Mansfield Park
Ethical Rigor and an
Emblematic Mode

To anyone fresh from the bracing air of Pride and Prejudice, it seems as if a heavy frost sets in with Mansfield Park. In fact the novel is disappointing to many readers and critics of Jane Austen, who find it uncharacteristic. Yet, though Mansfield Park undeniably feels chilly when compared with the rest of her work, my underlying argument in the following pages will be that its moral climate remains, in all essentials, exactly the one that we find everywhere in Jane Austen's writings. But before pursuing that matter, we might stop for a moment to notice what makes the temperature drop so sharply.

One reason for it is Jane Austen's handling of our point of view in Mansfield Park. Here she makes her nearest approach to the convention of the omniscient author, letting us see many of the characters in action apart from the heroine, judging them for us, all in all presiding more solemnly, I think more openly, than in her other novels. Of course we do look at a good deal of what happens with and through Fanny Price. But we have almost no sense of being dramatically implicated in a partial, perhaps unreliable, view of what is going on, and certainly no sense that the meaning of Mansfield Park hinges in any significant way on the limits of Fanny's perceptions as an individual. In these respects the novel differs radically from Pride and Prejudice or Emma, even from Northanger Abbey, and in another respect as well, for Fanny—unlike Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, or Catherine Morland—does not undergo any real change in the course of the story. Rather, her consciousness seems gradually to open out, its quality to become progressively clearer to us, as she more and more obviously takes on the function of the moral norm by which the other characters are to be evaluated. We would have
to go back to *Sense and Sensibility* to find a heroine whose moral presence and perspective on events are allowed to be anything like so unequivocally trustworthy as Fanny's, but even Elinor Dashwood is represented as developing to some degree. Not until *Persuasion* will we come on a heroine who changes as little as Fanny; by then, however, Jane Austen has resolved her two tendencies in managing our point of view: though we are dramatically involved in Anne Elliot's limited perceptions, she proves a thoroughly sound judge.

But Anne is so warm, so taking, that no reader feels tempted to hold the soundness of her decisions against her. Nothing of the sort can be said for Fanny; indeed her personality has a good deal to do with the chilliness of *Mansfield Park*. For no one can ignore the fact that she is something less than attractive. Sickly, quiescent, easily and constantly oppressed, she leaves the impression at moments of being Jane Austen's study in inferiority. Yet if Fanny's emotional sensitivity causes her to suffer acutely on practically every occasion, this sensitivity also fosters—somewhat as in the case of Anne Elliot—an almost unrelievedly accurate set of judgments. The combination is certainly unappealing, and I think Jane Austen recognized the fact, for from time to time she works hard to humanize her heroine, going out of her way, for instance, to insist that Henry Crawford's suit would have succeeded if Fanny were not already devoted to Edmund Bertram (p. 231), or showing Fanny to be jealous of Mary Crawford (pp. 67, 74, 159, 199, 279). But efforts like these to make Fanny a more sympathetic figure hardly temper the major sense of her that emerges from the novel as a whole, a sense of unalloyed righteousness, of a nearly infallible judgment.

Although these qualities may keep Fanny from winning the heart of the reader, they also place her at the moral center of the story. And she stands quite alone there, for *Mansfield Park* makes it clear that her feelings, unlike those of any other character, are securely moored in conscience. No matter how intense her emotional experience, she retains that degree of objectivity which allows her to judge herself. In direct contrast, everyone else in the novel is represented as trapped to some extent within
feelings oriented toward satisfaction of the self alone, and all these other characters tend, under pressure of such emotions, not to view the world about them as it is, but to recreate it in the image of their desires. This inability to transcend the purely self-regarding element in feeling is what *Mansfield Park* takes under attack, treating it as a moral failure on the part of the individual and arguing that self-interest of this sort—rather as we have seen in the earlier works—results inevitably in folly and blindness. The sheer number of such misjudgments that Jane Austen records here is staggering; in importance, they range from so trivial a matter as Yates’s idiotic assumption that Sir Thomas Bertram will approve of the acting scheme, through the more serious mis-taking of Maria Bertram by Aunt Norris, to such crucial misconceptions as Edmund’s of the Crawfords, or Sir Thomas’ of Fanny and of his own family. The malady disables everyone but Fanny at some time or other, and even she shows symptoms of it once, though they clear up quickly. Since it does strike so many characters and, by my reading of *Mansfield Park*, leaves so great a variety of them in morally critical condition, I feel a little uneasy about the interpretation of the novel which finds in it primarily a conflict between worlds—the Bertrams’ *Mansfield Park* vs. the Crawfords’ London vs. the Prices’ Portsmouth—with the world of the Bertrams winning out because of its moral superiority. Rather, as I have already suggested, *Mansfield Park* seems to me concerned fundamentally with defining moral integrity, a subject it explores by contrasting the self-centered behavior of all the other characters with Fanny’s unselfishness. Although the righteousness of the heroine, the gravity with which Jane Austen treats her materials here (such as the acting episode or the affair of Edmund’s ordination), and the pervasively somber tone of the novel all combine to make *Mansfield Park* almost Victorian in mood, yet Jane Austen’s theme remains very much what it has always been.

This theme is mirrored in the action of *Mansfield Park*, which springs largely from misjudgments of the kind I have mentioned, and in its conversations, which dramatize in their own way the moral obtuseness of the characters. One of the chief clues to per-
sonality that these dialogues provide is the individual's estimate of what does or does not seem to be the case, of what is or is not likely to happen—a decision that reveals the degree to which his wishes govern his insight and thus measures his objectivity for us. How frequently such estimates crop up in *Mansfield Park* will emerge, I hope, in the following pages. But my main job will be, first, to set down some of the large lines along which the narrative develops, meanwhile sketching in a few of the minor characters; then to explore the interaction between Edmund, Fanny, and the Crawfords; finally, to show the variation that is worked here on the technique of metaphoric indirection that we have seen Jane Austen using in the dialogues of earlier novels.

It is Mrs. Norris who gets the story started by engineering the invitation of Fanny to settle at Mansfield. And it is Mrs. Norris who introduces us almost immediately to the sort of misjudgment which the novel everywhere condemns; for her zeal to carry her project with Sir Thomas leads her to dismiss with scorn the possibility of any attachment arising between Fanny and either of his sons: "... do not you know that of all things upon earth that is the least likely to happen? It is morally impossible. I never knew an instance of it. It is, in fact, the only sure way of providing against the connection" (pp. 6-7). Of course the absurdity of this prediction is demonstrated by the union of Fanny with Edmund at the end of *Mansfield Park*, but so severe an irony is hardly felt as inappropriate, for Mrs. Norris emerges as one of the most disagreeable characters in the book. Although she frequently professes her benevolence and charity, the officiousness with which she prosecutes the schemes that fill her mind shows her need to assert herself at the expense of others. Indeed she betrays her fundamental egocentricity in almost every sentence. Since Sir Thomas is her social superior, she must
at least affect discretion when she generalizes to him: "A niece of our's. I may say, or, at least of your's, would not grow up in this neighbourhood without many advantages" (p. 6). But with inferiors she deals ruthlessly, presuming to generalize with the social authority of the Bertrams while in fact revealing her own snobbishness, and, in the following excerpt, her dislike for Fanny as well: "there is no real occasion for your going into company in this sort of way, or ever dining out at all; and it is what you must not depend upon ever being repeated" (p. 220). Perhaps the actual feelings of Mrs. Norris come clearest, however, in her use of particular terms. When addressing Fanny, she simply gives a free rein to her nasty temper, berating her niece in this passage for resting instead of sewing: "I am sure I almost broke my back by cutting it out. You should learn to think of other people; it is a shocking trick for a young person to be always lolling upon a sofa" (p. 71). To Sir Thomas she speaks in a different tone, yet I think her particular diction—now describing her sympathy for a coachman—still expresses the urge of Mrs. Norris to dominate: "my heart quite ached for him at every jolt, and when we got into the rough lanes I was quite in an agony about him. And then the poor horses too!—To see them straining away!" (p. 189). It is as if, unable to compete with Sir Thomas socially, Mrs. Norris must stake out her own claim to superiority in the realms of sensitivity and unselfishness. Obviously the claim is exploded by her words and deeds throughout the story: far from projecting herself into others, Mrs. Norris stands convicted of being so enslaved by her will that she can see only what she wants to see.

The same charge applies to the favorite of Mrs. Norris, Maria Bertram, whose intrigue with Henry Crawford takes up much of the narrative foreground in the first part of the novel. Sir Thomas' trip to Antigua has given Mrs. Norris her finest chance to exercise her talents at Mansfield, and she distinguishes herself typically, both by promoting Maria's engagement to the rich but insipid Mr. Rushworth and by remaining blind to the subsequent flirtation between her niece and Henry. The absence of their father acts like a tonic on all the young Bertrams, stirring
Maria to behave even more imperiously than usual in adjusting facts to the demands of her will. Thus when Henry Crawford appears, so much more fascinating than Mr. Rushworth, Maria surmises: “There could be no harm in her liking an agreeable man—every body knew her situation—Mr. Crawford must take care of himself” (p. 44). After minimizing her feelings in the first clause, she contrives to shift the responsibility for proper conduct from herself to “every body,” especially “Mr. Crawford,” while by her arrogant close she implies, ludicrously enough, that she will be far more attractive to him than he to her. Even in the rhythm of Maria’s clauses, itself abrupt and assertive, we can hear something of her willfulness. As Jane Austen has just remarked, “She did not want to see or understand.” Much the same comment might be made about Tom and Julia Bertram, who share to a large extent their sister’s self-indulgence, but Maria’s case is the most serious for she has accepted her engagement to Mr. Rushworth willingly, if unenthusiastically. Yet she seizes every opportunity to set herself for Henry Crawford, most conspicuously in the outing to Sotherton and in the acting venture—all the while relishing the precedence she gains from being engaged. Her bubble bursts only with the return of her father from Antigua.

Sir Thomas presides over the action in the middle third of Mansfield Park, and he proves no more reliable than Mrs. Norris. Jane Austen has introduced him as a man motivated by “principle as well as pride” (p. 4), but it is the fate of Sir Thomas never to realize how readily his pride subverts principle. His sense of himself can be traced in his talk with Mrs. Norris, early in the novel, about “the distinction proper to be made” in bringing up his girls with Fanny:

> how to preserve in the minds of my daughters the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a Miss Bertram. I should wish to see them very good friends but still they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will always be different.” (pp. 10–11)
In a series of meticulous antitheses Sir Thomas not only weighs his daughters against Fanny but also separates his “wish” for them to be “friends” from his conviction of their inequality. The controlled rhetoric combines with the dominantly conceptual terms to suggest the role that he always fancies himself to play: that of an impartial judge moving in a world of fixed values. Yet I think we are entitled to ask, even at this stage of the story, whether what informs his strict division between Fanny and her cousins is a thoroughly proper distinction or an exorbitant pride in his children. No such question presents itself to Sir Thomas, of course, who constantly supposes his feelings to be so saturated with principle as to guarantee his conduct. This assumption traps him into any number of errors, most spectacularly after he has come back to Mansfield.

When Sir Thomas recognizes his daughter’s indifference to Mr. Rushworth, for instance, yet supports Maria in her desire to go through with the marriage, Jane Austen points out his folly—describing him as “too glad to be satisfied perhaps to urge the matter quite so far as his judgment might have dictated to others” (p. 201)—and shows us his wish for Maria’s company masquerading as a principle: “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, and would, in all probability, be a continual supply of the most amiable and innocent enjoyments.” A prediction further from the truth would be hard to imagine, inasmuch as Maria accepts Mr. Rushworth in order to escape from home and later destroys her marriage by running off with Henry Crawford. If Sir Thomas deceives himself in the matter of Maria’s engagement, he seems absolutely blind when the courting of Fanny by Henry Crawford—the focus of narrative interest in the second part of *Mansfield Park*—develops into a proposal. Although Fanny declares her real feelings, “I—I cannot like him, Sir, well enough to marry him,” Sir Thomas in effect denies their existence, beguiled as he is by his wish for so apparently advantageous a match: “I am half inclined to think that you do not quite know your own feel-
ings" (pp. 315–16). And when she stands by her refusal, his ambition for the marriage drives Sir Thomas to invert the morality of the situation even more flagrantly, for he conceives it his "duty" to reprimand Fanny for being so selfish:

"... you have disappointed every expectation I had formed, and proved yourself of a character the very reverse of what I had supposed. 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. But you have now shewn me that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you. You think only of yourself." (p. 318)

As usual, the rhetoric sounds judicious, because Sir Thomas separates his statement about feeling "disappointed" from a supposedly reasoned demonstration of Fanny's stubbornness. But obviously the generalizations and conceptual terms here bear no relation at all to her case; rather, they express Sir Thomas' chagrin as if it were a law. Perhaps by the end of the story, when he has seen events frustrate so many of his cherished aims, we are to believe him somewhat chastened. Perhaps—yet Jane Austen's final words about him still undercut his sense of principle: "... in the general well-doing and success" of the Prices, the author reports, "Sir Thomas saw repeated, and for ever repeated reason to rejoice in what he had done for them all, and acknowledge the advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure" (p. 473).

It is the Prices themselves and their squalid home at Portsmouth that make the most vivid impression in the closing third of the novel. Fanny's visit to them is planned by Sir Thomas, who secretly hopes it will induce her to marry Henry, and Fanny looks forward eagerly to being with her family, for once gravely misinformed by her emotions. Overcome with nostalgia for her early childhood and depressed by her inferiority to the people at Mansfield, she imagines that "to be at home again, would heal every pain," that at Portsmouth she will be "more loved by all
than she had ever been before,' will "feel affection without fear or restraint" and "feel herself the equal of those who surrounded her" (p. 370). But the Portsmouth home turns out to be dirty, life there chaotic, and the Prices—with William away at sea—as completely self-centered as the Bertrams. Although Fanny herself never makes so damaging a comparison between the Portsmouth inhabitants and those of Mansfield, though she even seems something of a snob when she later comes to yearn for the placidity of the Park, at least the feelings that she brings with her to Portsmouth do not blind her to the reality of her family—not that the shortcomings of the Prices are hard to discover.

Fanny's mother and father, who set the tone of the Portsmouth scenes, are so self-engrossed that to all intents and purposes they ignore the return of their daughter. The flurried rhythms of Mrs. Price indicate that she is always at the mercy of the moment's emotions:

"And when did you get anything to eat? And what would you like to have now? And now I am afraid Campbell will be here, before there is time to dress a steak, and we have no butcher at hand. It is very inconvenient to have no butcher in the street. We were better off in our last house. Perhaps you would like some tea, as soon as it can be got." (pp. 378–79)

As the passage makes clear, her own concerns dominate her talk. When she tries to speak of Mansfield with Fanny, she inevitably ends in herself, for such questions as "How did her sister Bertram manage about her servants," so Jane Austen tells us, "soon led her mind away from Northamptonshire, and fixed it on her own domestic grievances" (p. 385). This absorption in herself makes Fanny's mother the Portsmouth counterpart to Lady Bertram, who differs from Mrs. Price only in being absolutely inert and incapable of attempting to consider anyone else. As for Mr. Price, he never interests himself in Fanny in the slightest. The habitual "by G——'s" are symptomatic of his emotional extremism, a private condition which he converts into a public standard when generalizing about Maria's desertion of...
Rushworth: "But by G—— if she belonged to me, I'd give her the rope's end as long as I could stand over her. A little flogging for man and woman too, would be the best way of preventing such things" (p. 440). After an outburst like this, it may appear absurd to name Mr. Price in the same breath with the calm Sir Thomas, but we should observe that feeling—feeling determined by their concern with themselves—governs the judgments that both of them pass on what happens around them. Indeed, for all the murkiness of the Portsmouth scenes (nowhere else does Jane Austen heap up such naturalistic details) and for all that serenity which so attracts Fanny to Mansfield, the Prices' world and the Bertrams' seem to me to reveal the same moral debility. Even at the end of the novel, after Fanny has returned to find life at the Park ruffled by Tom's illness and the news of Maria's infidelity, Mansfield seems ready enough to settle back into its usual ways, most of the Bertrams giving little evidence of any deep-seated change in their attitudes despite the catastrophes that have occurred. But Edmund does discover, through his own bitter experience with Mary Crawford, how false an image of her his feelings have created. And Fanny can be rewarded with him at last, in a match which many feel is about what each of them deserves.

The minor figures of Mansfield Park, so I have been arguing, are all to some degree blinded by their desires and thus become expressions of the novel's theme, which contrasts the selfishness that results from indulging in one's own wishes with the principled behavior achieved through self-denial. These conflicting modes of being are treated most fully by Jane Austen in her representation of the major characters. At one pole stands the righteous Fanny; at the other, the fundamentally egotistical Crawfords; and in the course of the story Edmund is drawn toward the
Crawfords, freeing himself of their influence only when he finally comes to see them clearly and to understand himself. In this sense the story is more concerned with Edmund than with Fanny, and he will take up much of our attention in the following pages.

Both of them reveal their essential commitments in an early interchange at Mansfield Park, when it appears that Fanny may have to move in with Mrs. Norris. Edmund thinks the plan thoroughly sensible, though kindly hoping that it will not "distress" his cousin. But Fanny is stirred by her experiences with her bullying aunt to a response full of feeling, its intensity marked by the abrupt rhythms and the repeated "I":

"Indeed it does. I cannot like it. I love this house and everything in it. I shall love nothing there. You know how uncomfortable I feel with her."

"I can say nothing for her manner to you as a child; but it was the same with us all, or nearly so. She never knew how to be pleasant to children. But you are now of an age to be treated better; I think she is behaving better already; and when you are her only companion, you must be important to her." (p. 26)

Edmund begins his reply, in a fashion that may remind us of Sir Thomas, with distinctions that are level-headed enough, using them as the basis for a generalization about Mrs. Norris' dealings with all "children." But the logic collapses in the last half of his remarks. In spite of the syllogistic façade—and Edmund almost always takes pains to speak like a precisionist—it does not really follow, from the premise about Fanny's "age," that Mrs. Norris will or even "is" treating her niece better. Quite the opposite, in fact. This is not to say that Edmund is stupid; rather, his ardor for what he feels to be a proper relationship between his aunt and Fanny prompts him to gloss over the imperfections of the one and the deep emotions of the other. Throughout the novel his panoply of logic conceals assumptions, usually benevolent enough in themselves, of which he is unaware. The words of Fanny, on the other hand, spring so directly from her feelings that she often sounds sentimental; but her emotional sensitivity
itself—so *Mansfield Park* insists, however arbitrarily—empowers her to cut through the assumptions that bedevil Edmund. Indeed the fact that he should so often be disposed to imagine an emotional bias at work in Fanny sets up one of the standard ironies in the story, for it is Edmund who is constantly swayed by his liking for Mary Crawford.

Mary herself breathes confidence, wit, and high spirits, her manner the antithesis of Fanny's; and her effect on Edmund, not surprisingly, is immediate. But the contrast between Mary and Fanny goes beyond manner: they differ in the quality and kind of their feelings. Mary's have shallower roots than Fanny's, a distinction suggested partly by Mary's willingness at moments to make a conscious display of her feelings—in particular terms or figurative language—and partly by her ability to act, to play someone else (whereas Fanny remains bound by her own nature). Furthermore, the novel presents Mary as unable to escape, in her emotional life as an individual, from being influenced by some sense of self or by her demands as a person. This point is hinted at, I think, by the two types of generalization that she employs throughout *Mansfield Park*. One type is the axiom that codifies self-interest (when leavened with taste), the sort of formulation which Mary has absorbed through living in the fashionable world. Not only does she subscribe to the doctrine, but by acting as a spokesman for it she allies herself with a select social group, which means that some sense of her status as a person haunts her use of the axioms. The doctrine itself may crop up in a relatively casual judgment: she thinks the navy a feasible profession "under two circumstances; if it make the fortune, and there be discretion in spending it" (p. 60). But she brings the same kind of axiom to bear when she is under emotional stress, a measure of her belief in the doctrine: while questioning Fanny suspiciously about the sisters of a friend whom Edmund is visiting, Mary stops to observe, "It is everybody's duty to do as well for themselves as they can. Sir Thomas Bertram's son is somebody" (p. 289). Her second type of generalization expresses her personal feelings more openly, and, typically, it projects them as a standard, something valid for everyone. Thus, for all the con-
conscious wit in her apology for monopolizing Fanny's horse, "Selfishness must always be forgiven you know, because there is no hope of a cure" (p. 68), Mary still makes universals of her own feelings and thus, in effect, legalizes them. The process is really the same when she utters a much more generous sentiment, claiming that "No other man" but Edmund "would have thought of" giving Fanny a necklace for the ball (pp. 274–75). Here the generalization articulates Mary's intense delight at the behavior of the man who strongly attracts her. Of course by nagging about Mary's motives in this way I am darkening, perhaps unfairly, the impression we have of her on reading much of the novel. For she is intelligent and warmhearted. More than that, **Mansfield Park** shows her enduring a severe emotional struggle in her relationship with Edmund: beset on the one hand by her allegiance to the fashionable world, which has its own set of requirements concerning a suitor proper for her, and on the other by the commands of her own heart, probably the more compelling of the two forces. But whichever the force that dominates Mary at any given moment—and this is what I was trying to suggest in analyzing her kinds of generalization—there remains a touch of the self-regarding in all her feelings, and this element differentiates her absolutely, in the context of this novel, from Fanny.

What Mary hardly realizes, or what in her vivacity she will not worry about, is that this element of the purely personal undermines her judgments, giving them a base too local, too limited to her private feelings. Many dialogues illustrate her condition, the talk about family prayer, for instance, or the one I shall summarize now, in which she, Edmund, and Fanny discuss the clerical profession (pp. 108–12). Mary begins with an ironic thrust at Edmund, accusing him of choosing to be a clergyman for reasons of self-interest, the motive she attributes to any intelligent person: "It is fortunate that your inclination and your father's convenience should accord so well. There is a very good living kept for you, I understand, hereabouts." Edmund will go so far as to admit her charge that he is "biassed," but he reorients it to prove his integrity:
"There was no natural disinclination to be overcome, and I see no reason why a man should make a worse clergyman for knowing that he will have a competence early in life. I hope I should not have been influenced myself in a wrong way, and I am sure my father was too conscientious to have allowed it. I have no doubt that I was biassed, but I think it was blamelessly."

Characteristically, he works his way through a set of distinctions which defend his behavior, and just as characteristically, he avoids taking a stand that is unalterably opposed to Mary's.

Edmund holds his ground for about a page, using his controlled rhetoric and exact logic to overturn those generalizations drawn from the world of fashion on which Mary builds part of her case against clergymen. But after a time her more personal feelings flash out in the particular terms and rhetorical series of the following passage, throughout which Mary formulates her emotions as general truths: a clergyman, she maintains,

"has the best intentions of doing nothing all the rest of his days but eat, drink, and grow fat. It is indolence Mr. Bertram, indeed. Indolence and love of ease—a want of all laudable ambition, of taste for good company, or of inclination to take the trouble of being agreeable, which make men clergymen. A clergyman has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish—read the newspaper, watch the weather, and quarrel with his wife."

The immediate source of these generalizations, as will become clearer in a moment, is Mary's dislike for her brother-in-law, Dr. Grant. Understandable as her reaction to him is, it plainly cannot validate her blanket condemnation of clergymen here, any more than could the prevailing attitude toward them in highly fashionable society. Edmund, sensing the emotional bias in Mary's remarks, points out the fallacy of generalizing on the basis of limited instances:

"There are such clergymen, no doubt, but I think they are not so common as to justify Miss Crawford in esteeming it their general character. I suspect that you are not judging from yourself, but from prejudiced persons, whose opinions you have been in
the habit of hearing. You can have been personally ac­
quainted with very few of a set of men you condemn so con­clusively. You are speaking what you have been told at your un­
cle's table."

Though he diagrams her error, Edmund’s liking for Mary im­
pels him to make every allowance for her that he can, and so he
attributes the opinion to others, trying to divorce her from it.
Finally, his desire to align himself with Mary forces Edmund
to desert, in effect, his defense of the clergy, for she absolutely
refuses to modify her view:

I am not entirely without the means of seeing what clergymen are, being at the present time the guest of my own brother,
Dr. Grant. And though he is really a gentleman and often preaches good sermons, and is very respectable, I see him to be an indolent selfish bon vivant, who must have his palate con­sulted in every thing, who will not stir a finger for the conven­ience of any one, and who, moreover, if the cook makes a blun­der, is out of humour with his excellent wife.

"I do not wonder at your disapprobation, upon my word. It is a great defect of temper, made worse by a very faulty habit of self-indulgence; and to see your sister suffering from it, must be exceedingly painful to such feelings as yours. Fanny, it goes against us. We cannot attempt to defend Dr. Grant."

The case of Dr. Grant, of course, does not authorize Mary’s ear­
erlier generalizations about clergymen; rather, it is the single spe­
cific instance at the bottom of the generalizations, as the similari­ties in language and tone reveal. Edmund, however, gives over his efforts on behalf of the class, content instead to take his place at Mary’s side by remolding her particular attacks on Dr. Grant in a conceptual vocabulary.

This turn of events proves too much for Fanny, who comes out of her shell to reclaim both the "profession" and Dr. Grant:

"No but we need not give up his profession for all that; because, whatever profession Dr. Grant had chosen, he would have taken a—not a good temper into it, and as he must either in the navy or army have had a great many more people under his
command than he has now, I think more would have been made unhappy by him as a sailor or soldier than as a clergyman. Besides, I cannot but suppose that whatever there may be to wish otherwise in Dr. Grant, would have been in a greater danger of becoming worse in a more active and worldly profession, where he might have escaped that knowledge of himself, the frequency, at least, of that knowledge which it is impossible he should escape as he is now. A man—a sensible man like Dr. Grant, cannot be in the habit of teaching others their duty every week, cannot go to church twice every Sunday and preach such very good sermons in so good a manner as he does, without being the better for it himself.”

While the speech may get on our nerves because of its latent antagonism toward Mary, its sentimental echo of Fanny’s love for her brother in the navy, and its moral optimism, still its significance in the present context is unmistakable. Whereas Mary has distorted and Edmund momentarily relinquished the class of clergymen, Fanny refuses to lose sight of the “profession” as a whole. And when she turns to the particular case of Dr. Grant, though she says all that can possibly be said for him, she does not close her eyes to his faults but carefully qualifies her estimate of him. Yet Mary’s opinion is not to be shaken, and after a pleasant compliment to Fanny she withdraws to another part of the room, leaving Edmund to sing her praises to his cousin.

As Edmund’s affection for Mary increases, his hold on the sort of distinctions we have seen him attempting slips more and more, at least where she is concerned, and this fact is discoverable in his behavior as well as in his rhetoric. After he learns that Mary has joined the cast of Lovers’ Vows, Edmund agrees to take a part himself: abandoning his earlier moral objections to the theatrical venture, he now identifies “wrong” with Mary’s uneasiness at the possibility of having to act with a stranger, a situation to which “it would be really wrong to expose her” (p. 155). The change in his rhetoric that the mere thought of her can produce is another measure of his love. To realize fully Mary’s impact on him, we should first listen to Edmund receiving Fanny’s thanks for the necklace he has given her:
"My dear Fanny, you feel these things a great deal too much. I am most happy that you like the chain, and that it should be here in time for to-morrow: but your thanks are far beyond the occasion. Believe me, I have no pleasure in the world superior to that of contributing to yours. No, I can safely say, I have no pleasure so complete, so unalloyed. It is without a drawback."
(p. 262)

The rhythm is declarative and, above all, relaxed. The fairly equal sentence lengths show Edmund emotionally poised between a gentle reproof of Fanny—in which he weighs his happiness against her "thanks"—and his complacent attachment to her. So at ease is he emotionally that he can pause, in his next to last sentence, to think over his other pleasures in order to assess his satisfaction in gratifying Fanny. But as soon as she announces that Mary has also given her a necklace, one that Fanny wishes to return, Edmund's rhythm and tone are drastically altered:

"Return the necklace! No, my dear Fanny, upon no account. It would be mortifying her severely. There can hardly be a more unpleasant sensation than the having any thing returned on our hands, which we have given with a reasonable hope of its contributing to the comfort of a friend. Why should she lose a pleasure which she has shewn herself so deserving of?" (p. 263)

The two bursts with which he begins; the fourth sentence, which runs on in agitation; the final, almost querulous question—all mark how deeply Mary affects him. Edmund has left his rhetoric of distinctions far behind, a point implied by Jane Austen's description of him a minute earlier as lost "in a reverie of fond reflection, uttering only now and then a few half sentences of praise" for Mary. It need hardly be added that in his overwhelming anxiety for Mary here he completely ignores Fanny's emotions, both her distrust of her rival and her devotion to him.

This is her fate through most of the novel, of course, and one repeated indication of blindness in Edmund, Mary, and Henry is that none of them can conceive of Fanny being in love with her cousin. All three reveal how essentially their feelings center
on themselves in the episodes dealing with Henry's pursuit of Fanny. Henry himself bears close resemblances to his sister. He too will use language as a vehicle for conscious self-display, rather more frequently than she does. He may put his wit on parade via metaphor for the amusement of Mary and himself: spending his time with her "would be all recreation and indulgence," he says, "without the wholesome alloy of labour, and I do not like to eat the bread of idleness. No, my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me' (p. 229). Or he may represent himself as a simpler soul, protesting to Maria on one occasion that he feels much too deeply to be a "man of the world" (p. 98)—while the whole dialogue shows, incongruously enough, his adroit control of implication and his easy manipulation of Maria. When Henry exploits language in this way, often more playfully than in my examples, he appears quite conscious of indulging himself. But he seems unaware that his remarks, when less carefully wrought, betray the same commitment to his private pleasure, the fundamental egotism that he shares with Mary. Thus, the natural environment itself must answer to his will: since he "can never bear to ask," he declares, "I told a man . . . that it was Thornton Lacey, and he agreed to it" (p. 241). And so must the human environment, although all the evidence that Henry has given us about his uncle runs counter to the following prediction: "When Fanny is known to him he will doat on her. She is exactly the woman to do away every prejudice of such a man as the Admiral, for she is exactly such a woman as he thinks does not exist" (p. 293). The whole world is cut to the pattern of his desires.

When Henry sets out to conquer Fanny, he intends merely to entertain himself with another flirtation of the sort he has conducted with Maria. Even after he has come to love Fanny, however, the recurrent motif of his speeches remains self-gratification. In announcing his love to his sister, he may joke about the "bitter pill" it will be to Maria and refuse to exaggerate his own attractions, but in the next breath he is exclaiming, "Yes, Mary, my Fanny will feel a difference indeed and it will be the completion of my happiness to know that I am the doer of it,
that I am the person to give the consequence so justly her due,”
and a moment later, “What can Sir Thomas and Edmund to­
ergether do, what do they do for her happiness, comfort, honour, 
and dignity in the world to what I shall do” (p. 297). I do not 
want to deny Henry the “moral taste” by which the author ex­
plains his attraction to Fanny, but the novel insists, relentlessly, 
that this taste is vitiated by Henry’s drive to indulge himself. His 
rhetoric gives away his condition when he brings Fanny news of 
the promotion he has engineered for her brother. Henry begins 
by asserting his unselfishness: “I will not talk of my own happi­
ness great as it is, for I think only of yours. Compared with 
you, who has a right to be happy?” But, as the breathless 
rhythms continue, he dwells mainly on what he has done and 
felt:

“I have not lost a moment, however. The post was late this morn­
ing, but there has not been since, a moment’s delay. How impa­
tient, how anxious, how wild I have been on the subject, I will 
not attempt to describe; how severely mortified, how cruelly dis­
appointed, in not having it finished while I was in London!”
(p. 299)

Even this “glow” of feeling does not seem to penetrate Henry 
too deeply, however, for on the next page Jane Austen reports 
him carrying on to Fanny about “the deepest interest two­
fold motives views and wishes more than could be told”—
in short, reverting to the controlled ambiguity he has practiced 
earlier with Maria. To be sure, Mansfield Park damns Henry 
arbitrarily in the end by involving him in that escapade with 
Maria, which happens too suddenly and is altogether too foolish 
to be convincing as behavior, at least as Henry’s behavior. Yet 
there is a degree of moral consistency in the act, for the novel 
shows Henry always ruled by the wish of the moment and bent 
on pleasing himself.

The reaction of Mary to Henry’s suit for Fanny makes clear 
that her primary feelings, like his, revolve around herself or mir­
ror limited personal allegiances. Furthermore, she proves herself 
as blind to Fanny’s real emotions as he has. When Henry tells
Mary of his hopes, she immediately desires the match for her own sake, because it will bring her closer to Edmund. Her “first” open response expresses both her own social commitment and her adoration for her brother: “Lucky, lucky girl! what a match for her! My dearest Henry, this must be my first feeling” (p. 292). Only then does she declare her genuine value for Fanny: “my second is that I approve your choice from my soul...” And Mary instantly rushes on to convert her feelings, much as Henry did, into a prediction: “I foresee your happiness as heartily as I wish and desire it.”

All is now cut to the pattern of Mary’s pleasure. But it is a pattern that sometimes minimizes Fanny as a person in making her simply an adjunct to Henry: “Exactly what you deserve.” Or at best the pattern takes Fanny’s emotions for granted, and in the following passage imposes its own moral order on the world as well: “Your wicked project upon her peace turns out a clever thought indeed. You will both find your good in it” (p. 295). The “good” equals the “clever,” the “wicked” being overcome by a verb of transformation.

In saying this, I do not mean that Mary is insensitive, has odious feelings, or really dislikes Fanny. But the novel does propose that she is as unable as Henry to shed the habit of self-indulgence. On her last personal appearance in Mansfield Park she tries as hard as she can to win Fanny over to Henry: “And then the glory of fixing one who has been shot at by so many; of having it in one’s power to pay off the debts of one’s sex! Oh, I am sure it is not in woman’s nature to refuse such a triumph” (p. 363). Perhaps the generalizations sound a little like an exhibition of Mary’s spiritedness, of the aspirations she can cherish, or perhaps she echoes here the values of fashionable society. In either case, the “woman’s nature” she envisions has absolutely nothing to do with the reality of Fanny. The behavior attributed to Mary in the closing pages of Mansfield Park—just as in the case of Henry—seems improbable; yet it is morally consistent. In one letter to Fanny she invokes the standard of self-interest in speculating on Tom Bertram’s possible death (pp. 433–34). In another, which reports the disappearance of Maria and Henry,
Mary's partiality for her brother compels her to pronounce him "blameless" (p. 437). The judgment Edmund ultimately passes on her—that she lacks "the most valuable knowledge the knowledge of ourselves and of our duty" (p. 459)—is priggishly bitter, but essentially it restates the point implicit in her verbal habits throughout the novel.

Edmund has good reason, by the end of *Mansfield Park*, to dwell on the importance of knowing oneself, for he has previously shown himself to be almost as self-willed as the Crawfords and just as blind concerning Fanny. He reaches the height of his confusion in the long dialogue during which he works to persuade his cousin that she should accept Henry (pp. 346-54). Edmund attempts one distinction after another, most of them plainly undermined by his love for Mary, and he finds himself opposed by a Fanny who speaks out more sharply than anywhere else, carefully reinforcing her feelings with sense. At first Edmund differentiates between how far Fanny has gone—"So far your conduct" in refusing Henry "has been faultless"—and how far he wishes her to go: "But let him succeed at last, Fanny, let him succeed at last." He desires Henry's success, of course, because it will bring Mary closer to him. And even as he grants here that Fanny was "perfectly right" in rejecting Henry, Edmund colors his statement by adding that the rejection makes him "sorry." To all this Fanny responds with a fervent denial that the match is possible: "Oh! never, never, never; he never will succeed with me." Under further pressure from Edmund, including a remark that Fanny is unlike her "rational self," she explains what she thinks about herself and Henry:

"We are so totally unlike we are so very, very different in all our inclinations and ways, that I consider it as quite impossible we should ever be tolerably happy together, even if I could like him. There never were two people more dissimilar. We have not one taste in common. We should be miserable."

For all the emotional intensity with which Fanny predicts the future, her predictions issue from an appraisal of the real dissimilarities between herself and Henry. In making her judgment,
moreover, she explicitly takes into account a condition contrary to her present feelings, "even if I could like him."

Edmund now pounces on her appraisal, confident that he can distinguish more aptly than she. Initially he contends that Fanny and Henry have a good deal in common, "moral and literary tastes," for instance, though about the best proof he can offer in support of this curious estimate is the rather equivocal example of Henry reading Shakespeare aloud. Then he claims that the main dissimilarity lies in their "tempers," a difference which, as he goes on, becomes a blessing, for it

"does not in the smallest degree make against the probability of your happiness together: do not imagine it. .. I am perfectly persuaded that the tempers had better be unlike . Some opposition here is, I am thoroughly convinced, friendly to matrimonial happiness."

By the time Edmund arrives at this last generalization, as the whole context of the dialogue makes perfectly clear, he is actually no longer thinking of Henry and Fanny at all, the case supposedly under consideration, but cheering himself up about his own relation with Mary. In fact his affection for her has informed the whole, presumably scrupulous analysis of Henry. Fanny recognizes as much and replies with a distinction of her own—between Henry's "temper" and "character"—that goes deeper than anything Edmund has managed, one which she supports with the evidence of Henry's flirting during the weeks given over to Lovers' Vows. But Edmund brushes her charge of impropriety aside, calling the time itself a "period of general folly," blaming his sisters, blaming himself, and readily slurring over Henry's behavior.

The dialogue comes to its climax when Edmund, kindled by thinking of Mary, reveals that he has talked with her and Mrs. Grant about Henry's proposal. In reporting their view, Edmund does not identify himself absolutely with it:

"That you could refuse such a man as Henry Crawford, seems more than they can understand. I said what I could for you; but
in good truth, as they stated the case—you must prove yourself to be in your senses as soon as you can, by a different conduct; nothing else will satisfy them."

His phrasing suggests, however, that he shares their opinion to some extent. And Fanny is stirred to utter her fullest defense of her own integrity as well as one of her most powerful indictments of Mary. Her opening generalizations expose the limitations of Henry's sisters, the first sentence by measuring their partiality for him against a standard of total sympathy, what "every woman must have felt," and the second sentence by measuring their assumption that the Henry they love "must be acceptable" to Fanny against a more rational evaluation of the possibilities:

"I should have thought that every woman must have felt the possibility of a man's not being approved, not being loved by some one of her sex, at least, let him be ever so generally agreeable. Let him have all the perfections in the world, I think it ought not to be set down as certain, that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like himself. But even supposing it is so, allowing Mr. Crawford to have all the claims which his sisters think he has, how was I to be prepared to meet him with any feeling answerable to his own? How was I to have an attachment at his service, as soon as it was asked for? His sisters should consider me as well as him. And, and—we think very differently of the nature of women, if they can imagine a woman so very soon capable of returning an affection as this seems to imply."

If those generalizations Fanny begins with imply that she thinks more clearly and feels less narrowly than the ladies whom she attacks, the rest of her comments show her exploring the emotional reality of her situation more intensely, more profoundly, than have Mary and Mrs. Grant. The whole speech dramatizes that special, quasi-divine quality in Fanny which sets her apart from all the other characters: her capacity to feel less personally and at the same time more deeply than anyone else. But Edmund, bound by his desire for the engagement, does not attend to what Fanny really says here; instead, he seizes on her conclu-
sion as a proof that she will soon be attached to Henry, the premise he has held to since the start of the conversation.

Till the end of *Mansfield Park*, it is standard procedure for Edmund to misinterpret Fanny's emotions and ignore her insight in relying, as we have so frequently seen him rely, on a logic unconsciously distorted by his love for Mary. Only after the affair between Henry and Maria, when Edmund finds Mary objecting to the "detection" rather than to the "offence" itself (p. 455), to the social appearance rather than to the moral reality, does he recognize his own errors in judgment: "My eyes are opened" (p. 456). Thus cleansed, he can become Jane Austen's gift to the worthy Fanny.

Throughout this chapter I have been insisting that every character except Fanny—whether major or minor, whether from Mansfield, London, or Portsmouth—is dominated to some degree by feelings which aim at satisfying the self. That is to say, all these persons are lacking in the capacity to be objective, which explains why *Mansfield Park* reads like a catalogue of misjudgments. The meaning of the novel turns on how accurately one can perceive reality, and this is the essential subject of those dialogues in which Jane Austen employs something like her technique of metaphoric indirection. I should probably call the technique here emblematic rather than metaphoric, for the author presents us with a correspondence between A and B, not with a fusion of them. Whereas some of the conversation in *Pride and Prejudice* operates on a literal and metaphorical level simultaneously, *Mansfield Park* will put two dialogues side by side, one of them a fairly explicit discussion of certain attitudes and the other an oblique representation of the same attitudes. It almost seems as if Jane Austen wants to make sure that no one can miss the moral issues involved.
Several pairs of scenes in the novel illustrate the method: the talk between Fanny and Mary about Edmund's name, which precedes a clash between Mary and Edmund over what is really valuable (pp. 211–14); or the discussion between Henry and Edmund concerning sermons, which is followed by Henry's misappraisal of his own character (pp. 339–44). But the two dialogues I shall take up occur during the outing to Sotherton, Mary and Edmund chatting together while Fanny listens (pp. 91–96). In these conversations Edmund stands his ground pretty firmly (we are still early in the novel), and it is Mary's habits that come under fire.

The first of the pair deals with Edmund's choice of a profession. Mary has recently learned that he is to take orders and, after expressing her "surprise," remarks:

"it had not occurred to me. And you know there is generally an uncle or a grandfather to leave a fortune to the second son."

"A very praiseworthy practice," said Edmund, "but not quite universal. I am one of the exceptions, and being one, must do something for myself."

A normal enough possibility has "not occurred" to Mary because she dislikes clergymen, and her wish that he were richer, could thus become something else, is the actual basis of the generalization that follows. Edmund points out its fallacy by "not quite universal," going on to emphasize the reality of his own situation by the accented being. Yet Mary still tries to circumvent the facts, buttressing her argument with another generalization obviously grounded in her aversion to the clergy:

"But why are you to be a clergyman? I thought that was always the lot of the youngest, where there were many to choose before him."

"Do you think the church itself never chosen then?"

"Never is a black word. But yes, in the never of conversation which means not very often, I do think it. For what is to be done in the church? Men love to distinguish themselves, and in
the other lines, distinction may be gained, but not in the church. A clergyman is nothing.”

When Edmund’s “never” confronts her with the exact logical consequence of her assertion, Mary accuses him of being the illogical one by her own play with “never”—though of course she ends up with a generalization more emotionally extreme than any she has earlier advanced.

So Edmund takes it on himself to give her a little lesson in analysis, but, before getting down to his most serious business, he both underlines her error and brings into the open her limited sense of what constitutes distinction:

“The nothing of conversation has its gradations, I hope, as well as the never. A clergyman cannot be high in state or fashion. But I cannot call that situation nothing, which has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally—which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence. No one here can call the office nothing. If the man who holds it is so, it is by the neglect of his duty and stepping out of his place to appear what he ought not to appear.”

Although Edmund’s rhetoric swells with feeling when he describes the responsibility of the clergy, in his speech as a whole he charts out a series of differentiations: between Mary’s view and his, the “office” and the “man,” appearance and reality. His sentences offer her a model, as it were, of the rational activity that must go hand in hand with generalizing.

But Mary refuses to retract her opinion, and I do not think her fundamental method changes. She may now take the trouble to create a verbal surface which seems more rigorously logical, first by distinguishing between “one” and “I,” then by making much of visual evidence:

“You assign greater consequence to the clergyman than one has been used to hear given, or than I can quite comprehend. One does not see much of this influence and importance in society,
and how can it be acquired where they are so seldom seen themselves? How can two sermons a week, even supposing them worth hearing, supposing the preacher to have the sense to prefer Blair's to his own, do all that you speak of? One scarcely sees a clergyman out of his pulpit."

Yet her contempt for clergymen breaks out again in the clause about Blair's sermons. And, despite the consciously impersonal "One" governing her last generalization, I cannot keep from hearing Mary's typical style here, the style which formulates her own experience as general truth. Perhaps this is unfair to Mary's feelings, but Edmund concerns himself only with her logic, suggesting to her again that a valid generalization needs a broad base:

"You are speaking of London, I am speaking of the nation at large."

"The metropolis, I imagine, is a pretty fair sample of the rest."

Mary, however, simply reasserts that her logic is inviolable, and, unshaken by another long paragraph of Edmund's distinctions, she restates the feeling that brought on the entire dialogue: "I am just as much surprised now as I was at first that you should intend to take orders." This section of the scene records a number of specific judgments, to be sure. Yet the main subject under discussion, as I have tried to show, is how to make a judgment that closes accurately with reality—a subject which both Edmund and Mary analyze more or less officially.

The different commitments that they have made fairly explicitly in the first conversation are imaged in a second, which occurs some moments later and revolves about the distance they have walked. Mary begins the dialogue by projecting, quite typically, her feeling of "wonder" at not being "tired" into a claim about how far they have gone, and Edmund replies by citing fact:

"I am really not tired, which I almost wonder at; for we must have walked at least a mile in this wood. Do not you think we have?"
“Not half a mile,” was his sturdy answer; for he was not yet so much in love as to measure distance, or reckon time, with feminine lawlessness.

Before she lets Mary answer, Jane Austen herself intervenes to insure that the reader will view the argument from a proper moral perspective.

And when Mary does continue, she performs on the emblematic level exactly as she has in judging clergymen, interpreting facts subjectively to support her private conviction:

“Oh! you do not consider how much we have wound about. We have taken such a very serpentine course; and the wood itself must be half a mile long in a straight line, for we have never seen the end of it yet, since we left the first great path.”

“But if you remember, before we left that first great path, we saw directly to the end of it. We looked down the whole vista, and saw it closed by iron gates, and it could not have been more than a furlong in length.”

“Oh! I know nothing of your furlongs, but I am sure it is a very long wood; and that we have been winding in and out ever since we came into it; and therefore when I say that we have walked a mile in it, I must speak within compass.”

Scoffing at the precision of Edmund’s “furlongs,” Mary discards his objective account to reaffirm what she has said earlier. Although her “therefore” has a reasonable sound, still the root of her whole declaration is the emotional certainty of “I am sure.” Even when Edmund comes forward with some corroborating data, she will not back down:

“We have been exactly a quarter of an hour here,” said Edmund, taking out his watch. “Do you think we are walking four miles an hour?”

“Oh! do not attack me with your watch. A watch is always too fast or too slow. I cannot be dictated to by a watch.”

Mary remains the intuitionalist impatient with the restrictions imposed by reality.
By the close of the scene, indeed, she will not really admit the evidence in front of her eyes:

"Now, Miss Crawford, if you will look up the walk, you will convince yourself that it cannot be half a mile long, or half half a mile."

"It is an immense distance," said she; "I see that with a glance."

He still reasoned with her, but in vain. She would not calculate, she would not compare. She would only smile and assert.

Clearly both Mary and Edmund are acting out—in all this business about looking at the wood and judging its size—the same principles that they talked over more explicitly in their dispute about clergymen. And Jane Austen's final words here heighten the emblematic quality: they not only spell out again the moral significance of the scene but also, in paralleling her first intrusion, complete the formal frame of the dialogue.

In the tendency of this emblematic method to handle the discussion of principles separately from their embodiment in action and to set up a one-to-one correspondence between the two, we have another reason for the sense of stiffness conveyed by the novel—and another proof of Jane Austen's need in Mansfield Park to decide unequivocally and uncompromisingly on questions of morality. If we turn now to Emma, we shall find no relaxing of the moral standards, but we will see Jane Austen taking up again a more purely dramatic technique.

1. Mudrick's chapter on Mansfield Park contains the most sustained account of it as presenting "a collision of worlds" (Jane Austen, p. 155). He condemns the novel, essentially on the grounds that Jane Austen abandons her ironic method to take a series of arbitrary moral stands—against the Crawfords, for Fanny, and in favor of the Mansfield world. I cannot agree with Mudrick—one of several points at which I quarrel with his reading of the novel—that the Mansfield characters are rendered so sympathetically as he suggests. A more satisfying critique, to my mind, appears in Lionel Trilling's essay on Mansfield Park in The Opposing Self (New York, 1955), pp. 206-30. Like Mudrick, he senses a clash between worlds in the novel and suggests that Jane Austen treats the
Mansfield group rather indulgently. But he defends the concept of duty advanced in Mansfield Park, discriminating brilliantly between the "insincerity" of the Crawfords and Fanny's integrity, between her principled behavior and "the style of sensitivity, virtue, and intelligence" that Mary "cultivates" (p. 220).

2. Lionel Trilling develops a much larger claim of this sort in his discussion of the acting episode in the novel (The Opposing Self, pp. 218-20).

3. Mudrick observes that Mary is "impatient with generalities" (Jane Austen, p. 162). He is not talking about her verbal habits, to be sure, yet I think his remark needs qualifying, given the number of times Mary herself generalizes. It might be truer to say that she is impatient with any generalizations but her own and those of the fashionable world. And I wonder if another of Mudrick's comments on Mary may not be similarly misleading. He finds that she is "uninfluenced by snobbery or condescension" in approving of the "prospective marriage" between Henry and Fanny (p. 166), and Mudrick illustrates his claim by quoting a passage in the course of which Mary remarks, "Fanny Price—Wonderful—quite wonderful!—That Mansfield should have done so much for—that you should have found your fate in Mansfield!" While Mary does wholeheartedly approve of the match, these words suggest that her immediate judgment is a social one. A little later on in my text I shall try to deal with Mary's reaction more fully.