," 65.

and destroyed by those very ornaments, which were intended to embellish what they have contributed to ruin.”<sup>12</sup> A lady’s education must be built on virtue otherwise the praise of the world will crush the morality of the lady. More sees “the end of a good education is not that they may become dancers, singers, players, or painters: its real object is to make them good daughters, good wives, good mistresses, good members of society, and good christians. The above qualifications therefore are intended to *adorn* their *leisure*, not to *employ* their *lives*.”<sup>13</sup> This end is similar to Austen’s own idea of the end goal of a complete education. In fact, *Mansfield Park* appears to be Austen’s experiment examining what would happen should a lady (or anyone) receive an incomplete education. Should one receive an incomplete education, he will only obtain the appearance of virtue and not the possession of virtue. The reader can see that, as Avrom Fleishman states, “one intention of *Mansfield Park* is to set up ways of modifying the manners and morals of the beau monde of London and of the gentry at Mansfield. It aims, that is, to refine the kinds of value judgment which these societies themselves employ.”<sup>14</sup>

The idea of virtue as the end goal of education in *Mansfield Park* is noted by other critics as well. Joyce Tarpley believes that “for Austen, the rightly educated mind combines the rational and the affective, the reason and the emotion, the mind and the heart. Fanny must learn to balance these elements and to form thereby the beautiful mind that is the aim of her education.”<sup>15</sup> Tarpley states she does this by practicing constancy which she defines as something that

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<sup>12</sup> More, “Thoughts on the Cultivation of the Heart and Temper in the Education of Daughters,” 67.

<sup>13</sup> More, “Thoughts on the Cultivation of the Heart and Temper in the Education of Daughters,” 69.

<sup>14</sup> Avrom Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park: An Essay in Critical Synthesis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), 74.

<sup>15</sup> Joyce Kerr Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 59.

“regulates and unifies the practice of Christian virtue by reference to its hierarchy of law, which ultimately depends upon its end: God.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Alastair Duckworth notes “that there is a natural moral order stemming from God,...that the role of education is to call the individual to an awareness of his duty to God and to his social trust—all these beliefs are present in *Mansfield Park*, but with one further recognition. From the individual himself must come the affirmative response, and the courage to maintain faith in ‘principles’ and ‘rules of right’ even when these are everywhere ignored and debased.”<sup>17</sup> Duckworth notes here the added recognition of not just education but application as well. In the end, an education based solely on knowledge can only gain one the appearance of virtue and not its possession because knowing is only half the battle. In order to possess actual virtue, one must act according to virtue. In a similar fashion, for this chapter, I want to draw out the idea of knowledge and application both being necessary to receive a proper education and thus obtain virtue.

The beginning portion of *Mansfield Park* is dedicated to the education of the Bertram sisters, Maria and Julia, and Fanny Price, which indicates the importance of education in the novel as nowhere else does Austen give us the heroine at a young age or adults that explicitly discuss the educating of children. Austen puts the question of education forward through Sir Thomas when he initially discusses the benefits to Fanny of bringing her to Mansfield. He tells Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris, “We shall probably see much to wish altered in her, and must prepare ourselves for gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner; but these are no incurable faults.”<sup>18</sup> Devlin observes in this scene that in the “first

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<sup>16</sup> Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, 80.

<sup>18</sup> Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. John Wiltshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11.

chapter he [Sir Thomas] raises the crucial question: what can be done to change a person for the good, and what factors — disposition (that key word in *Mansfield Park*) environment, example — are most important in the education of anyone?”<sup>19</sup> Sir Thomas, however, subtly lists what he values and how he hopes Mansfield will educate the “manners” of Fanny, but says nothing of the formation of her “conduct.” Education is one aspect of a person that can help him achieve a good end, one that is rooted in virtue. To achieve that end, one must gain a good education as well as apply that education towards the proper end of virtue: Knowledge itself is a tool and unless it is properly used and applied, the person who has it will not ultimately succeed; the best a person can gain is the appearance of virtue (manners), but not its possession (conduct). Throughout the novel the reader is introduced to the major characters’ various educations, their influences, and the varying degrees of how they apply their education.<sup>20</sup> These varying educations and applications lead to a variety of outcomes at the end of the novel.

Several characters throughout the novel are given an external education, but it is an education where they are required to know what is right without understanding or being made to choose the right. The first and perhaps most easily identifiable education in *Mansfield Park*, is that of the Bertram sisters. They value their ability to name the kings of England, the rivers of Russia, and to play their instruments well, without any desire to do more than recite fact.<sup>21</sup> Nor are they ever asked to put their knowledge to the test or required to learn anything else. The narrator sarcastically remarks, “it is not very wonderful that with all their promising talents and

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<sup>19</sup> D. D. Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education* (London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975), 77.

<sup>20</sup> In this chapter I will be focusing on the young women and the education they receive as Austen does not dedicate much time to the gentlemen and most of their education is left to speculation. We know that Tom and Edmund attend Oxford (24) and the difference in their education stems perhaps from the difference in their career paths. Edmund’s path is the church, and, through Fanny, we can see what type of education he possesses when he passes it on to her.

<sup>21</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 20.

early information, they should be entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In every thing but disposition, they were admirably taught.”<sup>22</sup> This is the sum of their education. Maria and Julia have the knowledge, but are not taught to apply it or to learn beyond the surface level of fact. Mrs. Norris tells Maria that she “should always be modest; for, much as you know already, there is a great deal more for you to learn.”<sup>23</sup> Maria is told to be virtuous, but telling (once) is not enough. Mrs. Norris does not correct her conduct; to this call to virtue Maria responds, “Yes, I know there is, till I am seventeen.”<sup>24</sup> The comment on modesty is bypassed and Maria acknowledges the limits of her education by giving it an end date. To imagine education ends at the age of seventeen (no matter how smart or how much one has learned till then) is folly. The lack of application keeps the Bertram sisters from truly possessing a proper education and thus virtue. In addition, Mrs. Norris only praises the Bertram sisters and offers no correction. The sisters, therefore, are left to their own discernment and their own will concerning what is right. Maria’s rejection of education and moral education continues throughout the novel (as is the case with several other characters) and plays a role in the other factors of reflection and duty, which will be discussed later on, that prevent her from the possession of virtue and give only the appearance of it.

The Crawfords receive a type of education similar to that of the Bertram sisters. They too possess an exterior education and lack the moral aspect of education. Their education, however, has been expanded by the outside world. Marilyn Butler points out that “Mary Crawford has actually been instructed, by her social circle in general, the marriage of her uncle and aunt in particular, in a wholly sceptical modern philosophy. Her doctrine includes the notion that there

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<sup>22</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 21-22.

<sup>23</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 21.



are no values but material ones, and that the gratification of the self is the only conceivable goal.”<sup>25</sup> Not only is there a lack of moral instruction from home, but from society as well. Henry in his own way has also received this type of education from the Admiral. As John Wiltshire points out, “Henry’s pursuit of his sexual objects, in this instance Maria, is accompanied by contempt for those objects. Austen implies that he has picked up such attitudes from his uncle.”<sup>26</sup> Henry does not value people as people and uses them as tools for his own amusement and vanity. While both Mary and Henry receive an exterior education, their education remains incomplete as they are also “entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility,” similar to the Bertram sisters.<sup>27</sup> They too lack the moral component of education and therefore cannot act towards virtue.

Mary’s mercenary views continue throughout the novel as she echoes similar ideas when she states, “I mean to be too rich to lament.... A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of. It certainly may secure all the myrtle and turkey part of it” and “it is everybody’s duty to do as well for themselves as they can.”<sup>28</sup> These lines dropped throughout the novel show that there is something wanting in her character and that her end goal is not directed towards the good or achieving virtue, but towards gaining material goods. Kenneth Moler points out that “Mary is *merely* accomplished. While doing full justice to all that is attractive in her, Jane Austen sees Mary as a woman who is emotionally and spiritually hollow. She reveals Mary’s

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<sup>25</sup> Marilyn. Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 222.

<sup>26</sup> Wiltshire, “*Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion*,” 64. Not much is said of Henry’s education, but we do know that he was educated at Westminster and Cambridge (72). Also, Mary’s London connections and her ability to play the harp, which is an upper-class instrument, seem to indicate someone who received a good education.

<sup>27</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 248, 336.

real nature in one of her subtlest studies in moral blindness.”<sup>29</sup> Mary’s incomplete education is hidden by her charms. This brilliant move allows her to state her beliefs and almost no one, especially Edmund, takes her seriously. They believe her to be simply parroting “the London view” as a means of “manners.” The episode at Sotherton is a prime example of her spiritual hollowness brought about by her incomplete education. While in the chapel she praises the idea of the lack of communal prayer, arguing with Fanny and Edmund that “At any rate, it is safer to leave people to their own device on such subjects. Every body likes to go their own way—to choose their own time and manner of devotion. The obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, the length of time—altogether it is a formidable thing, and what nobody likes.”<sup>30</sup> Since the moral dimension of her education is missing, she is unable to find value in the church as it has no influence in “the London view” and this view, Anne Crippen Ruderman states, “presents Mary’s city tastes and education as connected to her lack of real principle.”<sup>31</sup> Mary views the “good manners” of the “London view,” or the appearance of virtue, as the equivalent to “right conduct,” the possession of virtue. Edmund attempts to correct this view when he tells her, “And with regard to their [the clergy] influencing public manners, Miss Crawford must not misunderstand me, or suppose I mean to call them the arbiters of good breeding the regulators of refinement and courtesy, the masters of the ceremonies of life. The *manners* I speak of, might rather be called *conduct*, perhaps the result of good principles.”<sup>32</sup> Mary rejects Edmund’s

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<sup>29</sup> Kenneth L. Moler, *Jane Austen’s Art of Allusion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 129. He also goes on to say that this study “is not sufficiently appreciated by those critics who insist that Mary has a better mind and a warmer heart than Fanny Price” which I also think is true.

<sup>30</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 101-2.

<sup>31</sup> Anne Crippin Ruderman, *The Pleasures of Virtue* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995), 101.

<sup>32</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 109.

distinction and changes the subject (109). This rejection of the distinction between “manners” and “conducts” highlights her lack of principles and her appearance of virtue.

The exposure of the Crawford’s education to the world is different than that of the Bertram sisters, whose education exists almost in a vacuum where there is no worldly influence upon Mansfield and they are the top of society. Moler notes that “the Crawfords are presented as extreme cases of the same moral malady that prevails in the Mansfield family—not, as many critics believe, as characters who are opposed to the Bertrams in the moral scheme of the novel.”<sup>33</sup> This malady, is a lack of morals in an education coupled with the inability to act even on the morals they do know. The Bertrams are what this kind of incomplete education looks like isolated in its own microcosm while the Crawfords are what this kind of incomplete education looks like in the wider world. Butler makes the connection that “the Crawfords are sophisticated, fully aware disciples of a worldly creed to which the Bertram girls merely veer unconsciously, on account of the vacuum left in their education.”<sup>34</sup> The Bertrams play the game thinking they know the rules, but as Butler points out they “are peculiarly vulnerable to be made the Crawfords’ dupes, since their attitudes to life already half incline them to throw off restraint and pursue the self-gratification which the Crawfords’ creed allows. It is dangerous to be exposed to worldliness without the worldly-wisdom which goes with it.”<sup>35</sup> The Bertrams do not realize the consequences of throwing off self-restraint and their ignorance of the world also makes this attitude dangerous. The distinction between the two educations is in the knowledge of consequences. The Bertrams exist in their own world where the rules only come from one

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<sup>33</sup> Moler, *Jane Austen’s Art of Allusion*, 111.

<sup>34</sup> Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 222.

<sup>35</sup> Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, 223.

source—Sir Thomas—therefore there is no acknowledgement that his rules apply outside Mansfield and how they function. The Crawfords are more prudent in vice and the social world.

Fanny is indeed initially ignorant about the rivers of Russia, but soon begins to grow in understanding of fact from Miss Lee and in virtue from Edmund. Edmund provides her a supplemental education that directs knowledge and application to the proper end. He knows that she has “a fondness for reading, which, properly directed, must be an education in itself.”<sup>36</sup> So although “Miss Lee taught her French, and heard her read the daily portion of History[,]...he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read, and heightened its attraction by judicious praise.”<sup>37</sup> Edmund is sincere and discerning when he praises Fanny, and she is able to form her judgment accordingly knowing that his praise or censure is for her betterment. The governess gives Fanny one part of her education while Edmund gives the other so she can apply what she has learned towards the right end. The combination gives her a complete education.

A major influence on one’s education is his teacher. In general, a teacher can make or break a student’s learning. In *Mansfield Park* there is not only the concern for teachers passing down a proper education, but also a correlation between the type of learning and the quality of the relationship between teacher and pupil. Those who have a superficial relationship do not gain a complete education, while those who have a deeper relationship do.

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<sup>36</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 25.

<sup>37</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 25.

Mrs. Norris is one of the major influences on the Bertram sisters. Her initial praising of the Bertram sisters at the beginning of the novel is a representative sample of her treatment towards the girls as they mature. Their vanities are continually nurtured as they are praised for their accomplishments with hardly a corrective word spoken. Even in the moral realm, as mentioned above, the one time the reader sees Maria being “corrected,” she glides over the correction and Mrs. Norris makes no attempt to correct her again. When Mrs. Norris is praising Maria for her ability to name the rivers of Russia, she then takes the opportunity to misguide her one step further into the social sphere of education; “But, all things considered, I do not know whether it is not as well that it should be so, for, though you know (owing to me) your papa and mamma are so good as to bring her [Fanny] up with you, it is not at all necessary that she should be as accomplished as you are;—on the contrary, it is much more desirable that there should be a difference.”<sup>38</sup> The distinction of education is a distinction of rank.<sup>39</sup> This attitude reinforces their vanities and the idea of wealth and status as a higher good.

If ever there was an inclination to correct the girls’ conduct, this ability lessens as the Bertram girls age. According to Maria, once she is past seventeen she no longer has “need” of any instruction and because this erroneous logic is not corrected at thirteen, her opinion has become fact at twenty-one. In the matter of the play, Edmund and Fanny both believe that an appeal to Mrs. Norris should end the whole scheme; they are, however, “mistaken in supposing she would wish to make any. She started no difficulties that were not talked down in five minutes by her eldest nephew and niece, who were *all-powerful* with her.”<sup>40</sup> Mrs. Norris has created a

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<sup>38</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 21.

<sup>39</sup> This is interesting because the distinction of rank is only one generation deep. Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris, and Fanny’s mother, Mrs. Price, come from the same nuclear family.

<sup>40</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 152, (emphasis mine).

situation where she does not have any power over the Bertram sisters and maintains her “authority” by validating their choices: she can “attach them only by the blindness of her affection, and the excess of her praise.”<sup>41</sup> No longer is the teacher able to instruct, but she has become a “yes-man” and incapable of influence. There is a break down in the model, not because the students no longer *need* a teacher, but because they *think* they no longer need a teacher. Her authority has become as illusionary as their morals.

Inquiring minds might think that perhaps the girls’ own mother, Lady Bertram, might have something to say on the subject of their education, but this would be an erroneous thought. Lady Bertram lacks interest in her daughters’ education, for “she had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needle-work, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter, when it did not put herself to inconvenience, guided in every thing important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister.”<sup>42</sup> This attitude is opposed to what More states that a mother ought to be. A prudent mother “will be more careful to have the talents of her daughter cultivated than exhibited.”<sup>43</sup> Lady Bertram is supposed to be the prime teacher who helps to foster virtue in her daughters according to More’s ideas. By her absence, Lady Bertram is acting contrary to what is beneficial for the sisters. Austen is critiquing Lady Bertram as yet another bad example the Bertram sisters possess. In fact, none of the mother or mother adjacent figures (such as aunts) provide a proper education to their children. Austen is suggesting that a good education is not inherent in parents themselves nor can it be safely

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<sup>41</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 535.

<sup>42</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> More, “Thoughts on the Cultivation of the Heart and Temper in the Education of Daughters,” 68.

assumed that a good parent will pass down a good education or a bad parent will pass down a bad education.

Even Sir Thomas, who desires a good education for his children, still fails to educate most of his children properly. He does not correct Mrs. Norris in regards to his daughters as he “did not know what was wanting, because, though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him.”<sup>44</sup> Sir Thomas fails as a teacher because he not only fails to make sure that his daughters have good principles, but he also does not create an environment where his daughters are able to express themselves. By only acquiring the knowledge of good principles, but not the application, their education is incomplete. His firm nature has also taught them to fear him rather than love him. He puts forth the image of stern discipline as a means of counteracting the overindulgence of Mrs. Norris by the “reverse in himself” and “clearly saw that he had but increased the evil, by teaching them to repress their spirits in his presence, as to make their real disposition unknown to him.”<sup>45</sup> Since the daughters do not have an open relationship with their father, similar to Edmund and Fanny’s, there is not a natural flow of emotion or love that encourages the them to be honest. Sir Thomas’s manner deters his daughters from revealing their true feelings and they have learned to appear as they ought without being as they ought. Therefore, his daughters have the appearance of virtue as they lack the application of their moral education and also the desire for virtue as the proper end of their education.

As for the Crawfords, their major influence is their aunt and uncle. In a private conversation with Fanny, Edmund, still blinded by Mary, remarks:

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<sup>44</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 535.

“I know her disposition to be as sweet and faultless as your own, but the influence of her former companions makes her seem, gives to her conversation, to her professed opinions, sometimes a tinge of wrong. She does not *think* evil, but she speaks it—speaks it in playfulness—and though I know it to be playfulness, it grieves me to the soul.”

“The effect of education,” said Fanny gently.

Edmund could not but agree to it. “Yes, that uncle and aunt! They have injured the finest mind!—for sometimes, Fanny, I own to you, it does appear more than manner; it appears as if the mind itself was tainted.”<sup>46</sup>

The blame lies with the aunt and uncle who have not properly formed Mary’s mind.<sup>47</sup> While the reader is never shown the home life of the Crawfords with their aunt and uncle, there is enough narration from the nephew and niece to fill the gaps. The little they do reveal marks a home where the Admiral and Mrs. Crawford failed to instruct them in a positive moral manner, despite their love for the them. The bad education observed from family and society have formed Mary and Henry poorly, so much so that they are unable to identify good principles or reeducate themselves for the better end of virtue.

These influences are in contrast to Fanny who loves and respects Edmund not only as her teacher, but also as her friend. In return for his kindness to her upon her arrival to Mansfield, “she loved him better than any body in the world except William.”<sup>48</sup> The discussion of love is notably absent in the relationship between the Bertram sisters and Mrs. Norris or even their father. Devlin observes that “Sir Thomas restrains others; but he restrains not only all displays of

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<sup>46</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 312.

<sup>47</sup> Interesting how he does not note this in his own siblings.

<sup>48</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 25.



bad behaviour but all free exchange between himself and his children, that free exchange which is shown to be the source of all true education and moral growth.”<sup>49</sup> This would make sense as Fanny and Edmund have an honest relationship which allows for the free movement of thought and idea. Fanny cannot be corrected if Edmund does not know what she truly thinks, and Edmund by being kind and judicious creates an environment where Fanny feels safe to express those ideas. Devlin believes this is what makes Edmund’s education so fruitful with Fanny and Fanny’s with Susan: “The personal interest encourages love, and love is the sole basis for education.”<sup>50</sup> In an episode similar to that portraying Edmund’s kindness to Fanny upon her arrival to Mansfield, Fanny solves a dispute at Portsmouth by buying a knife for Betsy; “the deed thoroughly answered; a source of domestic altercation was entirely done away, and it was the means of opening Susan’s heart to her, and giving her something more to love and be interested in.”<sup>51</sup> Mirroring her own experience, Fanny now comes to a better understanding of Susan and Susan of Fanny. This kindness opens Susan to a better education from Fanny and its benefits. Devlin’s belief that affection is the sole contribution to Susan’s improvement and that “it is not the biography and poetry which will educate Susan and enable the ‘natural light’ of her mind to shine, but the personal interest Fanny takes in her,” disregards her education which is distinct from the Bertram sisters.<sup>52</sup> Creating an open and caring environment allows characters the safety to open themselves up to others and positively engage with them, however, the education itself is of equal importance. Both a proper education and a caring environment create the ideal circumstances for one to flourish.

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<sup>49</sup> Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education*, 99.

<sup>50</sup> Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education*, 120.

<sup>51</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 459-460.

<sup>52</sup> Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education*, 119.

While education (nurture) is the main focus, Austen does not rule out nature as also contributing to a character. Multiple critics point out that Austen allows for the inner workings of a person to also play a role in who they are. Tarpley points out that “Austen’s use of the words ‘taught’ and ‘disposition’...suggests that her educational philosophy considers both nature and nurture. Although one’s disposition, temperament, or inclination may fall under ‘nature,’ the use of the word ‘taught’ suggests that the right education can correct, or at least mitigate, nature’s deficiencies.”<sup>53</sup> Fanny, while at Portsmouth, is astonished at Susan’s principles despite having no Edmund to help her. She observes that:

Susan saw that much was wrong at home, and wanted to set it right. That a girl of fourteen, acting only on her own unassisted reason, should err in the method of reform was not wonderful; and Fanny soon became more disposed to admire the natural light of the mind which could so early distinguish justly, than to censure severely the faults of conduct to which it led. Susan was only acting on the same truths, and pursuing the same system, which her own judgment acknowledged, but which her more supine and yielding temper would have shrunk from asserting.<sup>54</sup>

Fanny’s observation opens a new angle to view education. This passage would seem to justify Ruderman’s belief that “in fact, *Mansfield Park* makes it clear that Fanny Price’s virtues would never have developed had she been raised in her father’s home. Her sister Susan, brought up ‘in the midst of such negligence and error, nonetheless...has ‘delicacy’ and generally ‘proper opinions.’”<sup>55</sup> What Fanny thinks, however, is that Susan is more vocal about her attempts to right

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<sup>53</sup> Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*, 65.

<sup>54</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 458.

<sup>55</sup> Ruderman, *The Pleasures of Virtue*, 116.

the household, whereas Fanny would not have been able to assert herself despite the knowledge of error. Fanny observes the distinction between her temperament and Susan's, not their virtue. Susan's nature has a natural goodness which is fostered when Fanny takes an interest in her and thus keeps her on the path towards virtue.

Devlin also believes that both education and environment are important and that "natural qualities exist (and not only in Fanny and Susan), but will not of themselves go far. Mary Crawford, too, has natural gifts — 'how delightful nature had made her, and how excellent she would have been, had she fallen into good hands earlier.' The 'good hands' (education and environment) are everything."<sup>56</sup> This is an interesting view of Mary and emphasizes the need for early intervention should any person be on the wrong educational path. Nature may play an early role in placing the child on the path of virtue, but without a complete education to foster its growth, a character's bad education can override his or her good nature.

Sir Thomas learns the role of nature in his own daughters at the end of the novel. Despite the flaw in his daughter's education, "he gradually grew to feel that it had not been the most direful mistake in his plan of education. Something must have been wanting *within*, or time would have worn away much of its ill effect. He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice."<sup>57</sup> The Bertram sisters have not exercised principle beyond the use of "manners." The overindulgence from their family, has not prepared them to sacrifice their comfort for the sake of anything or anyone (think of Fanny's need for a horse earlier in the novel). If the sisters had a nature that was inclined towards virtue, then despite

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<sup>56</sup> Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education*, 118-9.

<sup>57</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 535-6.

their incomplete education, the natural virtue of the girls would have come through as they realized their power and place.

Is it possible for characters to learn and grow past their education or to follow their inclinations? Austen believes so; one need look no further than Sir Thomas, who is arguably the oldest person in the novel. He learns how his views on education were wrong and comes to a right understanding. Not only does he learn his views were mistaken, he also changes his outlook and expectations over the course of the novel to match the new information he has learned. His example shows the reader that it is never too late to learn or change.

The Crawfords, however, are unable to reform their ways. Despite being presented with new models of understanding, Mansfield, in the end, does not “cure them.” Moler notes that Mary “cannot rise far enough above the mental habits of her London set to see them—and herself—as they really are.”<sup>58</sup> Despite the positive influence of Mansfield as soon as she returns to London, any good that may have been done is lost as she slips back into her old London habits. Henry’s change is dubious at best, under the pretense of trying to win Fanny, but even this brief attempt has a positive influence upon him as he tries to appear virtuous. His appearance of virtue to please Fanny begins to steer him in the right direction toward responsibility, but is not enough to save him from habit when he returns to London. His vanity ends all possible hope of Fanny and he must forever regret the loss of her. After his affair with Maria comes to light, the illusions of all the characters begin to break as their reactions to this event reveal the errors in their education and their character. Only in hindsight can the reader see the influence of

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<sup>58</sup> Moler, *Jane Austen’s Art of Allusion*, 141.

Mansfield for Henry and Mary and those connected to the Bertram sisters see how their education has taught them to pursue their own ends instead of virtue.

Julia's education, however, has not been as damaging, because "her temper was naturally the easiest of the two; her feelings, though quick, were more controulable; and education had not given her so very hurtful a degree of self-consequence."<sup>59</sup> When Henry renews his acquaintance with the family in London, she is able to remove herself from the situation, and ultimately elopes with no "worse feelings than those of selfish alarm. It appeared to her the only thing to be done. Maria's guilt had induced Julia's folly."<sup>60</sup> Julia's choice, although not as bad as Maria's, was "done in the worst manner, and at the worst time; and though Julia was yet as more pardonable than Maria as folly than vice, he [Sir Thomas] could not but regard the step she had taken, as opening the worst probabilities of a conclusion hereafter, like her sister's."<sup>61</sup> Her natural temper has not been ruined by her education, because Julia's education was less flattering to her ego than Maria's. One of the effects of Mrs. Norris's bias towards Maria has taught Julia that as she is not the favorite, she will always be less important. This idea has allowed Julia to have a better understanding of the world and to accept when she cannot have her own way or is not preferred by others. Her end reflects this better understanding as Mr. Yates does actually marry her and they go back to Sir Thomas because "she was humble and wishing to be forgiven, and Mr. Yates, desirous of being really received into the family, was disposed to look up to him and be guided."<sup>62</sup> By seeking forgiveness, Julia recognizes and acts on her duty to heal the breach between her father and herself.

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<sup>59</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 539.

<sup>60</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 540.

<sup>61</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 522.

<sup>62</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 534.

Henry Crawford, however, “indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long” and in the end he is unable to change towards virtue.<sup>63</sup> In London, his “curiosity and vanity were both engaged, and the temptation of immediate pleasure was too strong for a mind unused to make any sacrifice to right,” so he decides to stay in town to see Mrs. Rushworth. Her cold greeting, however, stirs up his vanity and “he could not bear to be thrown off by the woman whose smiles had been so wholly at his command; he must exert himself to subdue so proud a display of resentment; it was anger on Fanny’s account; he must get the better of it, and make Mrs. Rushworth Maria Bertram again in her treatment of himself.”<sup>64</sup> He succeeds and becomes “entangled by his own vanity, with as little excuse of love as possible.”<sup>65</sup> Henry allows the education of his youth to override any good principles that might have been starting to grow after his idea to pursue Fanny. His knowledge of virtue is not enough to guide his actions when he is away from Fanny. Although the narrator states that it was Maria who forced his hand to run off, he would not have been in her power had he not entangled himself with her initially. His vanity stirred the pot and she drank from it. His participation in the affair is a clear sign that his brief turn towards virtue was not enough to save him from the habit of vice.

The evidence for Mary’s lack of change is seen in her opinion of the affair. She can only see the elopement between Maria and Henry as folly, which forces Edmund to confront his understanding of Mary with who she actually is. Her comment reveals that she does not see the affair as vice, but only as an obstacle to be worked around, which would have been easier if they had not been discovered. Edmund tells Fanny, “She saw it only as folly, and that folly stamped only by exposure. The want of common discretion, of caution—his going down to Richmond for

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<sup>63</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 540.

<sup>64</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 541.

<sup>65</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 541.

the whole time of her being at Twickenham—her putting herself in the power of a servant;—it was the detection in short—Oh! Fanny, it was the detection, not the offence which she reprobated.”<sup>66</sup> Mary’s education has taught her not to see the affair of Maria and Henry as condemnable. This revelation is what finally breaks the illusion Edmund has about Mary. Her inability to condemn what is obviously condemnable demonstrates to him that she does not possess the virtue he thought she had. In the end, the reward Mary received for her charm was to lose out on a decent man; she “was long in finding...any one who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, whose character and manners could authorize a hope of the domestic happiness she had there learnt to estimate, or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head.”<sup>67</sup>

Sir Thomas and Julia are able to learn and at the end gain a better ending than those who do not improve. Henry and Mary both have the opportunity to change under the positive influence of Mansfield and, more specifically, under Fanny and Edmund. While they do seem to gain some understanding of Fanny and Edmund’s superiority, it is not enough to keep them from falling back to their London ways once they are away from Mansfield. This inability to change fully keeps them from orienting themselves towards virtue and thus their happy ending.

Jane Austen uses education as a way of exploring one aspect of a person and how he or she can be formed. Without a complete education, a person can only gain the appearance of virtue and not its possession. Maria, Henry, and Mary all fail to receive a happy ending because they are unable to apply their education and direct themselves to virtue, while Edmund and

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<sup>66</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 526.

<sup>67</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 543. To note, she also brings about the meeting of Henry and Maria as she encourages Henry to stay for the party. Had she not interfered, then perhaps the meeting would not have taken place and the natural gulf that must occur between the two families would not have appeared.

Fanny, who do direct themselves towards virtue, receive their happy ending. The reward for Fanny's virtue is that Edmund begins to see her value and that she actually possesses what Mary only appeared to have. The narrator informs the reader that at the proper time "Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire."<sup>68</sup> She is rewarded not only with Edmund, but with Sir Thomas's praise as well, for he learned that "Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted."<sup>69</sup> Tarpley notes that "Fanny achieves her proper earthly end by developing and practicing constancy."<sup>70</sup> Fanny's path to virtue is preserved by the application of principle united with action.

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<sup>68</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 544.

<sup>69</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 546.

<sup>70</sup> Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park*, 254.



## Chapter 2:

## Reflection

The next aspect that Jane Austen views as integral to the formation of the whole person in regards to virtue is a characters' ability not only to remember, but to reflect upon his or her actions and behavior in such a way as directs the character to moral betterment. Joyce Tarpley notes that "the kind of education that Austen supports in her narrative depends as much on the mind's ability to seriously reflect on the faculty of memory as it does on its understanding that the memory, as it is described in Fanny's musings, needs to be guided rightly in order to achieve integrity or unity in the practice of virtue."<sup>71</sup> Characters must be able to recall and reflect accurately on their actions in order to be virtuous. As with education, their reflections must direct them towards the proper end (virtue). Reflection occurs frequently throughout the novel; characters who are able to reflect exhibit a concern for their actions and how they affect others. Those characters who do not properly reflect can only gain the appearance of virtue because their concern for solely the present inhibits their ability to learn or grow from their actions. In contrast, those who properly reflect gain its possession because they are able to look beyond the present and learn from their actions.

Although Sir Thomas is concerned with doing what is right, his ability to reflect and arrive at the proper end is faulty. In the beginning of the novel, the reader observes that before Sir Thomas takes Fanny into his home, he reflects on the consequences of doing so. Unlike Mrs. Norris he "could not give so instantaneous and unqualified a consent. He debated and hesitated;—it was a serious charge;—a girl so brought up must be adequately provided for, or

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<sup>71</sup> Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park*, 73-4.

there would be cruelty instead of kindness in taking her from her family.”<sup>72</sup> Sir Thomas recognizes that there is more to rearing children than food and shelter and that there are other concerns such as the child’s future that must be considered. This passage helps to establish Sir Thomas’s character and that he possesses the ability to reflect properly when the decision aligns with his desire (will) and if he has enough time to think about his decisions.

This careful determination is not the case when he confronts Maria about her engagement with Mr. Rushworth. Although he allows Maria the option to back out of the engagement, he does not press further when she reaffirms her desire for the engagement. His will is not aligned with breaking the engagement, which is why he does not “urge the matter quite so far as his judgment might have dictated to others.”<sup>73</sup> Sir Thomas allows his emotions to dictate his actions and reflections in the matter of Maria’s engagement. He would rather make up his own excuses or pretend to understand than truly to understand by further inquiry. He reflects that

her feelings probably were not acute; he had never supposed them to be so; but her comforts might not be less on that account, and if she could dispense with seeing her husband a leading, shining character, there would certainly be everything else in her favour. A well-disposed young woman who did not marry for love, was in general but the more attached to her own family, and the nearness of Sotherton to Mansfield must naturally hold out the greatest temptation.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 234.

<sup>74</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 235. This is ironic because when Fanny must explain that she does not love Crawford, Sir Thomas cannot accept lack of love as a reason for not marrying when he has married his daughter off with the same premise.

Sir Thomas is entirely wrong about her reasons for accepting Rushworth. At this point in the novel, he is still in error about the proper end of virtue, believing that material goods are more important than character. The narrator reflects upon Sir Thomas that he was “happy to escape the embarrassing evils of a rupture, the wonder, the reflections, the reproach that must attend it, happy to secure a marriage which would bring him such an addition of respectability and influence, and very happy to think any thing of his daughter’s disposition that was most favourable for the purpose.”<sup>75</sup> The narrator mocks Sir Thomas’ attitude towards the marriage by describing what *Sir Thomas* gains from the marriage and not Maria. The desire to keep up appearances affects his ability to reflect about the long-term repercussions of an unhappy marriage or to push Maria into revealing her true feelings. Sir Thomas’s desire to break the engagement restricts his ability to reflect critically and thus properly on his decision as it does not align with his will, unlike the matter of bringing Fanny to Mansfield. There must be a critical aspect to the approach of reflection; otherwise, emotion can cloud a person’s ability to reflect and cause them to arrive at the wrong conclusion.

Another example of Sir Thomas’s fickle reflections occurs in his reaction to Fanny’s answer in regards to Henry’s proposal. When Fanny informs Sir Thomas that she will not marry Henry Crawford, he makes erroneous claims about her person, but, when Mrs. Norris makes similar comments, Sir Thomas thinks “as a general reflection on Fanny...nothing could be more unjust, though he had been so lately expressing the same sentiments himself, and he tried to turn the conversation; tried repeatedly before he could succeed.”<sup>76</sup> When Sir Thomas hears his own arguments repeated back to himself, he recognizes that he might have initially judged Fanny a bit

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<sup>75</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 235.

<sup>76</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 373.

too harshly, allowing his emotions to get in the way of his judgment.<sup>77</sup> In the heat of the moment, Sir Thomas's emotions do not allow him to reflect honestly in regards to Fanny, but once his emotions have cooled, his reason allows him to see that he has been unjust. He does not, however, ever admit this or apologize to Fanny. He only acknowledges the error internally, but he does cease to pressure her overtly to accept Crawford.

The final reflection of Sir Thomas on these matters is after Maria's affair; "he felt that he ought not to have allowed the marriage, that his daughter's sentiments had been sufficiently known to him to render him culpable in authorising it, that in so doing he had sacrificed the right to the expedient, and been governed by motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom. These reflections...required some time to soften."<sup>78</sup> At this point, Sir Thomas realizes the errors of his way and is repentant. His desire to take the easy route and to maintain good "manners" has led him to the hard road when those "manners" fail. Sir Thomas's internal reflections add to the complexity of his character as he strives for what he believes is the moral good, but does not always arrive at that good because he places importance on material goods versus virtue. His continual reflection, however, despite his incomplete knowledge of the moral good, demonstrates a will desiring to do good. In the end with Maria, his reflections help him to understand his errors and to change his understanding of what the good is and to desire it.

Maria, on the other hand, actively chooses not to reflect. When she first meets Henry Crawford, the reader learns that her "notions on the subject [her own feelings towards Henry] were more confused and indistinct. She did not want to see or understand."<sup>79</sup> Maria refuses to

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<sup>77</sup> Right after this line, we learn that Mrs. Norris is ignorant of how highly Sir Thomas thinks of his niece and does not care for putting her down so as to raise her cousins up (373-4).

<sup>78</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 534.

<sup>79</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 52.

inspect her motives or to assess the appropriateness of her relationship with a bachelor as an engaged woman. She reasons that, “There could be no harm in her liking an agreeable man—every body knew her situation—Mr. Crawford must take care of himself.”<sup>80</sup> Maria’s self-centered attitude continues on as, she does not want to think on these small matters and acts according to her present desire. Since she does not stop to reflect, she is led astray by her emotions. This willful blindness continues later when Henry goes shooting and the narrator tells us that “a fortnight of such dullness to the Miss Bertrams...ought to have put them both on their guard, and made even Julia admit in her jealousy of her sister, the absolute necessity of distrusting his attentions, and wishing him not to return,”<sup>81</sup> but because Maria does not reflect, she remains unaware of the danger of Henry’s attention.

There is a brief hint of reflection from Maria when Sir Thomas confronts her about continuing her engagement with Rushworth. Maria has had time to assess her situation and regain control of her emotions; however, “had Sir Thomas applied to his daughter within the first three or four days after Henry Crawford’s leaving Mansfield, before her feelings were tranquillized, before she had given up every hope of him...her answer might have been different; but after three or four days, when there was no return...her mind became cool enough to seek all the comfort that pride and self-revenge could give.”<sup>82</sup> Her brief reflection has only allowed her to feel slighted and to affirm a decision based on present emotions. Maria’s emotion clouds her ability to reflect properly and come to the right conclusion. She allows her pride and her anger with Henry to dictate her action rather than desire for her own good which is why she rejects Sir Thomas’s offer to rescind her engagement with Mr. Rushworth. Maria is a pouting child who

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<sup>80</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 52.

<sup>81</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 135.

<sup>82</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 235-6.

seeks to prove to another “I’ll show you” by acting in a way that ultimately only harms herself and has no effect on the other. This mindset reveals Maria’s inability to see outside herself and her narrow understanding of the world around her. With no true reflection on her conduct or on the potential consequences of her relationship with Henry, she renews her affair with him in London as soon as he engages with her again. Maria never reflects on Henry’s past treatment of her or her present situation with Rushworth; doing so would allow her to understand Henry’s game or at least be wary of his attentions towards her. Tarpley suggests that Maria’s faulty recall of memories is what leads her to abandon her duties because she has “forgotten them.” She believes that Maria chooses instead to remember “her seductive liaison with Henry during the excursion to Sotherton and during the theatricals [to]...overcome the memory of her contract with her husband, of her obligation to obey the seventh commandment, [and] of her sacred vows before God”;<sup>83</sup> but I wonder if she even knew what her duty was to begin with. At most, she has forgotten how to appear virtuous and the necessity of doing so should she wish to remain in good society. Maria knows how to fool her father and appear virtuous, but she is unable to keep up appearances under the new rules as a married woman. She continues to do what she wills and part of that will does not want to reflect. Even at the very end, after her affair, she still refuses to reflect or repent. Her inability to reflect on the consequences of her actions leads to her ruin as she makes her will the ultimate end goal instead of virtue.

Initially, Julia too is also unable to reflect, but as the novel progresses, the reader sees her ability to reflect, as well as her ability to act upon her reflections, increase. When Edmund offers up his spot in the carriage so that Fanny can go on the trip to Sotherton, Julia reflects that she should have offered to stay behind and feels slightly bad, but carries on—no action stems from

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<sup>83</sup> Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*, 75.

her reflection (93). Similarly, even though the absence of Henry is enough to put Julia on her guard, the uneasy feeling she possesses is not enough for her to act upon the information to remove herself from his influence. The turning point of her ability to reflect as well as act happens during the casting of the play when Henry chooses Maria over her; this forces Julia to look outside herself and think about herself as well as those around her. Julia learns that despite the unspoken “rules” of social manners dictating that the focus of Henry’s attention should be on her since Maria’s “engagement made him in equity the property of [herself]..., of which [she]...was fully aware,” she is not the favored sister.<sup>84</sup> This rejection causes Julia to look around and actually see the world as it is instead of a world that strictly adheres to the rules of “manners.” Her moment of positive reflection and action comes when Henry renews his acquaintance with Julia and the new Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth in London. Knowing herself, Julia “had the merit of withdrawing herself...and of chusing that time to pay a visit to her other friends, in order to secure herself from being again too much attracted.”<sup>85</sup> Julia learns from her past experience and, reflecting on her current situation, makes the right choice. This one reflection, however, is not enough to keep her from panicking and eloping with Yates when Maria’s affair comes to light—“she had been allowing his attentions some time, but with very little idea of ever accepting him; and, had not her sister’s conduct burst forth as it did...it is probable that Mr. Yates would never have succeeded. She had not eloped with any worse feelings than those of selfish alarm. It had appeared to her the only thing to be done. Maria’s guilt had induced Julia’s folly.”<sup>86</sup> Julia is acting purely on instinct when Maria’s affair surfaces. This reflexive action is an indication that the habit of reflection still needs to be formed, but she

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<sup>84</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 51.

<sup>85</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 539.

<sup>86</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 539-40.

is on the right path and her repentance at the end of the novel is an indication of her desire to orient herself towards the good (534). Julia's desire for her father's forgiveness is the product of reflecting on her actions—"she was humble and wishing to be forgiven and Mr. Yates, desirous of being really received into the family, was disposed to look up to him [Sir Thomas] and be guided."<sup>87</sup> While her decision to marry Yates was not based on reflection, the decision to reconcile must have been one in which Julia and Mr. Yates reflected. Julia's ability to reflect along with her desire to reconcile points her down the path of virtue.

On the rare occasion that Mary Crawford reflects, she uses the action as a way to assess her own ability to manipulate the situation. This is especially the case with her attentions to Edmund. Mary's charm is so successful, she says whatever comes to mind and relies on it to escape from any sticky situation. Sheehan points out one reflection of Mary's that highlights her manipulative mindset, is when she is looking back at the time spent rehearsing for the play. She tells Fanny, "'I never knew such exquisite happiness in any other [time],' she recalls. 'His [Edmund's] sturdy spirit to bend as it did! Oh! it was sweet beyond expression' (358). With these remarkable words, Mary reveals her primal motivation in pursuit of the man she would make her knave. He is to betray his principles and be ruled by hers."<sup>88</sup> Another instance of Mary's desire to rule Edmund occurs during a dinner party at the Grant's where Edmund tells the attendees that he will soon take orders. Upon hearing this information, the reader learns Mary, "was too much vexed by what had passed to be in a humour for any thing but music... The assurance of Edmund's being so soon to take orders, coming upon her like a blow that had been

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<sup>87</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 534.

<sup>88</sup> Colleen A. Sheehan, "To Govern the Winds: Dangerous Acquaintances at Mansfield Park," *Persuasions On-Line* 25, no.1 (Winter 2004): <https://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol25no1/sheehan.html>.



suspended, and still hoped uncertain and at a distance, was felt with resentment and mortification. She was very angry with him. She had thought her influence more.”<sup>89</sup> Mary’s reflection clearly indicates her desire for Edmund to conform to her will even to the extent of giving up his profession to satisfy her desire for a higher social status. After the ball at Mansfield, all the young men have left and Mary is isolated in the Grant’s cottage. With nothing to amuse her, her mind continually dwells on Edmund and

on his merit and affection, and longing again for the almost daily meetings they lately had. His absence was unnecessarily long. He should not have planned such an absence—he should not have left home for a week, when her own departure from Mansfield was so near. Then she began to blame herself. She wished she had not spoken so warmly in their last conversation.<sup>90</sup>

Mary is reflecting on her behavior, but it is dubious whether this stems from true repentance and not from boredom or fear of loss of control. The longer Edmund is gone the less control she may have over him. With the return of her brother, she is once again happy and the reader hears no more of her regrets or her reflections.

Henry too, lacks the ability to reflect and the narrator even tells the reader that after Henry leaves Mansfield “a fortnight of sufficient leisure in the intervals of shooting and sleeping...[should] have convinced the gentleman that he ought to keep longer away, had he been more in the habit of examining his own motives, and of reflecting to what the indulgence of his idle vanity was tending; but, thoughtless and selfish from prosperity and bad example, he

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<sup>89</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 266.

<sup>90</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 332.

would not look beyond the present moment.”<sup>91</sup> Similar to Maria, he is only interested in the pleasure of the moment. Later in the novel, Henry’s vanity leads him to pursue Fanny as a game and a test of his skills, yet as he plays the game, he comes to value the virtuous qualities of Fanny. The reader is told that he “had too much sense not to feel the worth of good principles in a wife, though he was too little accustomed to serious reflection to know them by their proper name.”<sup>92</sup> Having never learned any principles and with no natural inclination towards them, Henry is unable to identify what it is about Fanny that would make her a good wife. His inability to reflect hinders him from truly understanding Fanny’s value, knowing himself, or gaining any principle.

In volume three, there is finally a brief reflection from Henry. The narrator states that “after a moment’s reflection, Mr. Crawford replied, ‘I know Mansfield, I know its way, I know its faults towards you.’”<sup>93</sup> Henry is telling Fanny that he understands her situation in regards to Mansfield. This is the first moment the reader sees Henry reflect and it is towards the end of the novel. The influence of Fanny appears to have a positive effect on Henry, but his small reflection here is not enough to save him from his habit of vanity when he soon after, returns to London.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 135.

<sup>92</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 341. If Henry been able to identify the principles that Fanny possessed, then he would have tried harder to keep her knowing the importance and rarity of someone like her; at the very least through the idea of competition (since he begins his pursuit of her as a game) and gaining a highly desirable prize.

<sup>93</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 476.

<sup>94</sup> Before his trip to Portsmouth, the influence of Fanny leads Henry to Everingham on “real business, relative to the renewal of a lease in which the welfare of a large and (he believed) industrious family was at stake. He had suspected his agent of some underhand dealing...and he had determined to go himself.... He had gone, had done even more good than he had foreseen, had been useful to more than his first plan had comprehended” (469) Not only does Henry do good for the tenant, but he himself “was now able to congratulate himself upon it, and to feel, that in performing a duty, he had secured agreeable recollections for his own mind” (469). Henry experiences positive emotion upon the completion of his duty and the added benefit of telling Fanny of his good deed. He is sidetracked, however, in London.

In London, his ability to reflect is overshadowed by his impulsive vanity which incites him to reconquer Maria.

His only other reflection occurs after his affair with Maria becomes known. The narrator provides the short and long-term regret of Henry for his participation in the affair. In the short term, he regrets Fanny “infinitely more, when all the bustle of the intrigue was over, and a very few months had taught him, by the force of contrast, to place a yet higher value on the sweetness of her temper, the purity of her mind, the excellence of her principles.”<sup>95</sup> By entangling himself with Maria, he is now faced with the stark contrast of their nature and value (the difference between the appearance and possession of virtue). While Henry has viewed his relationship with Maria as a game, he has never stopped to consider the consequences of the game. His time with Maria after the public announcement of the affair has unveiled the importance of Fanny’s principles; and he now understands the worth of such principles, being made to suffer under their opposite. In the long term, the narrator informs the reader that one “may fairly consider a man of sense like Henry Crawford, to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret—vexation that must rise sometimes to self-reproach, and regret to wretchedness—in having so requited hospitality, so injured family peace, so forfeited his best, most estimable and endeared acquaintance, and so lost the woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved.”<sup>96</sup> While the narrator seems to describe the scene somewhat hyperbolically, there cannot be any doubt that Henry has gained some self-knowledge after the affair. Henry has not been described as loving anything passionately throughout the novel and seems rather ambivalent to the world around him (besides acting). For the narrator to describe his emotions towards Fanny as such is a

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<sup>95</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 542.

<sup>96</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 542.

sign of their genuineness. The extent to which he has gained self-knowledge or how it will affect his life moving forward, however, is left ambiguous by the narrator, but is there nonetheless. Not only does Henry regret Fanny close to the occurrence of the affair when his thoughts and emotions are fresh, but also removed from the situation by time and still has lingering regrets that surface throughout his life.<sup>97</sup>

Although insight into Tom's consciousness is minimal, the ability to reflect has a significant impact on his life. The narrator provides an insight at the beginning and end of the novel which illustrates the change in Tom's ability to reflect and thus gain a good ending.<sup>98</sup> At the beginning of the novel, when Sir Thomas is lecturing Tom about his extravagant ways, and how he has deprived his brother of his living, "Tom listened with some shame and some sorrow; but escaping as quickly as possible, could soon with cheerful selfishness reflect, 1st, that he had not been half so much in debt as some of his friends; 2dly, that his father had made a most tiresome piece of work of it; and, 3dly, that the future incumbent, whoever he might be, would, in all probability, die very soon."<sup>99</sup> Tom's list of reasons is a flimsy attempt at logic that betrays

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<sup>97</sup> Another point of comparison in favor of Henry Crawford's betterment would be the narrator's tone and attitude towards similar characters at the end of other novels of Austen which are different: such as Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility*—"Willoughby could not hear of her marriage without a pang....That his repentance of misconduct, which thus brought its own punishment, was sincere, need not be doubted;—nor that he long thought of Colonel Brandon with envy, and of Marianne with regret. But that he was for ever inconsolable, that he fled from society, or contracted an habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart, must not be depended on—for he did neither. He lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself" (Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Edward Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 430); or Mr. Elliot in *Persuasion*—"It [Anne's engagement] deranged his best plan of domestic happiness....But, though discomfited and disappointed, he could still do something for his own interest and his own enjoyment" (Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Blank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 272-3).

<sup>98</sup> Theresa Kenney in her essay, "Why Tom Bertram Cannot Die: 'The Plans and Decisions of Mortals,'" further describes Tom's character growth and importance in the novel.

<sup>99</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 27.

his callousness towards his family and his responsibility. Tom's reflections are a shallow justification for his actions which do not lead him to the proper end—shame. This refusal to reflect with any seriousness continues throughout the novel until the very end when he becomes dangerously ill. Tom “was the better for ever for his illness. He had suffered, and he had learned to think: two advantages that he had never known before; and the self-reproach arising from the deplorable event in Wimpole Street, to which he felt himself accessory by all the dangerous intimacy of his unjustifiable theatre, made an impression on his mind which, at the age of six-and-twenty, with no want of sense or good companions, was durable in its happy effects.”<sup>100</sup> The period of Tom's illness is his turning point in the novel as he shifts from wastrel older son to thoughtful heir. He gains the ability to reflect on and repent of the error of his ways and is thus able to gain a better end for himself.<sup>101</sup>

Edmund is obviously a virtuous character from the beginning, unlike his older brother: he provides moral formation for Fanny, he values a pastor who sets the example for his congregation, he rightly condemns Maria and Henry's affair—yet the reader hears very little of his internal reflections. When the reader does see Edmund reflect, the majority of the time it is in relation to Mary Crawford.<sup>102</sup> This would seem to imply that his reflections are not so much about whether or not he possesses virtue, but whether or not he can maintain his virtue. Edmund struggles throughout the novel to remember and reflect on Mary accurately as he is swayed by his growing affection for her. He is fooled by her charm and constantly attributes her opinions to

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<sup>100</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 534.

<sup>101</sup> Tom's ending differs from Henry in that the reader has a clear understanding that Tom has changed for the better and to the extent that the change occurred. By the end, Tom desires to be virtuous and orients himself towards the path of virtue. This is in contrast to Henry whose ambiguous end leaves doubts about the extent of his change and his desire to align himself toward virtue after his affair with Maria despite his regrets about Fanny and Mansfield.

<sup>102</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 131, 164, 305, 488-90, 526.

the “general London talk” without concern they might be her actual beliefs. Her negative influence can be seen in the following scenes: when she learns to ride, the abandonment of Fanny in the garden at Sotherton, and joining the scheme of the play. In each scene, Edmund neglects his duty and chooses to capitulate to Mary’s whims. Edmund’s emotions muddle his ability to reflect and remember. When Fanny and Edmund discuss Henry’s proposal to her, Sarah Emsley points out that “Edmund’s memory is faulty and he professes blindness to their differences in the past as well as in the present.”<sup>103</sup> He cannot even reflect on the memory of the play because of his clear negligence in doing his duty and tells Fanny, “Let us not, any of us, be judged by what we appeared at that period of general folly. The time of the play, is a time which I hate to recollect...we were all wrong together; but none so wrong as myself.”<sup>104</sup> He prefers not to remember the time and is too busy trying to persuade Fanny to marry Henry to pay attention to her reflections about Henry.

Throughout the novel, the narrator keeps the reader at a distance and like Fanny, the reader can only gain access to Edmund’s reflections in dialogue.<sup>105</sup> Similar to Maria, Edmund allows himself to be influenced by his emotions for another, in this case, Mary. Even though Edmund’s ability to reflect properly is questionable, he ultimately does not allow his emotions to drive him away from pursuing his duty or virtue. Edmund may be misled by his infatuation with Mary throughout the novel, but when Edmund finally comes to understand her through her comments about the classification of Maria and Henry’s affair as “mere folly,” he is able to reflect on his actions and his own understanding of Mary properly. This enlightenment occurs during his final conversation with Mary, when she asks Edmund to support a marriage between

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<sup>103</sup> Emsley, *Jane Austen’s Philosophy of the Virtues*, 112.

<sup>104</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 404.

<sup>105</sup> This is one way Austen keeps the reader in suspense.

Maria and Henry and to give implicit consent towards their union. Edmund tells Fanny these comments of Mary's "most grievously convinced me that I had never understood her before, and that, as far as related to mind, it had been the creature of my own imagination, not Miss Crawford, that I had been too apt to dwell on for many months."<sup>106</sup> The illusion of Mary is broken as Edmund himself admits to Fanny that her "charm is broken. My eyes are opened."<sup>107</sup>

In contrast to Edmund, the reader constantly hears Fanny's own reflections and the rationale of her choices and the actions of those around her.<sup>108</sup> The reader sees, as Tarpley explains, that "throughout the narrative, as Fanny engages in reflection about the actions that disturb her, she seeks to understand 'the good in a fuller sense' that Aristotle says is requisite for 'the natural characteristic [of virtue to]...become that virtue in the full sense.'"<sup>109</sup> She wants to make sure she is judging rightly and fairly. Similarly, Peter De Rose notes "that Fanny is an extraordinarily attentive young woman, that she is sensitive to the perception of experience, is a clear sign of her expanding moral consciousness."<sup>110</sup> Her reflections go beyond the moral realm and into the world around her. Fanny "was not often invited to join in the conversation of the others, nor did she desire it. Her own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions."<sup>111</sup> Fanny's contemplative attitude allows her the ability to reflect on herself and the world around her which leads her to a better understanding of the whole. By watching others, she is using her observations to form firm opinions of their characters. Fanny is particularly careful to locate the central emotion that guides her feelings, especially in regards to Edmund

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<sup>106</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 529-30.

<sup>107</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 527.

<sup>108</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 302, 365, 483.

<sup>109</sup> Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park*, 29.

<sup>110</sup> Peter L. De Rose, "Hardship, Recollection, and Discipline: Three Lessons in '*Mansfield Park*,'" *Studies in the Novel*. 9 no. 3 (Fall 1977): 267, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29531856>.

<sup>111</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 94.

and Mary's relationship. She is aware of her jealousies and vanities and by reflecting on the situation, keeps them from ruling her.

The first moment of major reflection for Fanny besides the general judgments of observation occurs when she goes to the East Room after being attacked by her family for not participating in the play. Alistair Duckworth believes that Fanny's withdrawal from the family "is the strategic withdrawal of the moral self from the corruption of its environment, [and] it is also a search inwards for a purity of moral intention," which is indeed the case.<sup>112</sup>

But she had more than fears of her own perseverance to remove; she had begun to feel undecided as to what she *ought to do*; and as she walked round the room her doubts were increasing. Was she right in refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for: What might be so essential to a scheme on which some of those to whom she owed the greatest complaisance, had set their hearts? Was it not ill-nature—selfishness—and a fear of exposing herself? And would Edmund's judgement, would his persuasion of Sir Thomas's disapprobation of the whole, be enough to justify her in a determined denial in spite of all the rest? It would be so horrible to her to act, that she was inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples, and as she looked around her, the claims of her cousins to being obliged, were strengthened by the sight of present upon present that she had received from them.<sup>113</sup>

In the moment, Fanny declines to act, but away from the pressure of the crowd, she begins to examine her own reasons. Her attempt to go somewhere safe and reflect, however, is almost destroyed by the very place she goes as her mind begins to drown in her second-hand

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<sup>112</sup> Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, 74.

<sup>113</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 179.



possessions from the Bertram family; creating in her mind a debt owed to them. Edmund pulls her out of her sinking reflection and by deciding to act in the play himself, is able to rescue her thought process about where her duty lies. Edmund's inconstancy forces her to reexamine her obligations and she ultimately decides against acting in the play, knowing that her duty to her uncle outweighs the duty to her cousins.

Although Fanny knows that she has chosen rightly by declining a place in the play, this still does not prevent her from being miserable by being set apart from the others. While they are happy with themselves and preoccupied with the play there is nothing and no one for Fanny. She initially almost resents Mrs. Grant because she “was of consequence; her good nature had honourable mention—her taste and her time were considered—her presence was wanted—she was sought for and attended, and praised; and Fanny was at first in some danger of envying her the character she had accepted. But reflection brought better feelings, and shewed her that Mrs. Grant was entitled to respect, which could never have belonged to *her*.”<sup>114</sup> By reflecting on her own feelings, Fanny is able to keep her emotions under control and think critically about the difference in situation between herself and Mrs. Grant. Fanny's reflections keep her rooted in reality. She knows her place and does not presume upon it as she understands the role of the poor relation and the expectations of the position. Even if she had accepted the role, she still would not be given the considerations that Mrs. Grant receives, because she is not Mrs. Grant or someone whom the group would consider of consequence.<sup>115</sup> Fanny is able to recognize when her emotions color her reflections, which allows her to address them before they affect her judgment. Even though she is initially upset about being left out, her ability to reflect allows her

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<sup>114</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 187.

<sup>115</sup> Fleishman notes that “she is the only character in the novel who is amply conscious of her relations with others” (46).

to come to a better understanding of the situation. Her recognition of the difference between her and Mrs. Grant keeps her from being bitter and resentful. She continues to reflect further “that had she received even the greatest, she could never have been easy in joining a scheme which, considering her uncle, she must condemn altogether.”<sup>116</sup> Despite her feelings of jealousy, she is still able to reflect on the proper end and accept that course. Her reflections confirm her choices and help her to verify that she is analyzing the whole picture and acting appropriately.

De Rose asserts, “Fanny indeed has a morally strong character, but not because her memory alone is strong. Principles once learned and subsequently recalled by the memory are of little value unless they are consistently acted upon.”<sup>117</sup> This vital connection is why the Crawfords and Maria ultimately fail to attain virtue. Fanny consistently acts upon her reflections; she tries to stop Maria from going into the garden alone with Henry at Sotherton, she refuses to act in the play, she refuses Henry’s dubious proposal, and she stands up to Sir Thomas despite his pressure on her to marry Henry. Her reflections save her from acting against her principles and the future of a loveless marriage. The Crawfords and Maria live in the now and thus lack any memory to remember their education or principles that might require them not to act according to their will. Reflection is a helpful tool that many of the characters do not have or are unable to obtain until the end. Without this tool characters who are not aligned toward virtue by education are unable to gain the possession of virtue and must settle for its appearance.

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<sup>116</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 187.

<sup>117</sup> De Rose, “Hardship, Recollection, and Discipline: Three Lessons in “*Mansfield Park*,”” 270.

### Chapter 3: Will versus Duty

The final aspect of Austen's whole-person approach to virtue that I will consider is the recognition and application of duty. Are characters able to fulfill their duty, or are they more concerned with having their own way? Virtue requires sacrifice for the higher moral good, but how can characters make that sacrifice if they do not know what the good is or act upon their knowledge of the good? Knowledge and action united with the desire to be virtuous is the necessary combination in order to possess virtue. Austen exhibits how the reader can distinguish between the appearance or possession of virtue in a character, by his or her acceptance or rejection of duty in a variety of matters.

When speaking of the will, I do not mean will as in free will, but a selfish willfulness that acts on its own accord without reference to duty or obligations—one could even say willfulness. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines “will” in my sense as “the action or willing or deciding to do something; the exercising of the mind with conscious intention towards initiating a chosen action; volition.”<sup>118</sup> Critics writing on *Mansfield Park* take a more nuanced view of the definition of duty than what is provided in the OED which aligns with Austen's own understanding of duty. While the OED's fourth definition of duty is “action, or an act, that is due in the way of moral or legal obligation; that which one ought or is bound to do; an obligation”—what is one's moral or legal obligation?<sup>119</sup> Critic Anne Ruderman gives a vague definition of duty, saying that “duty is not what one makes it to be, but neither is it chiefly a matter of

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<sup>118</sup> “will, n.1”. OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press.

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/229046?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=AmV48V&>.

<sup>119</sup> “duty, n.”. OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press.

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/58732?redirectedFrom=duty>.

adherence to traditional laws and manners.”<sup>120</sup> Duty cannot be whatever one wants, but nor is it blind adherence to the rules. She introduces the idea that there must be some discernment and judgment from the person about his duty. Patrick Goold, another critic, takes this idea one step further and notes that “to have integrity is to obey, but not in the superficial sense in which obedience is frequently taken. Neither mere compliance with the law nor adherence to generally accepted mores is sufficient or even necessary. What is necessary is recognition of those authorities that are seen, after conscientious reflection, genuinely to command respect.”<sup>121</sup> There must be a conscious act of the will to align itself with virtue through education and reflection. Goold is pointing out that “manners” cannot replace the need for “right conduct.” “Manners” might appear good, but the blind acceptance of rules does not help the person know why he is to follow these rules, only that he should. Without a deeper understanding of why he follows the rules, a character will only gain the appearance of virtue and not its possession. Real discernment leads to possession because one has reflected on why he should or should not act a certain way. He reflects to find the highest good and align his duty to those who deserve respect after careful consideration.

There is no greater rejection of duty in the novel than that of Maria Bertram. The reader can observe how her incomplete education along with her inability to reflect, contributes to the misdirection of her will. Early in the novel, the reader sees her thoughts on duty when “being now in her twenty-first year, Maria Bertram was beginning to think matrimony a duty; and as a 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, which was now a prime object, it became, by the same

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<sup>120</sup> Ruderman, *The Pleasures of Virtue*, 10.

<sup>121</sup> Patrick Goold, “Obedience and Integrity in *Mansfield Park*,” *Renascence* 39 (Summer 1987): 467.

rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could.”<sup>122</sup> For Maria, duty is tied to the mercenary view of education seen earlier. Tarpley notes that “like Mary,...Maria randomly selects what she feels is her ‘moral duty,’ grounding these choices not with the unifying spiritual context that constancy provides but with the vanity and egotism that is reinforced by her education, by her aunt, and, Austen suggests, by her nature. (Consider Sir Thomas’s closing reflection about Maria that ‘something must have been wanting within’).”<sup>123</sup> Without actual principle, Maria uses her own will as her guiding principle. She seems to see duty in general terms as the eldest daughter of a gentlemen (most likely provided by Mrs. Norris) and is aware she must marry. Fortunately, at an appropriate time, Mrs. Norris finds the wealthiest man in the neighborhood for her to marry. Without having been given a clear idea of what duty is and the importance of upholding it, Maria is left to assume that her own will is the source of her duty. Maria’s understanding of duty, Tarpley observes, “has been corrupted such that utility guides her ‘rule of moral obligation.’ Her egoism transforms the neutral good of wealth and position into entitlements that outrank or erase such goods as proper respect and sincere affection for her potential husband.”<sup>124</sup> The only value Mr. Rushworth has is in his fortune; a sentiment echoed by Mrs. Norris who states that “he is not a shining character, but he has a thousand good qualities!” and all thousand of them lie in the bank.<sup>125</sup>

Maria’s acceptance of her own will is the rejection of duty as her will does not align with virtue. When presented with the problem of the locked gate at Sotherton instead of dutifully

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<sup>122</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 44. Maria’s parents and aunt have inadvertently taught her to value marrying well. Thinking about Sir Thomas’s own understanding of duty and education, he is more concerned with manners and position. She believes that money will make her happy because until the arrival of the Crawfords, it has been enough to make her so.

<sup>123</sup> Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*, 63-4.

<sup>124</sup> Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*, 33.

<sup>125</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 222.

waiting for Mr. Rushworth, her fiancé, who is fetching the key, she is prodded by Henry to exert her will and she does so quite forcefully, stating, “Prohibited! nonsense! I certainly can get out that way, and I will. Mr. Rushworth will be here in a moment you know—we shall not be out of sight.”<sup>126</sup> Maria is choosing her will and rejecting her duty—she will go through the gate with a man of no relation instead of waiting for Mr. Rushworth. Her choice is rooted in the now and she disregards the consequences. She does not care for the feelings of Mr. Rushworth or her duty to him.

This active choice can be seen in the theatrical at Sotherton as well. When Edmund tries to engage her sense of duty to reject a role in the play, reasoning that it would go against their father’s wishes. Maria deflects the appeal to duty by giving an answer that aligns “good etiquette” with her will—stating that there are other young women among the party who are participating. Edmund then calls on her duty as the leader of the group to set “the example.—If others have blundered, it is your place to put them right, and shew them what true delicacy is.—In all points of decorum, *your* conduct must be law to the rest of the party.”<sup>127</sup> He attempts to apply to her sense of duty (which she does not have) in order to motivate her to “right conduct.” This appeal ultimately does not work and she again argues from a stand point of “good etiquette”— “I really cannot undertake to harangue all the rest upon a subject of this kind.—*There* would be the greatest indecorum I think.”<sup>128</sup> Edmund is arguing from the standard of “right conduct” and Maria under the guise of “good etiquette”; because of this, neither can convince the other. Edmund does not know that Maria lacks the understanding of “right conduct”

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<sup>126</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 116.

<sup>127</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 165.

<sup>128</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 165.

and the desire to apply it: Maria for her part, desires to follow her will and uses the concept of “good etiquette” to validate her position.

In volume three, Maria rejects even the idea of “good conduct” to validate her position when she abandons Mr. Rushworth to run away with Henry Crawford (541-2). Maria is the one who initiates the abandonment—“all that followed was the result of her imprudence; and he went off with her at last, because he could not help it, regretting Fanny even in the moment.”<sup>129</sup> The reader learns from Lady Bertram’s narrative to Fanny about the particulars of what happened (518-32). The initial hint that something is not right with Maria, comes from a friend of Sir Thomas “who hearing and witnessing a good deal to alarm him in that quarter, wrote to recommend Sir Thomas’s coming to London himself, and using his influence with his daughter, to put an end to an intimacy which was already exposing her to unpleasant remarks, and evidently making Mr. Rushworth uneasy.”<sup>130</sup> What is interesting, is that in theory, only under the authority of her father can her conduct be corrected; in theory because Sir Thomas arrives too late.<sup>131</sup> Mr. Rushworth is incapable of subjecting Maria either to his will or to her duty. She continues to act in accord with her own will regardless of the consequences. Maria’s inability to be a dutiful daughter-in-law has far-reaching consequences. When Maria abandons Mr. Rushworth, her maid is supported by Mrs. Rushworth Senior to come forth and trumpet the fault of Maria. The narrator remarks casually, but pointedly, that “the two ladies, even in the short time they had been together, had disagreed; and the bitterness of the elder against her daughter-

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<sup>129</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 542.

<sup>130</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 520-1.

<sup>131</sup> Maria could very well deny that her father has any authority over her since she is now a married woman. This would have been an interesting scene and events might have ended differently as Sir Thomas definitely has sway over Mr. Rushworth and could probably convinced him to leave London with Maria.

in-law might perhaps, arise almost as much from the personal disrespect with which she had herself been treated, as from sensibility for her son.”<sup>132</sup> Mrs. Rushworth Senior has no motivation or obligation to keep the infidelity of Maria a secret and the offensive manner of Maria exacerbates the problem.<sup>133</sup>

When Maria’s true nature has been revealed, “bitterly did he [Sir Thomas] deplore a deficiency which now he could scarcely comprehend to have been possible. Wretchedly did he feel, that with all the cost and care of an anxious and expensive education, he had brought up his daughters, without their understanding their first duties.”<sup>134</sup> Maria’s lack of duty and the sole use of her own will has serious consequences. By possessing “good manners” she rejects her duty to her father, marries a man she does not love and later abandons, and has no regard for others. She does not know how to behave outside the sphere of Mansfield because of her willfulness. In only following her will, Maria has ruined her life and will have to suffer the consequences of only having appeared virtuous.

While Maria completely rejects her duty and operates purely on her will, Julia is a bit more complex. In a couple of instances throughout the novel, the reader sees her identify what her duty is, yet still choose not to fulfill it or suffer from it. Her ability to do her duty is dictated by her emotions and this poor foundation has kept her from forming the habit of fulfilling her duty. In one scene, Julia defends Fanny against Mrs. Norris in her “good-humour, from the pleasure of the day, [and] did her the justice of exclaiming, ‘I must say, ma’am, that Fanny is as

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<sup>132</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 521.

<sup>133</sup> The narrator also goes on to say that Mrs. Rushworth Senior’s obstinacy does not matter as Maria has fled London with Henry, but I believe this would have at least helped control the damage as this does not look good for anyone.

<sup>134</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 536.



little upon the sofa as any body in the house,”<sup>135</sup> but in the next scene, when Edmund offers to stay behind so Fanny can go to Sotherton she only responds thus: “‘I am sure she ought to be very much obliged to you,’ added Julia, hastily leaving the room as she spoke, from a consciousness that she ought to offer to stay home herself.”<sup>136</sup> Julia’s recognition here shows that she has the self-awareness to know what her duty is, but not enough desire to follow through as it does not benefit her. This inability to completely fulfill her duty will continue at Sotherton when “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 had not formed any essential part of her education, made her miserable under it.”<sup>137</sup> Julia’s manners are enough to keep her in the company of Mrs. Rushworth and Mrs. Norris, but not enough to satisfy her or make the obligation less burdensome. When she finally is free of them, she is short towards Fanny because she has been trapped with the older ladies—“Why, child....Such a penance as I have been enduring, while you were sitting here so composed and so happy! It might have been as well, perhaps, if you had been in my place, but you always contrive to keep out of these scrapes.”<sup>138</sup> Due to her displeasure, she is condescending to Fanny and is upset that her will has been thwarted. She is unable to take comfort in doing her duty or graciously accept her fate. Of this moment David Lodge states that “Julia exemplifies duty divorced from principle. Duty animated by principle is the proper relationship between these two concepts, which are frequently

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<sup>135</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 84.

<sup>136</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 93.

<sup>137</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 106.

<sup>138</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 117.

invoked.”<sup>139</sup> Julia does not understand the true meaning of duty and is trapped by her “manners.” She keeps up the façade of her manners, but as soon as she is able the mask drops and she rails against the innocent Fanny. This lack of integration prevents her from possessing virtue. She has the knowledge of her duty, but lacks the desire and action to fulfill it.

Two other moments occur in the novel before Maria’s affair to establish that Julia is guided by her will rather than duty and lacks both the desire and action which are needed to possess virtue. When Sir Thomas returns, she announces to the room “I need not be afraid of appearing before him.”<sup>140</sup> She need not be afraid since she is not acting in the play which she refused to take part in because of Henry Crawford’s slight towards her. Julia’s judgment is still removed from principle and she has the benefit of appearing virtuous by chance. Had her vanity not been insulted, this shallow triumph would not have been possible. The second incident occurs later in the novel when Tom is ill. Fanny comments that Maria or Julia “might return to Mansfield when they chose; travelling could be no difficulty to *them*, and she could not comprehend how both could still keep away....Julia was certainly able to quit London whenever she chose.—It appeared from one of her aunt’s letters, that Julia had offered to return if wanted—but this was all.—It was evident that she would rather remain where she was.”<sup>141</sup> Fanny who wishes to return home during Tom’s illness cannot while his sisters can and choose not to do so; not even the fear of death for a sibling can inspire Julia’s sense of duty to overcome her will.

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<sup>139</sup> David Lodge, “The Vocabulary of *Mansfield Park*,” in *Language of Fiction*, ed. David Lodge (London: The Alden Press Ltd., 1967), 102.

<sup>140</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 206.

<sup>141</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 501.

Julia's ultimate rejection of duty comes from her time in London on the account of her elopement, but also on account of her sister. When Henry renews his acquaintance with the Rushworth's house, Julia "had the merit of withdrawing herself from it, and of chusing that time to pay a visit to her other friends, in order to secure herself from being again too much attracted."<sup>142</sup> This is a good decision on Julia's part, but what about Maria? Not once does Julia send a note to Mansfield with her concerns about Henry's influence. This dereliction is similar to her lack of duty towards Tom as her neutral emotions towards her siblings prevents her from identifying her duty towards her family.<sup>143</sup> By ignoring her duty to her family she plays an indirect role in the procurement of her marriage with Yates. Her attitude towards Yates is ambivalent, and he would not have succeeded "had not her sister's conduct burst forth as it did, and her increased dread of her father and of home, on that event—imagining its certain consequence to herself would be greater severity and restraint—made her hastily resolve on avoiding such immediate horrors at all risks....She had not eloped with any worse feelings than those of selfish alarm."<sup>144</sup> The emotion of fear is what drives her to act desperately and willfully as she desires to escape the will of her father and thus acts upon her own will.

Julia is capable of identifying her duty, but not always acting upon it, thus maintaining an appearance of virtue. By the end of the novel, however, the reader learns that "she was humble and wishing to be forgiven, and Mr. Yates, desirous of being really received into the family, was disposed to look up to him and be guided" by Sir Thomas.<sup>145</sup> Julia's understanding of duty is not as firm as Fanny's or Edmund's, but there does seem to be a growth of understanding about what

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<sup>142</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 539.

<sup>143</sup> I would not include her speaking up for Fanny as a sign of family duty because she only does so in the heat of the moment when her own emotions are positive and high.

<sup>144</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 540.

<sup>145</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 534.

is owed to whom and the openness to learn. Her arc is redemptive as she is initially deficient in her duty, but by the end she comes to a better understanding of what her duty is and has a willingness to submit to it. This willingness to submit gains her a better ending than Maria and puts her on the path to virtue.

Sir Thomas desires to do his duty and continually acts in accord with his belief. His understanding of duty is flawed, however, which prevents him from possessing virtue. Despite his good intentions, Sir Thomas fails in his duty as he does not provide a proper education for his daughters and they grow up with the appearance of virtue. Fanny is the only one who receives a proper education (and this is from Edmund), but she is the only one who is accused of not doing her duty. Sir Thomas, because he does not have a proper understanding of virtue, reacts poorly to Fanny in what appears to him to be a show of will. It is not until after Maria's affair that Sir Thomas learns what the ultimate duty is and to orient himself towards virtue.

Sir Thomas's idea of duty is focused on "manners" and the possession of material goods, which is why he is appalled at Fanny for rejecting Crawford. As Fanny's guardian and benefactor, he has a vested interest in her future. When she rejects Henry without consulting him, he feels justified in telling her:

I will, therefore, only add, as thinking it my duty to mark my opinion of your conduct—that you have disappointed every expectation I had formed, and proved yourself of a character the very reverse of what I had supposed. For I *had*, Fanny, as I think my behaviour must have shewn, formed a very favourable opinion of you from the period of my return to England. I had thought you peculiarly free from *wilfulness* of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in

modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shewn me that you can be *wilful* and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you—without even asking their advice.<sup>146</sup>

Moments before Sir Thomas tells Fanny he thinks well of her, her understanding, and her judgment, but the moment that she acts counter to his belief of duty, he turns on her.<sup>147</sup> Sir Thomas sees himself as the highest authority and thereby fails to understand Fanny's position and her belief in an authority higher than himself. Sir Thomas's accusations are unjust, but show the reader that his understanding of duty is aligned with marrying for material gain. Sir Thomas even compares her to his own daughters and tells her that if he had not been consulted by his daughters if they had received half such a proposal, he "should have thought it a gross violation of duty and respect. *You* are not to be judged by the same rule. You do not owe me the duty of a child."<sup>148</sup> Although she may not owe him the duty of a child, he still expects a similar level of deference from her. By her not consulting him, Sir Thomas feels slighted. In his anger, Sir Thomas is unable to accept Fanny's behavior and what he deems a "rejection" of duty.

Sir Thomas learns what real rejection of duty is after Maria and Henry's affair at the end of the novel. Maria rejects her duty as a wife and has made her family the center of scandal. She breaks even the idea of "manners" when she chooses to abandon her husband for her lover. Her affair shocks her whole family and there is a ripple effect among them: Tom's illness becomes

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<sup>146</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 367, (emphasis mine in last two sentences).

<sup>147</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 360-364.

<sup>148</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 368.

worse; Fanny is justified in her rejection of Henry's proposal; Julia elopes with Yates; Edmund and Mary are separated forever; and Sir Thomas learns how he has erred. Sir Thomas realizes "how ill he had judged, in expecting to counteract what was wrong in Mrs. Norris, by its reverse in himself, clearly saw that he had but increased the evil."<sup>149</sup> After the affair, Sir Thomas understands how little he knows his own daughters and Fanny, as his imposing exterior has isolated them from him. He finally sees the principles his daughters are lacking and learns to value Fanny for he was "sick of ambitions and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper."<sup>150</sup> Sir Thomas has a more loving and open approach with most of his children: for Julia and Yates, he is a guide and role model; and for Fanny and Edmund, he is a doting father.<sup>151</sup> His understanding of not only duty, but also his understanding of how to guide and form duty is corrected. By gaining proper understanding and putting his new knowledge to action, he is now on the course to virtue.

At the end of the novel, Henry too learns the values of good principle, but it is not until his happy end is out of reach. Throughout the novel, Henry desires his own will which he follows with no opposition from principle or duty. He is independent and his only financial obligation is his estate which he ignores (unless it is hunting season).<sup>152</sup> His independence has given him the freedom to pursue whatever suits his fancy and, with no principles to guide him, has led him to be directed by his own pleasure. Without duty, Henry acts upon his will and similar to Maria, cares only for the present with no thought to the future or past. He decides to pursue the Bertram sisters because they amuse him and Fanny because he is bored. The

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<sup>149</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 535.

<sup>150</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 545.

<sup>151</sup> While nothing is said about Tom's relationship with his father. The reader can assume that as Tom "became what he ought to be" his relationship with his father also improved (534).

<sup>152</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 134-5.

domination of his will as his guiding principle keeps him from attaining virtue and leads to his downfall

Henry sees the Bertram sisters and Fanny as means of enjoying himself while he is at Mansfield. On the trip to Sotherton, he plays with the affections of both sisters and both sisters believe they are the favorite. Later in the novel when Henry becomes bored after the departure of the Bertram sisters, he creates a scheme to pursue Fanny as a challenge for himself. Henry tells Mary, “I must take care of my mind....I do not like to eat the bread of idleness. No, my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me.”<sup>153</sup> Without regard for Fanny or her feelings, he plans to play with her and her emotions, similar to his toying with the Bertram sisters. Edwards states, “His attraction to Fanny stems from her resistance, from his need to prove the strength of his will by breaking hers.”<sup>154</sup> Henry needs to prove that he is superior. His will to dominate is stronger than any principle or duty. His disregard for her and her future exemplifies that Henry thinks only of the present and that he does not care for the consequences of his actions. Fortunately, Fanny refuses even to play Henry’s game and is vexed when he attempts to engage her feelings. After his failed proposal to Fanny, Henry continues to press his suit. Fanny becomes angry and notes that “here was again a something of the same Mr. Crawford whom she had so reprobated before. How evidently was there a gross want of feeling and humanity where his own pleasure was concerned—And, alas! how always known *no principle to supply as a duty what the heart was deficient in*. Had her own affections been as free—as perhaps they ought to have been—he never could have engaged them.”<sup>155</sup> Not having any principles to guide him, Henry is left to follow his

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<sup>153</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 267.

<sup>154</sup> Edwards, “The Difficult Beauty of *Mansfield Park*,” 66.

<sup>155</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 379, (emphasis mine).

own will. This is a cyclical problem because his selfish will leads him to his own desires and not virtue.

In order to impress Fanny, Henry begins to take an interest in the affairs on his estate. When he positively intercedes on behalf of a tenant, he reflects that “he had gone, had done even more good than he had foreseen, had been useful to more than his first plan had comprehended, and was now able to congratulate himself upon it, and to feel, that in performing a duty, he had secured agreeable recollections for his own mind....This was aimed, and well aimed, at Fanny.”<sup>156</sup> Despite the initial desire to impress Fanny, Henry discovers the personal benefit of performing his duty and looking after his tenants. This inspires him, along with the knowledge of Fanny’s approval, to go to Everingham to continue his duty of managing his estate. With the end goal of impressing Fanny, however, he will only be able to obtain the appearance of virtue and not its possession. His reason for doing his duty may be a good start, but has a shaky foundation and will need true principles and habit in order to become stable and lasting. On his way to Everingham, Henry stops in London and his new sense of duty is tested. Away from the person he is trying to impress, his desire to do his duty does not last. Soon after he returns to London, his vanity takes control of his actions and he never arrives at Everingham. His will overrides his new-found sense of duty and keeps him from possessing virtue and separates him from Fanny forever. Henry seems to attempt to gain some virtue, even if for the wrong reasons. Unlike other characters, Henry lacks the virtue of habit—habitually choosing virtue—in order to make the virtue stick. Maria and Mary do not desire to learn the proper meaning of duty and continue on with their misconception with no desire to change.

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<sup>156</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 469.



Similar to Henry, Mary pursues her own will throughout the novel. She also maintains the same mercenary view of marriage and others, believing that “It is every body’s duty to do as well for themselves as they can” and that “every thing is to be got with money.”<sup>157</sup> Seeing this as her duty, she has yet to be married and is still waiting for someone worth her 20,000/. An early indication of her desire to follow her own will is in the matter of borrowing Fanny’s horse. She actively chooses to delay its return and when she does return the horse she tells Fanny, “My dear Miss Price...I am come to make my own apologies for keeping you waiting—but I have nothing in the world to say for myself—I knew it was very late, and that I was behaving extremely ill; and, therefore, if you please, you must forgive me. Selfishness must always be forgiven you know, because there is no hope of a cure.”<sup>158</sup> This attitude signifies not only that she knows what she has done is wrong, but also that she does not care. Mary rejects the duty of her promise and follows her own will despite the inconvenience to Fanny. Her will continues to dominate as she pursues Edmund. When the play scheme arrives, she uses her influence over Edmund to persuade him to join despite his opposition and continually attempts to persuade him to give up his profession as a clergyman. She distances herself from Edmund when he does not conform to her will and is unwilling to give up her own wishes in order to become a clergyman’s wife. Mary only renews her relationship with Edmund when Tom is in danger of dying and there is a possibility of Edmund’s inheriting Mansfield.

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<sup>157</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 336, 69. This attitude toward the importance of money seems to stem from her friends, especially Mrs. Fraser. Edmund notes in a letter to Fanny that “she is a cold-hearted, vain woman, who has married entirely from convenience, and though evidently unhappy in her marriage, places her disappointment, not to faults of judgment and temper, or disproportion of age, but to her being after all, less affluent than many of her acquaintance...and is the determined supporter of every thing mercenary and ambitious” (488).

<sup>158</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 80.

Mary is unable to be happy unless it is on her own terms and according to her own will. Her inability, however, to reject the education she received from her aunt and uncle or London society interferes with her future happiness and her ability to obtain virtue. She does not possess the desire for doing her duty or obtaining virtue. In the episode at Sotherton, she applauds the discontinuation of household prayer, telling Edmund, “Every generation has its improvements.”<sup>159</sup> Mary’s lack of moral principle is what ultimately separates her from Edmund and dissolves even her appearance of virtue once Maria and Henry’s affair surfaces. Her inability to condemn the affair as a moral wrong severs her acquaintance with Edmund. She loses Edmund and “was long in finding...any one who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, whose character and manners could authorize a hope of the domestic happiness she had there learnt to estimate, or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head.”<sup>160</sup> Too late does Mary learn what to truly value.

Edmund differs from Mary in accepting his duty instead of his will. Edmund has a firm understanding of his duty plus the desire and the will to act upon it. With the introduction of Mary to Mansfield, however, the reader sees Edmund in an emotional conflict as he allows Mary to gain influence over him. While Edmund struggles to understand Mary and her role in his life, he never waivers from his duty as a clergyman and in the end his dedication to his duty will keep him on the path of virtue.

In the chapel at Sotherton, Edmund defends the role of the clergyman by advocating for those clergymen who live in their parish and are a model of virtue to their parishioners. The role is not as Mary calls it, “nothing,” as clergymen are the guardians of morality and “if the man

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<sup>159</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 101.

<sup>160</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 543.

who holds it is so, it is by the neglect of his duty, by foregoing its just importance, and stepping out of his place to appear what he ought not to appear.”<sup>161</sup> He goes one step further when pressed by Mary to make the distinction between “manners” and “conduct.” In response to her assertion that clergyman are unable to “govern the conduct and fashion the manners of a large congregation...[when] one scarcely sees a clergyman out of his pulpit,”<sup>162</sup> Edmund states that “The *manners* I speak of, might rather be called *conduct*, perhaps, the result of good principles; the effect, in short, of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend; and it will, I believe, be every where found, that as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation.”<sup>163</sup> A good clergyman will positively shape the conduct of his congregation, which is the backbone of society. In a place like London, there can be no hope of a clergyman having the ability Edmund speaks of because there is no personal relationship that is established or value given to the clergy.

Edmund is willing to perform his duty by fostering a personal relationship with his parishioners despite the lack of comfort he may endure in the future. When Henry mentions renting Thornton Lacey, Edmund’s future rectory, Sir Thomas rejects the idea, telling Henry:

[A] parish has wants and claims which can be known only by a clergyman constantly resident, and which no proxy can be capable of satisfying to the same extent. Edmund might, in the common phrase, do the duty of Thornton, that is, he might read prayers and preach, without giving up Mansfield Park; he might ride over, every Sunday, to a house nominally inhabited, and go through divine service; he might be the clergyman of

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<sup>161</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 108.

<sup>162</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 108.

<sup>163</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 109.

Thornton Lacey every seventh day, for three or four hours, if that would content him. But it will not. He knows that human nature needs more lessons than a weekly sermon can convey, and that if he does not live among his parishioners and prove himself, by constant attention their well-wisher and friend, he does very little either for their good or his own.<sup>164</sup>

This is the full service that Edmund was attempting to explain to Mary earlier. Edmund takes his role as a clergyman seriously and understands what is required of him in order to fulfill his duty faithfully. Edmund has aligned his will to his duty and is able to carry out this important role cheerfully. He knows that he is not fit for other professions that Mary suggests such as the law because he is past the age at which one begins to train for a profession nor does he have the knowledge to undertake them. By not allowing his will to be dominated by Mary's will, Edmund is eventually able to fulfill his duty. If Edmund had not remained faithful to his duty, then he might not have discovered Mary's true character until it was too late. His profession keeps Mary at a distance and after Maria and Henry's affair, separates them forever. Edmund is then able to obtain a better ending by marrying someone who actually possesses virtue, like himself, instead of someone who only has the appearance of virtue.

The one time Edmund falters is in the matter of the play. Despite his public refusal to act, he eventually decides to do so under the guise of keeping strangers from entering the play (183). This flimsy excuse is used to justify his desire to act with Mary and as he tells Fanny, "It [the play] is an evil—but I am certainly making it less than it might be."<sup>165</sup> Edmund allows his desire to turn him away from virtue instead of aligning his desire and will towards virtue. In his

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<sup>164</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 288.

<sup>165</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 183.

calculations Edmund does not account for the idea that Charles Maddox (the stranger whose place he is taking) may not be available or inclined to act. For Edmund, the idea of acting is the easiest solution to gaining influence over his siblings and reining in their production; however, this influence comes at the cost of his (brief) moral descent; “Edmund had descended from that moral elevation which he had maintained before, and they [Maria and Tom] were both as much the better as the happier for the descent.”<sup>166</sup> Not until the arrival of Sir Thomas does Edmund see the error in his judgment in straying from the path of right and repent of his acting (216, 219). This brief foray away from virtue is an example of how even those who desire virtue can stray away from it; however, if one does desire to he can just as easily regain the path to virtue.

Fanny is the only character in the novel who consistently fulfills her duty without too much doubt.<sup>167</sup> Her education and ability to reflect properly have formed her understanding, and her duty is founded on good principles. Throughout the novel, the reader sees Fanny act in accordance with duty and in such a way as to align her will with it. Fanny understands the importance of setting the example. While in the chapel at Sotherton, the issue of the duty of the master and mistress of the household to their servants as concerns their spiritual life is a topic of conversation. Mary is against the idea of required chapel time and defends her view by asserting that the master and mistress do not do what they order their servants to do. This argument receives backlash from Fanny and Edmund who tell her, “*That* is hardly Fanny’s idea of a family assembling....If the master and mistress do *not* attend themselves, there must be more harm than good in the custom.”<sup>168</sup> Fanny believes that the master and mistress set the example for their

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<sup>166</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 185.

<sup>167</sup> Edmund waivers over his decision about Mary for the length of their acquaintance which is at least six months. Fanny on the other hand waivers on her decision to reject a role in the play for a few hours.

<sup>168</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 101.

servants and appearances will not be enough; they must also be virtuous. This is accomplished by setting the example and fulfilling their duty to guide and form those in their household.

While Fanny knows the duty of a master to his servant, she has a harder time distinguishing her duty to her family when it does not align with her will. As mentioned earlier in the paper, Fanny is not always sure what her duty is and can be seen deliberating right after her initial rejection of acting. She is up in the East room reflecting on if her actions are correct when Edmund interrupts to discuss his joining the play. Fanny's resolve then hardens over Edmund's inconstancy as he decides to join the acting scheme. She reflects, "To be acting! After all his objections—objections so just and so public! After all that she had heard him say, and seen him look, and known him to be feeling. Could it be possible? Edmund so inconsistent.... Was he not wrong?.... The doubts and alarms as to her own conduct, which had previously distressed her... were become of little consequence now."<sup>169</sup> Edmund, by rejecting his duty, strengthens Fanny's resolve to do hers. Separate from herself, Fanny is able to see her situation in a new light and identify her feelings were she to bend like Edmund. She is able to use his negative example as a way to verify her duty, which is happily in accordance with her will. Fanny is ever conscious of doing her duty to Sir Thomas which is the main reason for her refusal to act in the play as she "could never have been easy in joining a scheme which, considering only her uncle, she must condemn altogether."<sup>170</sup> She knows the play to be wrong on moral grounds, which allows her to reject the call to act, but the reader also sees that the considerations of her uncle are enough to keep her from acting. Duty is above the will, and fortunately Fanny has a rightly-ordered will that makes the acceptance of her duty easier. Fanny's actions are correct and praised by Edmund

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<sup>169</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 183-4.

<sup>170</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 187.

when he tells Sir Thomas, “We have all been more or less to blame...every one of us, excepting Fanny. Fanny is the only one who has judged rightly throughout, who has been consistent. *Her* feelings have been steadily against it from first to last. She never ceased to think of what was due to you. You will find Fanny every thing you could wish.”<sup>171</sup> This success boosts Fanny’s confidence and affirms her ability to distinguish her duty correctly.<sup>172</sup>

Despite Fanny’s better understanding between herself and her uncle after his return from Antigua, she is still aware of her place and what is owed to her family. When she is invited to dinner at the Grants, she “would not venture, even on his [Edmund’s] encouragement, to such a flight of audacious independence” to accept the invitation without checking with her aunt and uncle; “it was soon settled that if nothing were heard to the contrary, Mrs. Grant might expect her.”<sup>173</sup> Fanny only conditionally accepts the dinner invitation knowing she has a duty to her aunt and must first check with her aunt before committing herself. This action is applauded by Sir Thomas once he hears of it, telling Mrs. Norris, “Mrs. Grant’s shewing civility to Miss Price, to Lady Bertram’s niece, could never want explanation. The only surprize I can feel is that this should be the *first* time of its being paid. Fanny was perfectly right in giving only a conditional answer. She appears to feel as she ought....I can see no reason why she should be denied the indulgence.”<sup>174</sup> She once again affirms that she knows what is due to her family. Another similar occurrence is when the Crawfords offer to take her home to Mansfield from Portsmouth.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 219.

<sup>172</sup> Fanny, however, almost bends as she is called upon a second time to read a few lines—“She had known it would irritate and distress her—she had known it her duty to keep away. She was properly punished” (120). Fortunately, the arrival of Sir Thomas saves her from having to read these few lines as the peer pressure is too much to resist with Edmund against her.

<sup>173</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 251.

<sup>174</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 255.

<sup>175</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 476-7, 482-3.

Although Fanny desires to go home and the offer from the Crawfords is tempting, she recognizes that to accept would be a presumption on her part and go against Sir Thomas's wishes for her to be at Portsmouth. Fanny is able to align her will with duty and not suffer from it: her duty requires her to reject the offer and her will balks at being indebted to the Crawfords.

Fanny's real test of duty comes when she is confronted by Sir Thomas about Henry's proposal. According to Lady Bertram "it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this," but is it?<sup>176</sup> Sarah Emsley makes an important observation that "it is one thing for Fanny to sacrifice her time and energy for the comforts and whims of others, but it is quite a different thing to sacrifice her body and soul to the preferences of those she cannot trust."<sup>177</sup> Sir Thomas erroneously believes that she is rejecting her duty as a poor young lady by not accepting the hand of an "eligible" suitor and instead following her will, but Fanny knows that accepting him would be to break the moral law of acting against her conscience, a law higher than the temporal law of Sir Thomas.<sup>178</sup> With this in mind, "she must do her duty, and trust that time might make her duty easier than it now was."<sup>179</sup> Sir Thomas is ignorant about the whole truth concerning Henry and his daughters, therefore Fanny forgives Sir Thomas for treating her as he does. She recognizes her duty is to reject a man lacking in character who has only the appearance of virtue, not the possession. Sir Thomas has yet to learn what characteristics make up a virtuous person and sees her rejection of Crawford as a rejection of what he considers a duty—the end goal being wealth, status, and prestige. Despite the strong opposition, Fanny remains firm in her decision to follow her duty and reject Crawford.

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<sup>176</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 384.

<sup>177</sup> Emsley, *Philosophy of the Virtues*, 110.

<sup>178</sup> Tarpley, *Constancy & the Ethics of Jane Austen's Mansfield Park*, 37-8.

<sup>179</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 382.



Duckworth is correct in noting that this stance is a confirmation of Austen's own position and that "even when the self is alone and unsupported by human example of approval, it must still imperatively act in accordance with what is 'right,' must still support what is valid in its moral inheritance."<sup>180</sup> One must always do his duty despite the difficulty that may arise; Fanny, the "weak" one, passes this test.

After Maria's affair, her duty does become easier, and when Edmund finally applies for her hand, nothing could please Sir Thomas more, for he was "sick of ambitions and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper."<sup>181</sup> By accomplishing her duty and aligning her will to it, Fanny is able to achieve virtue and her happy ending—with the addition of being the daughter Sir Thomas wanted.<sup>182</sup>

Not until all three aspects of duty are employed can a character possess virtue. Knowledge, action, and desire must all be present otherwise the character only appears to possess virtue. David Lodge states that "Jane Austen creates a world, in which the social values which govern behaviour at Mansfield Park are highly prized (the Mansfield: Portsmouth antithesis makes this clear) but only when they are informed by some moral order of value which transcends the social. The voice of the narrator, who sees through appearances, is insistent on this point."<sup>183</sup> The dogged pursuit of following one's own will does not bring him happiness or virtue. This is clearly seen throughout *Mansfield Park* as those characters who pursue their will—the Crawfords and Maria Bertram—are unable to obtain virtue, not to mention their own

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<sup>180</sup> Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, 76.

<sup>181</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 545.

<sup>182</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 546.

<sup>183</sup> Lodge, "The Vocabulary of *Mansfield Park*," 101-2.

happiness. Fanny and Edmund are able to submit themselves to a higher order and fulfill their duty and thereby retain their virtue and gain happiness.

## Conclusion

In *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen is particularly interested in the examination of the whole person. Why does a character behave in a certain manner or what is the rationale for his decisions? Evidence for this investigation of the whole person appears throughout the novel as Wiltshire notes, “*Mansfield Park* is a novel in the mode of the omniscient narrator, and for the first and only time in her novels, Jane Austen continuously allows the narrative to move freely in and out of the consciousnesses of a whole range of characters.”<sup>184</sup> This free movement is essential for an accurate understanding of the characters. Without the insight into Maria or Henry, the reader might be inclined to be more forgiving of their immoral behavior or write them off as ensnared by each other. In contrast, because the reader is allowed to see the inner thoughts and feelings of characters, people such as Julia or Sir Thomas receive more sympathy. This is what makes Henry’s actions towards Fanny more suspicious, because the reader knows what is really in his heart, or understands Mary’s desire to manipulate. Every time the reader is placed inside the consciousness of a character, this is a signal for the reader to pay attention. These insights of character provide the rationale for the conclusion of a character—if the reader fails to identify these insights of character, then the end can appear wrong.

Each aspect alone—education, reflection, and duty—assists the reader in distinguishing between “manners” and “conduct,” but combined, they illuminate the view Austen has of the whole person. Observing a character’s education, the reader can see the dangers of a bad education and how a firm foundation is vital to orienting a character towards the proper end of virtue. Fanny and Edmund receive a proper education and receive the best end. Other characters

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<sup>184</sup> Wiltshire, “*Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*,” 61.

who have had to modify their education such as Julia and Tom, receive a better end than Maria and the Crawfords, who do not modify their education. The inability to learn continually and correct previous errors keeps characters from attaining virtue.

While Austen attributes great significance to early education of virtue, she also accounts for nature and gives the reader hope that even if someone is not virtuous to begin with, he or she has an opportunity to change for the better *if* he or she chooses to do so. Without the conscious choice to submit the will to duty however, there is little chance of the character achieving virtue. The Crawfords and Maria are unable to submit to duty and allow their will to dominate their lives. Only after the affair do the Crawfords reflect on not only the loss of Mansfield, but also the loss of the people who made the place infinitely superior. These reflections occur at the end of the novel, but perhaps the Crawfords and Maria would not have lost what they had gained, had they been able to reflect properly on their actions and the actions of those around them. Their inability to look beyond the present moment leads them to follow their will, a will oriented towards self, not virtue. Alternatively, Fanny uses her reflections to understand herself and those around her. By reflecting, Fanny makes a conscious decision to orient herself towards virtue and to choose the good.

In the end, Fanny receives her good end, not because Austen chooses to give it to her out of blind favoritism, but because Fanny herself has earned it. Fanny's proper education, ability to reflect, and her ability to do her duty directly contribute to her happiness and provide the evidence against favoritism. The careful tracing of the above aspects proves that Austen is indeed intentional with her work and is not arbitrarily reinforcing conservative values or rejecting the distinction between "good manners" and "right conduct." The study of the whole

person by Austen emphasizes not only the difference between the appearance and possession of virtue, but also the importance of choosing virtue.

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