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The Boundaries of Mansfield Park

The Dirt at Portsmouth

IMMEDIATELY before the climax of *Mansfield Park*, in the last chapter of Fanny Price's exile at Portsmouth, comes a passage extraordinary for Jane Austen—extraordinary both in the concreteness of its details and in the sense of revulsion it records:

She felt that she had, indeed, been three months there; and the sun's rays falling strongly into the parlour, instead of cheering, made her still more melancholy; for sun-shine appeared to her a totally different thing in a town and in the country. Here, its power was only a glare, a stifling, sickly glare, serving but to bring forward stains and dirt that might otherwise have slept. There was neither health nor gaiety in sun-shine in a town. She sat in a blaze of oppressive heat, in a cloud of moving dust; and her eyes could only wander from the walls marked by her father's head, to the table cut and knotted by her brothers, where stood the tea-board never thoroughly cleaned, the cups and saucers wiped in streaks, the milk a mixture of motes floating in thin blue, and the bread and butter growing every minute more greasy than even Rebecca's hands had first produced it. . . .

The vulgar confusion that Fanny has registered ever since her arrival at Portsmouth is here brought vividly into focus. From the walls marked by the oil of her father's head to the unclean utensils on the table marred by her brothers, the motes in the milk and the greasy bread, Austen's heroine sees her family home as stained and polluted. Fanny may have been too long pampered at Mansfield Park, or Austen may have been tempted to indulge in some conventional disparagement of town life. But neither explanation accounts for the intensity of this consciousness of dirt—nor for its surfacing at this particular moment, as if prescient of the moral revulsion about to come. The passage continues:

Her father read his newspaper, and her mother lamented over the ragged carpet as usual, while the tea was in preparation—and wished Rebecca would mend it; and Fanny was first roused by his calling out to her, after humphing and considering over a particular paragraph—"What's the name of your great cousins in town, Fan?"

A moment's recollection enabled her to say, "Rushworth, Sir."

"And don't they live in Wimpole Street?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Then, there's the devil to pay among them, that's all."

Fanny's disgusted perception of dirt and spoilage among her immediate kin at Portsmouth thus directly anticipates her shocked verdict on the "too horrible . . . confusion of guilt" among her great cousins in London.¹ The squalor of Mrs. Price's housekeeping is inevitably swallowed up in the horror of Mrs. Rushworth's adultery, and the scandalized Fanny is soon summoned back to Mansfield and away from the mess on the family table. Guilty confusion commands more attention than the homely Portsmouth kind, especially in a world so insistently moralized as Austen's: distracted by the climactic revelations, the rush back to familiar characters and to moral judgment, the reader, too, tends to forget the dirt. But the sense of pollution recorded here is characteristic of the design of Austen's most troublesome novel.

Dirt, Mary Douglas has suggested, is not so much an idea in itself as a function of the need for order—"a kind of compendium category for all events which blur, smudge, contradict, or otherwise confuse accepted classifications."² If pollution ideas come strongly to the fore whenever the lines of a social system are especially precarious or threatened, as Douglas argues,³ it is not surprising that in this interval of heightened anxiety and suspense, Fanny Price should see dirt. The sojourn at Portsmouth has been characterized from its beginning by peculiar tension and disquiet. To be at "home" for the heroine of this novel is in fact to be in exile, displaced from the only ground to which her history has truly attached her. "*That was now the home. Portsmouth was Portsmouth*" (p. 431). No firm period has been fixed for her stay, and in the days before the scandal breaks, the term of her banishment threatens to lengthen indefinitely. The noise and disorder of her father's house have not prompted in Fanny the wish to be mistress of Everingham, as Sir Thomas had hoped, but Henry Crawford's persistent courtship of her at Portsmouth has proved unsettling. Without any serious change of heart, she is nonetheless disarmed by his apparent sincerity and embarrassed by the consciousness of all that distinguishes him from her vulgar relations. To walk upon the High Street with Henry and encounter her father is to bring "pain upon pain, confusion upon confusion" (p. 401). Between her shame at her family and her wavering assessment of Henry's capacity for change, Fanny Price has never before seemed so subject to confusion, her state of mind so vulnerably suspended. Worried and estranged, she must at the same time wait helplessly for the resolution of Edmund's own unsettled state, the outcome of his protracted, indecisive courtship of Mary. Her anxiety has already been further compounded by the news of Tom's illness when the mail brings yet another alarming letter, a hasty note from Mary Crawford, with its disturbing allusions to a scandal she does not name. The troubled suspense that has marked Fanny's entire stay at Portsmouth culminates in still another day of waiting before Mr. Price's newspaper unexpectedly confirms the scandal, and anxiety gives way to "the shock of conviction" (p. 440).

Fanny's revulsion at the news is vehement and absolute. "She passed only from feelings of sickness to shudderings of horror. . . ." And the origin of the sickness is the discovery of people dangerously out of place, of accustomed categories blurred and confounded:

The event was so shocking, that there were moments even when her heart revolted from it as impossible—when she thought it could not be. A woman married only six months ago, a man professing himself devoted, even *engaged*, to another—that other her near relation—the whole family, both families connected as they were by tie upon tie, all friends, all intimate together!—it was too horrible a confusion of guilt, too gross a complication of evil, for human nature, not in a state of utter barbarism, to be capable of!—yet her judgment told her it was so. (p. 441)

As D. A. Miller has noted, "Fanny's curious disbelief and excessive disgust are inadequately served by the moral terms in which they are accounted for."⁴ "Too gross a complication of evil" is closer to the "stains and dirt" in the Prices' parlor than it is to considered judgment. Fanny's revolt from the very event as impossible, her conclusion that "the greatest blessing to every one of kindred with Mrs. Rushworth would be instant annihilation" (p. 442), are only climactic instances of the tendency to organize experience by drawing sharp lines of exclusion. Though Fanny is the principal vehicle of such thinking, the novel as a whole reveals a similar impulse to draw a world divided by clear spatial and ontological boundaries—to envision sunshine as "a totally different thing in a town and in the country." Anxiety about transitional states and ambiguous social relations is repeatedly countered in *Mansfield Park* by this categorical sorting of things into the clean and the dirty, the sacred and the profane.

To approach *Mansfield Park* in so anthropological a spirit may well seem perverse. The inhabitants of the Park are hardly the natives of a distant culture, and few fictional languages would ordinarily seem less translatable into the anthropologist's terms than the subtle discriminations of Jane Austen. But the fact remains that modern readers have persistently felt *Mansfield Park* as somehow alien and remote, and that alone of all her novels, it seems to require special pleading. Indeed a latent tendency to think anthropologically, or at least to associate *Mansfield Park* with the "primitive," can be detected in a number of the novel's critics. Lionel Trilling's attempt to explain "the great fuss that is made over the amateur theatricals" by allusion to "a traditional, almost primitive, feeling about dramatic impersonation" represents probably the most familiar case.⁵ Trilling's contention that there is something Platonic about the novel's distrust of acting has been much disputed,⁶ but he is not alone in reaching for such analogies, nor in responding to what he elsewhere terms the "archaic ethos" of the text.⁷ Even a critic so sensitively attuned to the particulars of cultural history as Alistair Duckworth finds himself supplementing his effective use of Edmund Burke by reference to Lévi-Strauss—suggesting that the feeling for local ground at Mans-

field might instructively be compared to the Bororo Indians' profound attachment to the circular arrangement of their huts.⁸ The frequent association of Fanny Price with Cinderella, sometimes surrounded by vague allusions to "archetype" and "myth," may also arise from the sense that this is the closest of Austen's novels to older forms of story-telling, and that it operates by more primitive laws.⁹

Readings of *Mansfield Park* have repeatedly tried to bring the novel into accord with the rest of Austen's canon and to justify the values that govern it.¹⁰ But even the most acute and learned of such efforts do not quite satisfy—in part, I would suggest, because they must labor under the strain of rationalizing what is not finally rational. Stuart Tave's patient attempt to explain the disapproval of the theatricals is a case in point. Arguing that the issue is not the theatricals in themselves, but "these people in these circumstances," he carefully articulates the "whole series of objections, increasing in specificity and force" which are leveled against the scheme, all the while evading the deep anxiety conveyed by this very need to spin out one objection after another.¹¹ Like other gestures of rejection in *Mansfield Park*, the drive to condemn the theatricals still seems greater than the sum of these reasonable parts. What is missing from such a beautifully rationalized account is the fundamental sense of taint and pollution that seems to underlie so many of the novel's moral judgments. When other critics observe that the passion for theatricals spreads to Mansfield like a "germ," call Mary Crawford's correspondence "tainted," or allude to the "fear of contamination" that pervades the novel,¹² they come closer to what is at once deepest and most troubling in *Mansfield Park*. Even those unappreciative readers who disgustingly reject the book as corrupt and repellent are perhaps more directly in sympathy with the novel's own impulses to sort and discard.¹³

The Purgation of Mansfield Park

When Sir Thomas Bertram returns from Antigua to discover that the "infection" of acting has "spread" from Ecclesford to Mansfield (p. 184), he undertakes to combat that infection by energetically cleaning house. The theater that has been temporarily erected in his billiard room is dismantled, the scene painter dismissed, and "Sir Thomas was in hopes that another day or two would suffice to wipe away every outward memento of what had been, even to the destruction of every unbound copy of 'Lovers' Vows' in the house, for he was burning all that met his eye" (p. 191). It takes just "another day or two" before Mr. Yates, the stranger who has carried the infection to Mansfield, voluntarily quits the house: "Sir Thomas hoped, in seeing him out of it, to be rid of the worst object connected with the scheme, and the last that must be inevitably reminding him of its existence" (pp. 194–95). By wiping away every sign of the theatricals,

even burning the books, Sir Thomas does not merely put an end to his children's acting scheme but ritually purges Mansfield of its dangers. Sir Thomas wants "a home that shuts out noisy pleasures" (p. 186), and his gesture firmly re-establishes those boundaries that "shut out," restoring a space that had been profaned.

The risks of play-acting at Mansfield have been intensified from the start by circumstances in which boundaries are already significantly threatened, by states of uncertain passage and transition. "In a *general* light, private theatricals are open to some objections," Edmund argues, "but as *we* are circumstanced, I must think it would be highly injudicious, and more than injudicious, to attempt any thing of the kind. It would show great want of feeling on my father's account, absent as he is, and in some degree of constant danger; and it would be imprudent, I think, with regard to Maria, whose situation is a very delicate one, considering every thing, extremely delicate" (p. 125). Note that it is not merely Sir Thomas's absence from home that is at issue, but the fact that his travels expose him to "constant danger"—that his perilous journey renders him the object of suspense and anxiety. The anxieties prompted by Maria's "delicate situation" are superficially quite different—the risks she confronts are purely social and psychological, not physical; yet she, too, is embarked on a dangerous passage. Any engagement marks a period of transition, but Maria's social place is further unsettled by the fact that she has been pledged to Mr. Rushworth while her father is absent; engaged, yet not quite engaged, she is even more precariously suspended than is customary between her father's domain and that of her future husband. If acting "is almost certain to prove . . . injurious" to the female sex, as Thomas Gisborne's 1797 *Enquiry* on that sex's duties insisted, then Maria's ambiguous position renders her especially vulnerable. The perils that Gisborne associated with any theatrical performance by a woman—the risks of "unrestrained familiarity with persons of the other sex, which inevitably results from being joined with them in the drama"¹⁴—can only be heightened for one who is tempted to flirt with the relative freedom of a committed woman, even while she lacks the very protection that firm commitment affords. With its own shifting identities, its toying with sexual license and transgression, *Lovers' Vows* is hardly the play to minimize such dangers.

The traditional distrust of the actor's role-playing is never directly articulated in *Mansfield Park*, but the anxiety of boundary-confusion is everywhere felt. Edmund suggests that the theater has its place, in fact, but there is something more than the love of talent behind his preference for "good hardened real acting" over the amateur's kind (p. 124): hardened actors presumably have a more calloused sense of their own boundaries, are less in danger of too fluidly surrendering to their dramatized selves. When Mary Crawford realizes that she must "harden" herself by private rehearsals with Fanny before she can dare to speak Amelia's lines (p. 168), what she seeks to avoid is the embarrassing consciousness that her

dramatic role may be confused with her real one—an embarrassment all the greater because Amelia's immodest speeches themselves transgress the limits appropriate to her sex. Fanny's reluctant attempt to read the part of Anhalt, in contrast, is accompanied "with looks and voice so truly feminine, as to be no very good picture of a man" (p. 169). Her utter incapacity to act, especially to act across gender-lines, emblematically confirms her integrity: Fanny can represent no one but herself.

The fuss over the theatricals reaches its comic climax when Sir Thomas enters his billiard room only to find himself upon a stage, unwittingly cast opposite Yates's "ranting young man." Trivial as the removal of Sir Thomas's billiard table may seem, the "general air of confusion in the furniture" (p. 182) that he discovers on his return is the sign of a more profound disturbance, as the uneasy consciousness of his children confirms. While their father has been in danger, they have thoughtlessly invaded and violated his "own dear room" (p. 181). One violation opens the way to others, and the "confusion of guilt" in London eventually follows. When Edmund grudgingly agreed to act himself rather than open Mansfield to yet more strangers, on the other hand, he characteristically sought "to confine the representation within a much smaller circle" (p. 155)—to narrow and tighten the borders. Here as elsewhere in the novel, anxiety manifests itself in a heightened attention to the sanctity of domestic space.

Mansfield Park may be the most openly Christian of Jane Austen's novels,¹⁵ but the Christianity of its saving remnant is a peculiarly domestic religion. The only place of worship we see the characters enter is a household chapel, and the novel's theological debate begins when Fanny laments the discontinued custom of family prayer: "There is something in a chapel and chaplain so much in character with a great house, with one's ideas of what such a household should be!" (p. 86). Fanny's sense of the sacred is typically rooted in domestic ground, and to her way of thinking, the collective disciplines of large households and of religious practice are naturally linked. As Sir Thomas's later defense of the resident clergy also suggests, religion seems to flourish best in a fixed and local space. Nineteenth-century anthropologists might sharply distinguish the modern, universalist impulses of Christianity from the ancients' worship of family, place, and local gods, but the spiritual emotions with which Fanny and Edmund are associated have much in common with that ancient faith.¹⁶ Of course it is precisely because the current generation at Sotherton no longer frequents the household chapel that Fanny has been moved to invoke the older ways; the awareness of change typically prompts the celebration of domestic ritual. Mary Crawford, in contrast, presumably gives voice to the restless, individualistic spirit of Sotherton's contemporary inhabitants when she replies that "it is safer to leave people to their own devices on such subjects. Every body likes to go their own way. . . ." (p. 87). Mary speaks for the modern temper; but Fanny, like the novel as a whole,

sets herself against the tide of history—almost, in fact, against the very idea of time and change.

Paul Tillich's suggestion that "a nonhistorical interpretation of history, even if arising in Christian countries, must return to paganism in the long run,"¹⁷ may help to explain why the Christianity of *Mansfield Park* so oddly resembles the domestic religion of ancient Rome. Commentators on the novel have often been troubled by what seems to them Sir Thomas's decidedly un-Christian response to his daughter Maria's fall. For the crime of adultery with Henry Crawford, Mrs. Rushworth is apparently to be exiled from Mansfield Park forever. Though Mrs. Norris "would have had her received at home, and countenanced by them all," Sir Thomas "would not hear of it." Mrs. Norris characteristically assumes that the problem is Fanny, but Sir Thomas

very solemnly assured her, that had there been no young woman in question, had there been no young person of either sex belonging to him, to be endangered by the society, or hurt by the character of Mrs. Rushworth, he would never have offered so great an insult to the neighbourhood, as to expect it to notice her. As a daughter—he hoped a penitent one—she should be protected by him, and secured in every comfort, and supported by every encouragement to do right, which their relative situations admitted; but farther than *that*, he would not go. Maria had destroyed her own character, and he would not by a vain attempt to restore what never could be restored, be affording sanction to vice, or in seeking to lessen its disgrace, be anywise accessory to introducing such misery in another man's family, as he had known himself. (pp. 464–65)

As Julia Brown has astutely noted,¹⁸ this has a disquieting resemblance to the paternal conduct recommended by Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, when that cleric advises Mr. Bennet on the elopement of Lydia and Wickham: "You ought certainly to forgive them as a christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing." The idea of permanently banishing one of the Bennet girls seems both menacing and absurd, but the exile of Sir Thomas's child is a sober necessity. Mr. Bennet pointedly mocks Mr. Collins's "notion of christian forgiveness," and Elizabeth knows "what curiosities his letters always were" even before she reads his solemn verdict that "the death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this."¹⁹ But the comedy of Fanny Price's similarly drastic response to the "disgrace" of Maria is far less clear: "it appeared to her, that as far as this world alone was concerned, the greatest blessing to every one of kindred with Mrs. Rushworth would be instant annihilation" (p. 442). The qualifying clause makes an orthodox concession, but as far as this world alone is concerned, Fanny's code of honor seems more Roman than Christian.

Of course Maria has committed adultery, not merely fornication; if her punishment is more severe than Lydia Bennet's, so is her crime. A different system of relations governs the later novel: *Mansfield Park* draws its boundaries more

tightly than does *Pride and Prejudice*, and the transgressions it postulates are correspondingly more extreme. Indeed in a world dominated by worship of the family, adultery is the greatest of crimes, the most threatening violation of domestic purity.²⁰ Lydia Bennet can return to Longbourn a bride, her guilt at least papered over by marriage, but Maria Bertram must be exiled from home forever—lest “a vain attempt to restore what never could be restored” only give further sanction to vice. Though Mary Crawford suggests that Maria might recover partial respectability through a second marriage to her seducer, Edmund indignantly dismisses such an alliance. But if domestic religion requires a strict ban on adultery, the corollary of that rule is a certain bias toward incest:²¹ at the end of the novel, Fanny quickly passes from Edmund’s “only sister” (p. 444) to his wife. While Elizabeth Bennet comes to love and win a once-proud stranger, *Mansfield Park* rejects such cheerfully exogamous impulses in favor of an insistent endogamy. Anticipating both Fanny’s marriage to Henry and her own to Edmund, the misguided Mary Crawford feels that she and Fanny “are born to be connected” and will one day be “sisters” (p. 359). But the novel’s design is with Fanny, who has no intention of mingling Crawfords and Bertrams. “Edmund, you do not know *me*,” she silently addresses her absent cousin; “the families would never be connected, if you did not connect them” (p. 424). Once they learn of the adultery, both Fanny and Edmund take for granted that no further connection between the families is possible. “That Edmund must be for ever divided from Miss Crawford, did not admit of a doubt with Fanny . . .” (p. 453). As for Edmund, though he formally repudiates Mary only when she attempts to gloss over “the dreadful crime” (p. 457), he already arrives at their meeting “regarding it as what was meant to be the last, last interview of friendship, and investing her with all the feelings of shame and wretchedness which Crawford’s sister ought to have known . . .” (p. 454).

It is precisely with such feelings of irremediable shame that Lydia Bennet’s sister conducts what she imagines is her last interview with Darcy, tainted as she is by “such a proof of family weakness, such an assurance of the deepest disgrace” as must divide her from her former suitor forever. But the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* operates by more accommodating laws, and the sibling’s “infamy” there works to unite the lovers, not to sever them. Elizabeth’s very conviction that she has utterly lost Darcy forces her to recognize the strength of her feeling and prepares for his second proposal: “never had she so honestly felt that she could have loved him, as now, when all love must be vain.”²² Darcy’s memory of his own sister’s narrow escape from Lydia’s disgrace, his realization that his pride has kept him from warning others of the danger, prompt him to acknowledge an implicit kinship in the Bennets’ shame—and to demonstrate his honor and his devotion by arranging for Lydia’s marriage. Lady Catherine may fear that if her nephew in turn makes a sister-in-law of “*such* a girl,” the shades of Pemberley

will be “polluted,” but the chief function of her final pronouncements is to render all objections to the lovers’ union absurd. In the closing paragraphs of the novel the narrator informs us that Lady Catherine “condescended” to visit the Darcys at Pemberley “in spite of that pollution which its woods had received.”²³ Though Lady Bertram is also a figure of comedy, no such irony attends her view of Mansfield’s vulnerability to pollution and the need of permanently barring her tainted daughter from the house. “Guided by Sir Thomas,” the narrator assures us, “she thought justly on all important points”—one of which appears to be that Maria’s disgrace can never be “wiped off” (p. 449).

Modest Feminine Loathings

Fanny Price is the only one of Austen’s heroines to have a childhood, and the account of her growing up extends over Austen’s longest period of narrated time. Yet the Austen novel that most resembles a Bildungsroman proves the novel least open to real development and change.²⁴ When Fanny first arrives at Mansfield, her cousins make much of her deficient education; while they profess shock that she cannot name the principal rivers in Russia, the obvious irony will be that it is Fanny who has the least to learn. She may gain in assurance as she gets older, and we have Sir Thomas as a witness to her increasing beauty, but in character and judgment she is essentially formed from the start. Edmund receives credit as her mentor, yet theirs is a very different balance of wisdom from that between Henry Tilney and Catherine Morland or between Knightley and Emma. On all the most critical questions, whether of engaging in theatricals or of falling in love, it is Edmund rather than Fanny who must discover his mistakes. As he himself says after the catastrophe of *Lovers’ Vows*, “Fanny is the only one who has judged rightly throughout, who has been consistent” (p. 187). And in nothing is she more consistent than in her attachment to Edmund: Austen’s narratives typically turn on the heroine’s education in love, yet Fanny’s romantic emotions virtually have no history. Her choice of Edmund seems fixed before such matters are ever consciously at issue, and it remains steadfast throughout.²⁵ Even when she is assiduously wooed by the novel’s charming young man, it is not Fanny but Sir Thomas and Edmund who are nearly seduced by the performance. Like the flirtations of Willoughby, Wickham, and Frank Churchill, Henry Crawford’s pursuit of the heroine serves as a lesson in proper judgment, but in this case the heroine herself requires no enlightenment.

Only while she is indefinitely suspended from Mansfield does Fanny’s firm verdict on Henry’s character seem to waver, and the novel as a whole appear to flirt with the possibility of significant change. “I believe *now* he has changed his mind as to foreseeing the end,” Austen wrote of her own brother Henry when he was in the midst of the novel’s third volume; “he said yesterday at least, that

he defied anybody to say whether H.C. would be reformed, or would forget Fanny in a fortnight.”²⁶ Yet this suspense does not yield to new knowledge, but to acts that painfully confirm the old, and the anxieties of time are abruptly concluded by the renewed marking of exclusive space. The report of the adultery may nonetheless come to the reader as something of a shock—but just because such plotting so harshly insists that the promise of change was an illusion. Events do not compel the heroine to grow; they simply drive others to recognize what she has always been.

When Mansfield welcomes Fanny back, it is no longer to the humble east room with its chilly hearth: the wicked aunt is vanquished, the two older girls disgraced, and “the lowest and last” (p. 221) assumes her rightful place in the house. If Fanny resembles Cinderella, as many have sensed, she is perhaps most Cinderella-like in this—that hers is not so much a story of growing up as a myth of recognition, a fantasy of being at last acknowledged for the princess one truly is. In most versions of the fairy tale, the heroine begins as an only and much-loved child; her rags and ashes are a temporary debasement, signs of the humiliation she is forced to endure when a stepmother and stepsisters invade her father’s house. At the crucial moment of transformation, degraded appearances are cast off as dirt, and the heroine reveals herself to be worthy of a prince. Magic may transform rats into coachmen and dirty rags into dresses of gold, but hers is the inherent virtue and loveliness—and the small feet. When the glass slipper fits, even her stepsisters are compelled to recognize Cinderella as the beautiful lady of the ball. Cinderella may have dwelled among ashes, but the dirt has not really touched her; in retrospect, she seems to have been simply waiting to be discovered, her essential purity undefiled. Indeed in a curious footnote to his lengthy discussion of the tale, Bruno Bettelheim laments that by mistranslating the French “Cendrillon,” the English name for the heroine incorrectly associates her with cinders rather than ashes—the latter being a “very clean powdery substance” and not “the quite dirty remnants of an incomplete combustion.”²⁷ Though Bettelheim’s etymology contradicts his earlier stress on the importance of dirt in the tale, his insistence that the genuine Cinderella was never really dirty at all suggests how deep are the longings her story addresses.

Like “Cinderella,” *Mansfield Park* associates its heroine with dirt only to deny the force of the association. But unlike the fairy tale, the novel establishes her purity not by an outward, symbolic transformation but by an inner response, the experience of revulsion. Fanny visits her parents’ home and finds it unclean—discovers, in effect, that she is not her parents’ child. She cannot even stomach the food of this “home,” but must send out, covertly, for chaster fare: “She was so little equal to Rebecca’s puddings, and Rebecca’s hash, brought to table as they all were, with such accompaniments of half-cleaned plates, and not half-cleaned knives and forks, that she was very often constrained to defer her heart-

iest meal, till she could send her brothers in the evening for biscuits and buns.” As to whether nature or nurture has prompted such disgust, the text seems unable to decide. “After being nursed up at Mansfield,” the narrator observes on the matter of the puddings and the hashes, “it was too late in the day to be hardened at Portsmouth” (p. 413). But only a chapter earlier, Fanny had felt a “thrill of horror” when her father invited Henry Crawford to partake of the family mutton, since “*she* was nice only from natural delicacy, but *he* had been brought up in a school of luxury and epicurism” (pp. 406–407). The structure of the novel has made it impossible to determine whether Fanny could ever have thrived at the family table: though Fanny’s Portsmouth origins were reported, her represented history only began at Mansfield, and it was at Mansfield that her appetites and affections were given narrative life. Even mother-love has long been displaced: embracing Mrs. Price for the first time, Fanny sees features which she “loved the more, because they brought her aunt Bertram’s before her” (p. 377)!

By returning Fanny to her parents’ house only when it is clear that she does not belong there, the narrative elides the most problematic interval in a daughter’s history, that anxious period in which she gradually shifts her allegiance from one family to another. Fanny never really has to negotiate the passage that proves so dangerous for Maria Bertram; though she literally journeys back and forth between two houses, the sense of movement is largely an illusion. The transfer of its daughters’ loyalties poses a difficult problem for any patriarchy, but the more the family is itself the locus of worship, the more critical is the transition, since to enter a new family is to adopt new gods. In the ancient world a bride did not officially cross the threshold of her husband’s dwelling until she had first returned home to participate in a solemn rite of passage, a ceremony in which her father formally separated her from the paternal hearth.²⁸ The preference for Bertrams over Prices is also partly a spiritual choice, but when Fanny returns to Portsmouth, the anxieties of change are evaded by the foregone conclusion. Mr. Price greets his daughter with “an acknowledgement that he had quite forgot her”—and “having given her a cordial hug, and observed that she was grown into a woman, and he supposed would be wanting a husband soon, seemed very much inclined to forget her again.” Fanny, for her part, “shrunk back to her seat, with feelings sadly pained by his language and his smell of spirits” (p. 380). At Mansfield, Fanny had imagined that “to be at home again, would heal every pain that had since grown out of the separation” (p. 370), yet no sooner is she confronted by the vulgar words and odors of Portsmouth than she automatically imitates Mansfield’s gestures of exclusion. For all the naturalistic comedy of the scene, the division between father and daughter is scarcely less abrupt and absolute than in the ancient ritual. In fact this daughter’s story has been so arranged that the normal separation on coming of age will never occur, since she was taken

from her parents while still a child and will marry into the very family by which she has been raised. The Portsmouth chapters do not offer a history of the heroine's separation from her family of origin, merely repeated demarcations of a space that already divides them.

Though Sir Thomas deliberately tries to unsettle her, Fanny's instinctive revulsions continue to guard her from contamination. She may temporarily soften in her judgment of Henry Crawford, but she is hardly more tempted by his attractions than by Rebecca's hashes. Indeed the lines drawn by Fanny's delicacy are finally more to be trusted than the boundaries of Mansfield Park itself. The house and its inhabitants prove vulnerable to change and corruption, but the distinctions that should ideally be defined by its borders are grounded more securely in the consciousness of the heroine. If the limits of that consciousness may also occasionally be breached, the offending thought can be immediately swept out—as Fanny hastens to do when she once finds herself entertaining dangerous ideas of Edmund:

To think of him as Miss Crawford might be justified in thinking, would in her be insanity. To her, he could be nothing under any circumstances—nothing dearer than a friend. Why did such an idea occur to her even enough to be reprobated and forbidden? It ought not to have touched on the confines of her imagination. (pp. 264–65)

The idea that has thus transgressed—that Edmund might be “dearer than a friend”—has broken in only under the cover of negation, but the alert mental housekeeper has nonetheless quickly spotted it and rushed to remove it. “It ought not to have touched on the confines of her imagination”: like other spaces, consciousness maintains its own purity by shutting things out.

Those internalized lines in the heroine's consciousness, the limiting confines of her imagination, are most evident when she is contrasted with Mary Crawford, as Fanny's own meditation suggests. With the Crawfords' arrival, there are in effect two marriageable young women for the Bertram brothers, but Fanny believes that only Mary may be “justified” in thinking herself so. As for Mary, she no sooner arrives at Mansfield than she begins to weigh the relative attractions of the elder and younger sons—and to assess the status of the potential competition:

“I begin now to understand you all, except Miss Price,” said Miss Crawford, as she was walking with the Mr. Bertrams. “Pray, is she out, or is she not?—I am puzzled.—She dined at the parsonage, with the rest of you, which seemed like being *out*; and yet she says so little, that I can hardly suppose she *is*.” (p. 48)

Mary's question prompts an extended discussion of the etiquette of “coming out,” as the three young people consciously examine the problematic conventions governing female coming-of-age in their culture. As to the “outs and the not outs,” as Edmund somewhat impatiently terms them (p. 49), there would seem no question where Mary herself stands, having boldly introduced the subject in her

very first recorded conversation with the Bertram bachelors. Indeed “till now,” Mary declares, she “could not have supposed it possible to be mistaken as to a girl’s being out or not,” since “manners as well as appearance are . . . so totally different,” and the moment many a girl crosses that imaginary threshold she abruptly abandons all previous reserve (p. 49). Tom Bertram offers in evidence his own embarrassments with a certain Miss Anderson, whose stony silence at one meeting had given way to boisterous aggression at the next. Though Mary deplores the awkwardness of such sudden transitions, she confesses herself unable to determine “where the error lies.” But Edmund responds that “the error is plain enough . . . such girls are ill brought up. . . . They are always acting upon motives of vanity—and there is no more real modesty in their behaviour *before* they appear in public than afterwards.” If modesty can be thrown off, apparently, it is not “real”: true modesty is a form of consciousness, not merely of behavior, and the test of its existence is that it does not change. The genuinely modest woman would have no wish to behave immodestly even if she were free to do so—nor would she have any idea how to begin. Mary, however, significantly fails to understand him:

“I do not know,” replied Miss Crawford hesitatingly. “Yes, I cannot agree with you there. It is certainly the modestest part of the business. It is much worse to have girls *not out*, give themselves the same airs and take the same liberties as if they were, which I *have* seen done. *That* is worse than any thing—quite disgusting!” (p. 50)

By presuming that the only alternative to the girl who abruptly alters her behavior when she comes out is the girl who acts immodestly from the start, Mary unwittingly reveals that she finds a modest consciousness unimaginable. All she can recognize is the difference in manners and appearance, the distinction between acting with or without restraint. Inner boundaries do not exist for her, and when she insists on returning to the problem of Fanny at the close of the conversation, it is only to settle the question in the most conventionally external of terms: “Does she go to balls? Does she dine out every where, as well as at my sister’s?” The answer to both queries being negative, “the point” for Miss Crawford “is clear”: “Miss Price is *not out*” (p. 51).

At the close of Edmund Bertram’s last conversation with Mary Crawford, he turns to look back at her as she smilingly calls after him from a London doorway—“but it was a smile,” as he later tells Fanny, “ill-suited to the conversation that had passed, a saucy playful smile, seeming to invite, in order to subdue me . . .” (p. 459). Edmund walks on, and gives no sign. If it is perhaps too much to say that the scene suggests a prostitute soliciting a client, there is no question that Mary’s equivocal placement and expression are the final emblems of her impurity, and that the impulse by which Edmund cuts her seems a momentary instinct of revulsion, an effort to avoid contamination.²⁹ By her willingness to call seduction and adultery mere “folly” (p. 454), by her hope that the guilty pair might still

join in marriage, even live down the scandal with “good dinners, and large parties” (p. 457), she has betrayed her tolerance for unclean mixtures, the casual promiscuity of her mind.

What finally condemns Mary Crawford is no deed of her own, but the fact that her “delicacy” is “blunted” (p. 456)—which is to say that her consciousness fails to draw sharp lines of revulsion:

“She reprobated her brother’s folly in being drawn on by a woman whom he had never cared for, to do what must lose him the woman he adored; but still more the folly of—poor Maria, in sacrificing such a situation, plunging into such difficulties, under the idea of being really loved by a man who had long ago made his indifference clear. Guess what I must have felt. To hear the woman whom—no harsher name than folly given!—So voluntarily, so freely, so coolly to canvass it!—No reluctance, no horror, no feminine—shall I say? no modest loathings!” (pp. 454–55)

Edmund’s broken syntax, his hesitation to “say,” conveys its own modest reluctance. To allude to “poor Maria’s” crime is difficult enough, but the guilt of the adulteress seems dwarfed by the failure of Mary Crawford to condemn her. What Edmund most hesitates to name is Mary’s lack, that absence of “modest loathings” which has left her mind “corrupted, vitiated” (p. 456). Mary is “spoilt, spoilt!” (p. 455)—or “at least,” as Edmund conscientiously adds when he describes that last dangerously seductive smile, “it appeared so to me” (p. 459). How Mary actually looked at him and how Edmund needed to see her cannot in the end be distinguished. Like the narrator’s ironic allusion to Edmund’s going over the story with Fanny again and again, that detail suggests something of the anxiety that may motivate such a vision, the very uneasiness that prompts one to see and reject the unclean.

Housekeeping Lessons

The most notorious crossing of a boundary in *Mansfield Park* occurs at Sotherton, the Rushworths’ estate, past an iron gate that blocks a way from the wood into the park beyond. Mr. Rushworth, betrothed to Maria Bertram, awkwardly returns to the house for the key to the gate, leaving Maria and Henry Crawford alone with the quietly seated Fanny to await his return. (Mary Crawford and Edmund have already departed for a further walk through the wood.) Subject to the combined effects of Henry Crawford’s stimulating flattery and Fanny’s silent observation, Maria quickly grows restive. “If you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited,” Henry obligingly suggests, “you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance.” With an “I certainly can get out that way, and I will,” Maria plunges over and away, beyond the reach of Fanny’s cautious protests (p. 99). The ingenious management of the scene has been much admired, as Jane Austen

makes her imaginary estate the grounds of a lively allegory about female abandonment and restraint. But it is of course still more difficult to represent prohibitions—or to honor them—without the gates, walls, or ha-has which a Sotherton so readily yields. The true test of virtue in the novel is the internalized boundary, and the true heroine polices even “the confines of her imagination.”

Such spatial frameworks, in all imaginings, tend to suppress or supplant temporal ordering. Thus the conversation of Mary Crawford with Tom and Edmund Bertram about a young woman’s coming-of-age automatically becomes an exchange about the “outs” and the “not outs”—the speakers conventionally adopting a language which already translates temporal changes into metaphorical positions in space. This emphasis on space, and the boundaries of spaces, is finally what we mean when we think of *Mansfield Park* as “primitive.” The parodic *Northanger Abbey* and the unfinished *Sanditon* are also fictions named for a special place, but no other novel of Jane Austen’s calls such attention to its boundaries, emphasizes so strenuously the line between the in and the out, the acceptable and the unclean. The opportunity of presenting a child’s development and adaptation to new experience it vigorously converts into an opportunity for revulsion and drawing distinctions. The most religious of Jane Austen’s novels—if that term can be used—is not as Christian as the vocation of its hero would lead one to believe. *Mansfield Park* concentrates not on salvation or final ends, but on place and guarded female consciousness. It lacks a Christian sense of history.

Mansfield Park has been called Jane Austen’s “Victorian” novel,³⁰ and I would like to suggest that what makes it seem Victorian, paradoxically, is just this archaic strain in its thinking. The domestic religion of the Victorians, the culture’s anxious insistence on feminine modesty and even “loathing,” may be more general instances of Mary Douglas’s rule that pollution ideas come to the fore whenever the lines of a social system are especially precarious and threatened. Austen’s novel is worth comparing in this connection to a representation of a different kind, from the following generation in England. Sarah Stickney Ellis’s *The Women of England* is another descriptive work that is filled with prescriptions. Like *Mansfield Park*, it offers “familiar scenes of domestic life,” but without the continuous action and specified group of characters of a novel. It is also professedly Christian, though the author apologizes in her preface “for having written a book on the subject of morals, without having made it strictly religious.”³¹ Despite its avowals, that is to say, *The Women of England* is not so much an argument for Christian values as for cleanliness and order in the home and “retiring shyness” and “purity of mind” in the housekeeper. Associating “good household management” with the “wall of scruples” by which English women are guarded, Ellis characteristically links one form of cleanliness with the other, her language metaphorically identifying female purity and the sharp demarcations of domestic space. Women preserve the sanctity of the home, and that sanctity is above all a

matter of boundaries: "In short, the customs of English society have so constituted women the guardians of the comfort of their homes, that, like the Vestals of old, they cannot allow the lamp they cherish to be extinguished, or to fail for want of oil, without an equal share of degradation attaching to their names." With a flourish of Podsnappery, she declares that "in other countries" women "resort to the opera, or the public festival" and carelessly neglect their homes, those other countries being "necessarily ignorant" of England's "science of good household management."³²

Ellis explicitly addresses those women who have only one to four servants and "no pretension to family rank," but the domestic order she celebrates seems hopelessly beyond the reach of Mrs. Price and her two servants; Ellis's household ideal is much closer to that "cheerful orderliness" which Fanny, confronted by the chaos of Portsmouth and Rebecca, nostalgically attributes to Mansfield Park (p. 392). Though she would presumably have no more taste for Rebecca's cooking than does Fanny, Ellis has nothing but scorn for those homemakers who prefer the kitchen to the drawing-room and firmly disapproves of "the constant bustle of providing for mere animal appetite." The emphasis of *The Women of England* is on order, both outward and inward: "Not only must an appearance of outward order and comfort be kept up, but around every domestic scene there must be a strong wall of confidence, which no internal suspicion can undermine, no external enemy break through." What marks off the sanctity of home from the unclean world beyond is not so much a wall of stone or brick—or a gate of iron—as "the boundary-line of safety, beyond which no true friend of woman ever tempted her to pass."³³

The Women of England has much to say of women's influence, their education, dress, manners, conversation, consideration and kindness, but it is virtually silent on the most obvious concern of all: women's role in childbirth and the rearing of children. The women of England play critical roles in the family—but primarily as sisters, daughters, and wives, rather than as mothers. So unequivocally do the walls of home exclude time, along with the unclean, that married women seem to have become sacred virgins, vestals to whom childbearing is apparently unknown. Nothing violates space like children, unfortunately—as Jane Austen, with her host of nieces and nephews and her relatively cramped quarters, must have been well aware. "The house seemed to have all the comforts of little Children, dirt & litter," she commented sharply to her sister, after returning from the home of one particularly fertile couple; "Mr. Dyson as usual looked wild, & Mrs. Dyson as usual looked big."³⁴ And nothing more readily carries the imagination backward and forward in time as childrearing: to introduce children into the world is inevitably to confront the pressures of history. Like *The Women of England*, Austen's novels keep out children, especially from a heroine's future, and this exclusion is particularly apparent in *Mansfield Park*. The house at Mans-

field has its “old nurseries” next to Fanny’s attic (p. 9), but there is no evidence that they will ever be put to further use. All the children of the novel, of course, are back at Portsmouth, where Mrs. Price was experiencing “her ninth lying-in” when “her eldest was a boy of ten years old” (p. 5). Such a brood puts the dirt at Portsmouth in perspective.

“Poor Woman!” as Austen wrote to her sister of a similarly prolific acquaintance, “how can she be honestly breeding again?” “Poor Animal,” another letter sounds the note of revulsion, “she will be worn out before she is thirty. . . . I am quite tired of so many Children.”³⁵ Children remind us that we are “poor animals” caught in time, and whatever Jane Austen’s private feelings about parturition, the form of *Mansfield Park* represents a response to anxieties that were not Austen’s alone. Such anxieties are in some measure always with us, but the England of Sarah Ellis felt them with a particular intensity. The “boundary-line of safety” around the women of England shuts out the “field of competition” in which the men of England are engaged, that arena in which “their whole being is becoming swallowed up in efforts and calculations relating to their pecuniary success” and in which “to slacken in exertion, is altogether to fail.” In Ellis’s sterilized version of sexual sacrifice, man needs “all” of woman’s “sisterly services, and, under the pressure of the present times, he needs them more than ever,” for sisterly services foster in him “that higher tone of feeling, without which he can enjoy nothing beyond a kind of animal existence.”³⁶ Free of an “animal existence” and its natural consequences, the relation of sister and brother is a purely structural as opposed to a temporal connection between the sexes—or at least offers the illusion of such a possibility. It is not surprising that the final marriage at Mansfield Park should assume this form. Edmund Bertram brings back to Mansfield “my only sister—my only comfort now” (p. 444).

Notes

1. Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. R.W. Chapman (1934; rpt. London, 1960), p. 439; p. 441. All further references to this work will be included parenthetically in the text.
2. Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London, 1975), p. 51. The third chapter of this book, “Pollution” (pp. 47–59), extends and refines the ideas advanced in Douglas’s earlier *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966).
3. *Purity and Danger*, p. 139.
4. D.A. Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton, 1981), p. 58.
5. Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism* (1955; rpt. New York, 1959), p. 218.

6. See in particular David Lodge's verdict—"Jane Austen was neither a Platonist nor a primitive . . ."—in *Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel* (London, 1966), p. 98; and Stuart M. Tave's extended discussion of the problem of the theatricals in *Some Words of Jane Austen* (Chicago, 1973), pp. 183–94. Tony Tanner, however, pursues the Platonic comparison in his Introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel (Harmondsworth, 1966), pp. 26–31. It might be noted that those who object to the allusion to Plato are critics especially attuned to the verbal texture of Austen's novels, while those who exploit the connection are more concerned with what might be termed the novels' deep structures.
7. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1971; rpt. Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 76.
8. Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore and London, 1971), p. 57.
9. For Fanny as Cinderella, see D.W. Harding, "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen" (1940), rpt. in *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), pp. 173–79; C.S. Lewis, "A Note on Jane Austen" (1954), rpt. in Watt, pp. 29–30; and Avrom Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park: An Essay in Critical Synthesis* (Minneapolis, 1967), pp. 57–69. Both Lewis (p. 29) and Fleishman (pp. 66–68) allude to "archetypes." Fleishman's entire chapter, which is called "The Structure of the Myth," also evokes the work of Lévi-Strauss.
10. In addition to Duckworth, pp. 36–80, and Tave, pp. 158–204, I would single out Marilyn Butler's chapter on the novel in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 219–49.
11. Stuart Tave, *Some Words of Jane Austen*, p. 185.
12. Tony Tanner, Introduction to *Mansfield Park*, p. 27; Thomas R. Edwards, Jr., "The Difficult Beauty of *Mansfield Park*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 20 (1965), 59; Julia Prewitt Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and Literary Form* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1979), p. 87.
13. See, for instance, Kingsley Amis's notorious pronouncement that *Mansfield Park* is "an immoral book" and evidence of Austen's "corruption" in "What Became of Jane Austen? [*Mansfield Park*]" (1957), rpt. in Watt, pp. 141–44. See also Marvin Mudrick's more subtle but nonetheless severely critical treatment of the novel's "inflexible and deadening moral dogma" (p. 180) in *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton, 1952), pp. 155–80. "What imagination will not quail before the thought of a Saturday night at the Edmund Bertrams, after the prayer-books have been put away?" (p. 179).
14. Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: T. Cadell, Jr. and W. Davies, 1797), p. 174; p. 175. Jane Austen seems to have read 'Gisborne,' as she called it; in a letter to Cassandra of 30 August [1805] she thanked her sister for recommending it and pronounced herself "pleased with it." See *Jane Austen's Letters to her sister Cassandra and others*, ed. R.W. Chapman, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1979), p. 169. Both Frank W. Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge, Eng., 1966), p. 36; and Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp. 231–32, cite Gisborne's comments in connection with *Mansfield Park*.
15. That *Mansfield Park* is the most religious of Austen's novels is widely taken for granted, despite the fact that many commentators no longer interpret her famous letter to Cassandra (29 January [1813]) as announcing that the subject of the novel was to be "ordination" (*Letters*, p. 298). Several offhand, and frustratingly contradictory allusions to the Evangelicals in her letters have also helped to fuel much controversy over the novel's denominational sympathies. On the "ordination" debate, see Charles E.

- Edge, "Mansfield Park and Ordination," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 16 (1961), 269–74; Joseph W. Donohue, Jr., "Ordination and the Divided House at Mansfield Park," *ELH* 32 (1965), 169–78; and letters to the editor of the *TLS* from Hugh Brogan, Brian Southam, Margaret Kirkham, Denis Donoghue and Mary Lascelles (Dec. 19, 1968; Jan. 2, 9, 16, and 30, 1969). For discussions of the novel's relation to Evangelicism, see Avrom Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park*, pp. 19–40; Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp. 242–45; and David Monaghan, "Mansfield Park and Evangelicism: A Reassessment," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (1978), 215–30.
16. See Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (1956; rpt. Baltimore and London, 1980): "For us the house is merely a domicile—a shelter; we leave it, and forget it with little trouble; or, if we are attached to it, this is merely by the force of habit and of recollections; because, for us, religion is not there; our God is the God of the universe, and we find him everywhere. It was entirely different among the ancients; they found their principal divinity within the house. . . . Then a man loved his house as he now loves his church" (p. 91). *La Cité antique* first appeared in France in 1864; though the publishers do not say so, the Hopkins edition reprints Willard Small's original English translation of 1873. It is difficult to imagine a nineteenth-century Englishman so casually dismissing the house as "merely a domicile—a shelter."
 17. Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago, 1948), p. 20.
 18. Julia Prewitt Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels*, p. 97.
 19. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. R.W. Chapman (1932; rpt. London, 1959), p. 364; pp. 296–97.
 20. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City*, p. 89.
 21. *Ibid.*, n. 7: "Though this primitive morality condemned adultery, it did not reprove incest; religion authorized it. The prohibitions relative to marriage were the reverse of ours. One might marry his sister . . . but it was forbidden, as a principle, to marry a woman of another city."
 22. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 278, 279, 278.
 23. *Ibid.*, pp. 357 and 388.
 24. Avrom Fleishman misleadingly insists on the need to recognize the novel as a Bildungsroman. See *A Reading of Mansfield Park*, pp. 71–73. Cf. A. Walton Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (New York, 1965): "Jane Austen took for the heroine of *Mansfield Park* a girl who is essentially passive and uninteresting, and in so doing she deliberately rejected the principle of growth and change which animates most English fiction" (p. 129). See also Lionel Trilling's resonant remarks in *Sincerity and Authenticity*: "*Mansfield Park* ruthlessly rejects the dialectical mode and seeks to impose the categorical constraints the more firmly upon us. It does not confirm our characteristic modern intuition that the enlightened and generous mind can discern right and wrong and good and bad only under the aspect of process and development, of futurity and the interplay and resolution of contradictions. . . . It is antipathetic to the temporality of the dialectical mode; the only moment of judgement it acknowledges is *now*: it is in the exigent present that things are what they really are, not in the unfolding future." Trilling significantly terms this "an archaic thought" (pp. 79–80).
 25. Only Elinor Dashwood perhaps approaches such steadfast devotion, but in *Sense and Sensibility* Elinor's fixed position is counterbalanced by Marianne's dramatic capacity for emotional error and change.
 26. Letter to Cassandra Austen (5 March [1814]), *Letters*, p. 381.

27. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York, 1977), pp. 253–54n. See also his subsequent note (pp. 254–55), which elaborates on the association of Cinderella with Vestal Virgins and once again stresses that ashes are a sign of purity as well as of mourning. For a brief and useful account of the many versions of “Cinderella,” see Iona and Peter Opie, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (1974; rpt. New York and Toronto, 1980), pp. 152–59. The Opies reprint the first English translation of Perrault’s tale, published in London in 1729 (pp. 161–66).
28. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City*, pp. 34–39. “This paternal fire is her [a daughter’s] god. Let a young man of the neighboring family ask her in marriage, and something more is at stake than to pass from one house to the other. She must abandon the paternal fire, and henceforth invoke that of the husband. . . . Was it not quite necessary that the young girl should be initiated into the religion that she was henceforth to follow by some sacred ceremony? Was not a sort of ordination or adoption necessary for her to become a priestess of this sacred fire, to which she was not attached by birth?” (pp. 35–36).
29. In *Narrative and Its Discontents*, pp. 85–90, D.A. Miller offers a shrewd analysis of the “closure practiced” (p. 89) on Mary in this scene. Miller notes the partial detachment of the narrator from Edmund and Fanny here, and rightly observes that “in the narrator’s final wrap-up” of Mary’s subsequent history, she is allowed to regain some of her earlier complexity (p. 87). That Jane Austen could imagine Edmund departing without even a word or an answering gesture is still something of a problem, however; the awkwardness, even the unimaginability, of the scene remains.
30. See Barbara Bail Collins, “Jane Austen’s Victorian Novel,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 4 (1949), 175–85; and Julia Prewitt Brown, “The Victorian Anxieties of *Mansfield Park*,” in *Jane Austen’s Novels*, pp. 80–100.
31. Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (New York, 1839), pp. vi–vii. Mrs. Ellis was already a poet and novelist when she wrote *The Women of England*. First published in 1839, the work was reprinted frequently during the following decade; the British Museum Catalogue lists a ninth edition, published in London and Paris, in 1850.
32. Ibid. Quotations are from pp. 32, 26, 33, 25.
33. Ibid. Quotations are from pp. 21, 37, 26, 32.
34. Letter to Cassandra Austen (11 Feb. 1801), *Letters*, p. 121.
35. Letter to Cassandra Austen (1 Oct. 1808), and Letter to Fanny Knight (23 March [1817]); *Letters*, pp. 210, 488.
36. Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England*. Quotations are from pp. 32, 48, 50.