MOTHERS, DAUGHTERS AND THE LEGACY OF THE ESTATE IN JANE AUSTEN'S MANSFIELD PARK AND PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

by

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Mothers, Daughters and the Legacy of the Estate in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

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**ABSTRACT**

Jane Austen uses the English estate and absent or ineffective mothers to show the relationship between mothers, their daughters, and the course of England’s culture. In both *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*, the main male characters and their estates are unified representations of English history and England’s potential future.

Austen’s heroines in these two novels learn from their mothers or mother substitutes how to become desirable wives and mothers. They do this by rejecting their mothers’ flawed value systems and developing their own strong sense of morality through experience, or by learning from an idealized mother figure. Once Austen’s heroines fully develop their own moral system, they are then ready to become the wives of the men of the great estates.

In marrying the upper class heroes, the heroines “improve” English society by bringing a strong sense of family, morality, equality and affection to the marriage, thereby passing these ideas on to their own offspring.

This abstract accurately represents the content of the candidate’s thesis. I recommend its publication.

Signed

Catherine Wiley
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Gregory Luby, for his unending patience, encouragement and support.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In all of her novels, Jane Austen uses the recurring theme of the absent or severely flawed mother for several purposes: These mothers serve as an often humorous, while at the same time serious, example of everything a mother should not be, and are also part of the extended metaphor for the legacy with which women are, by virtue of their role as child bearers, encumbered. Since England was separated by social classes that included: Rural gentry (those who had enough money to not work but who were not aristocrats), nobility (those awarded titles by the monarchy), moneyed professionals (those who were financially secure through work), urban merchants, gentlemen farmers, servants and rural poor (Handler 692), Austen’s women become an important part in her vision of England’s future. This vision includes the strengthening of non-aristocratic, rural gentry class familial and ancestral ties to England’s great estates through marriages to women who, instead of reinforcing the status quo, bring a new life to the gentry, thus reflecting the changing middle class of England through the blending of families. These changes include an increase in the number of people considered middle class through work (earning their wealth), rather than through inheritance.
I have chosen to look closely at the mother-daughter relationships in two of Austen’s novels—Mansfield Park and Pride and Prejudice. Despite the seemingly vast differences between the two novels, especially regarding their heroines, both Mansfield Park and Pride and Prejudice rely heavily on the ideas of mothers as the common link between the past and the future of England through the rearing of their middle class daughters. Austen belonged to a social class that consisted of “... large landowners, the armed services, the professions and the lower gentry [who] increasingly viewed the companionate marriage as the ideal...” (Jones 1), she therefore places more value on the worth of her heroines than the social class to which they belong. Moreover, the characters of Fanny Price (Mansfield Park) and Elizabeth Bennet (Pride and Prejudice) serve a similar purpose: to strengthen England through marriage.

It is no new observation that Austen’s mother characters are always flawed, and both Susan Peck MacDonald and Lionel Trilling argue that Austen must create flawed mothers in order for the heroines to have something to do; however, Austen’s flawed mothers also play a much more important role in the novels: that of lineal connection to England’s past. The mothers have their origins in the long-standing cultural traditions of England’s past; that is, they connect England’s past to its future through the education of their daughters, while the daughters represent all the possibilities of England’s future. As part of the past, Austen’s mothers are meant to be
flawed; that is, they are meant to be outdated because their daughters represent, for
good or bad, the changes occurring in England. Ideally, mothers are meant to
educate their daughters by teaching them not only how to be moral, but what good
morals are. However, since Austen’s bad mothers are incapable of directly teaching
their daughters, they teach them indirectly by setting an example by being the
antithesis of the ideal mother. Susan Peck MacDonald writes that the mother in
Austen’s novels

\[ \text{... [has] three... crucial tasks: she must handle her daughter’s}
\]
\[ \text{social contacts; she must insist upon propriety; and she must prevent}
\]
\[ \text{the wrong suitors from gaining her daughter’s affections. We see that}
\]
\[ \text{these are the mother’s tasks, not because they are performed properly}
\]
\[ \text{by the absent or inadequate mothers of these novels, but because they}
\]
\[ \text{are not performed properly. (59)}
\]

In not performing these tasks, whether because the mother is incapable or deceased,
the mother creates an indirect type of mothering or teaching that forces her daughter
to either emulate or reject her value system. Indirect mothering results in two types
of daughters: the heroine, who does not follow her mother’s example, and second, a
woman who emulates her mother who then becomes a fallen woman. The heroine
upholds England’s gentry class cultural traditions of valuing education and supporting
those in need (including the church), while at the same time bringing a newer
perspective from their more humble lives that includes marriage based on affection,
modesty, and economy in spending. This blending of ideas thereby strengthens
England national identity becoming a country that accepts social change. The moral daughters will become mothers who will in turn teach their children about being English and about England; they will “...guarantee the continuity of a traditional society, grounded in religious principle, guided by historical example, and ‘improved’ by individual energy” (Duckworth preface). The immoral daughter is left to wallow in the disgrace of an unsuitable marriage that can only damage the future of England by being the antithesis of these ideas.

Austen’s focus on motherhood as part of the continuance of the gentrified familial line is evident in each novel. In order for the next generation to be a “success,” Austen’s heroines must accomplish several things in their respective novels. First, they must prove their worth as young women, and thereby as a future wives and mothers. In order to accomplish this, each woman must traverse a series of situations that are meant to test them. Second, Austen’s heroines must address tests of moral character, such as the refusal of inappropriate husbands, a proper reaction in threatening situations, calmness in the face of chaos or refusal to compromise one’s moral beliefs despite pressure from family. Hina Nazar argues that the way in which Austen’s heroines move through their respective stories makes her “heroines the agents of a complex moral education [and shows the importance of] women cultivating their own critical judgment” (145), while at the same time endorsing the chief value of “adherence to the norms of propriety, which embody the collective...
judgment of society rather than the judgment of the individual” (145). Austen’s women must learn what society expects of them before they can be accepted as wives. Once each heroine has learned what these expectations are and has passed all these tests to prove her knowledge, she becomes suitable and desirable wife and mother material. Passing these tests assures potential husbands that the women are able to continue a morally sound familial line through being good wives and mothers, while failure results in bad marriages and humiliation.

It is each mother’s responsibility to educate her daughter in becoming a wife, in part by “. . . [easing] the transition from the private and individualistic world of adolescence into the social and therefore somewhat conventionalized world of maturity” (MacDonald 59). However, Austen’s mothers fail in this task; therefore, her heroines must find adequate substitutes from whom they can learn. In *Mansfield Park*, heroine Fanny Price turns to her male cousin Edmund, while in *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth Bennet turns to her Aunt Gardiner. As the heroines learn, they become ready to be part of English history.
Austen uses the English estate as a representation of England itself. In doing so, she requires her heroines to prove themselves worthy to become wives and mothers, but she also requires her heroes to prove themselves as worthy of being husbands to her heroines. Both heroines and heroes must have self-knowledge and the ability to learn and change from their mistakes. Gary Kelly writes that Mansfield Park is “a figure for England or Britain as rural, leisured and cultivated but with heavy social, economic, and imperial responsibilities that must be carefully tended and reinvigorated in each generation,” and that it is also a “mansefield,” a field for the inspiriting influence of the manse or domestic home of the established church and its theology of true faith, or ideological correctness, and good works, or social responsibility and leadership. (26)

And these ideas are included in all of Austen’s novels. The estate was much more than a home to a wealthy family, it was the center of the community in which the villagers lived. The head of an estate would have been expected to set an example for those living in his village; his character would have been judged by the way in which his estate was run, on how he worshipped, and how he supported the village. As we shall see, Austen uses these ideas to create the male characters in the form of
responsible, caring landowners, or neglectful, foolish landowners. The country estate was valued not only because it symbolized wealth, but also because the growing distance between “town dwellers [and] rural life” caused “... men and women of letters [who] cherished local roots and traditions [to fear] that they were being lost” (Brewer 617). As more people found ways to earn money in the large cities (particularly London), the idea of a rural neighborhood, with a closely-knit social circle began giving way to the idea of gaining personal wealth through individual work. Social classes were beginning to become more fluid, and Austen reflects that change in her representations of the great estates of her novels.

The estates of Pemberley, Mansfield Park, and Sotherton all play important roles in the continuance, or potential discontinuance, of the social constructs of patriarchy and class. Each of these great estates represents not only wealth and the gentry of the England of the past, but also the hope of more generations in the future. Each marriage is therefore a connection to the future, and Austen shows us through the marriages of Fanny Price and Elizabeth Bennet that although class distinctions are changing, with the middle class becoming larger, those changes can improve the quality of the estate by blending the most desirable qualities of both the landed gentry and the upper-middle class. In the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, we see the lively, intelligent Elizabeth, act as a counterbalance to the more reserved Darcy, while in *Mansfield Park* Fanny acts as a stabilizer, not only for Edmund, but for the entire
aristocratic Bertram family. Therefore, by marrying into landed gentry, each heroine positively influences the estate as it is represented by her husband. Husbands are so closely associated with their estates, that the descriptions of the estates can be interchanged with their owners.

The reader’s first glimpse of Pemberley is also Elizabeth’s first glimpse. The narrator describes the estate:

It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills;--and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. . .[Elizabeth] had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste... [T]o be mistress of Pemberley might be something! (PP 159)

Pemberley is both an extension and reflection of Darcy and his familial line. Darcy tells us as much himself, early in the novel when he describes Pemberley’s library as “. . .the work of many generations” (PP 26). From the estate’s description we can then draw a clearer description of Darcy himself: He is of “natural importance”--that is, he comes from a long line of English gentry, he is a landowner, and, is the firstborn (and only) son of the Darcy family. As such, he is an important part of English history; he and his family history are one and the same. He is not “artificial”: he (like Pemberley) can be seen as someone for whom nature could not have done more. He is graced with being handsome and intelligent, and we learn later in the novel that he is
a good and moral man. Moreover, he does not falsely present himself to others, as Wickham and Mr. Collins do, as being something more, or less, than he is. He does not consider that his first proposal to Elizabeth will offend her because he speaks honestly, remarking "... disguise of every sort is my abhorrence" (PP 127). Perhaps most importantly, to be his wife would be "something" extraordinary—that is, to be both his wife and part of the Darcy familial line. Even Mrs. Gardiner, who has not met Darcy, describes him in a portrait as having "... something a little stately in him..." (PP 167). Therefore, when Darcy’s housekeeper (Mrs. Reynolds) tells Elizabeth and the Gardiners that she does not know when Darcy shall marry because she "does not know who is good enough for him" (PP 161), readers can then understand that Elizabeth is not yet "good enough" to marry Darcy; she must yet prove that she is not only worthy of the legacy, but understands its value as part of historical England. It is as this point in the novel when Elizabeth begins to consider becoming a part of Darcy’s world, and since the estate is an extension of its owner, Elizabeth must consider what she can bring to Pemberley; what she will have to do as a potential wife and mother, to improve Pemberley. Austen handles one of Mansfield Park’s great estates in a similar manner.

The estate of Sotherton, owned by the ridiculous Mr. Rushworth, is "one of the largest estates and finest place in the country" (MP 29). Maria Bertram sets her sights on marrying Rushworth, not because she loves or respects him but because "a
marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father’s, as well as ensure her the house in town, which was now a prime object” (MP 29). Since Maria’s motivation to marry is not love, but material gain, the Sotherton estate is a stark contrast to the stable, well-tended legacy of Pemberley, and, like the description of Pemberley, Sotherton’s description can be interchanged with its master:

[Sotherton] is a large, regular, brick building—heavy, but respectable looking, and has many good rooms. It is ill placed. It stands in one of the lowest spots of the park; in that respect, unfavourable for improvement. (MP 59)

Because of his social status, Rushworth is respectable, and we are told that his appearance is not “disagreeable” (MP 124) and could therefore be considered, like Sotherton itself, regular, but because of his stupidity he is also unfavorable for improvement. Furthermore, Rushworth’s obvious social ineptness and awkwardness put him in an “ill place” socially: he does not fit in with other members of the gentry, nor do they respect him as an equal, marking him as “one of the lowest” in his social circle. Additionally, Rushworth’s surname may have sub-meaning that devalues him even more: The word “rush” is defined as “something of no value or importance” (OED), and combining this with the second part of the name, “worth,” works to reinforce the idea that Rushworth has no value. Moreover, Rushworth’s continued ideas for improving an estate that is by description “unfavourable for
improvement" reflect Rushworth's lack of knowledge regarding his lineal connection to his estate. Because he is considering hiring someone to improve his estate, rather than making the attempt himself, as he should, he is damaging the cultural worth of his estate. In addition, Edmund's remarks that the chapel in Sotherton "was only for the private use of the family. They have been buried, I suppose, in the parish church" (MP 61) emphasizes Rushworth's and the estate's separation from England's past, which, like his ancestors, has for him been buried.

During a discussion of Sotherton, Rushworth describes part of his improvements as the removal of "...two or three fine old trees cut down that grew too near the house" (MP 41). Rushworth's mindless "improvements" affect Fanny, who laments, "Cut down an avenue! What a pity!" and "I should like to see Sotherton before it is cut down, to see the place as it is now, in its old state..." (MP 41). Fanny understands the importance of the English estate, and the importance of the changes that Rushworth seems desirous of making. In rejecting an estate that is already respectable and long established, Rushworth metaphorically rejects his (English) past; he does not respect the ancestral land; therefore, not only will the physical estate suffer from Rushworth's ill planned improvements, but the improvements are a foretelling of the beginning of the end of the Rushworth legacy. As it stands, Sotherton is a "...heavy, but respectable..." (MP 41) estate, that under the care of Rushworth will be destroyed.
Nowhere is this more apparent than in the description of the trip to Sotherton, wherein the surrounding village, as a reflection of the estate, is filled with "cottages [that] are really a disgrace" (*MP* 59). Since country estates were "often the main source of employment in the parish" (Cliffe 1), Rushworth does not fulfill his obligation to his tenets as a landowner. Therefore, the disgrace of the village is not only a reflection on Mr. Rushworth's inability to manage his estate, it also mirrors the eventual disgrace of Rushworth after Maria runs away with Henry Crawford. But first, Maria also rejects Sotherton because of her desire to live in town. Rushworth, with his thoughtless improvements, and Maria, with her scandalous affair, ravage the legacy of the Sotherton estate.

Mansfield Park serves a similar purpose but with one crucial difference: the head of the estate is an established, married man with adult children. For the estate of Mansfield Park, the trial of the potential wife occurred long ago. Austen tells us that Sir Thomas, "about thirty years ago" was "captivated" by Miss Maria Ward, and soon after married her (*MP* 5). It is important that Austen does not use the word "love" to describe their feelings, and because of this we also discover that Lady Bertram was not the worthy choice that Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price become. And since Lady Bertram is not an ideal choice, she and Sir Thomas do not produce children who will improve on Mansfield Park's greatness but rather may damage it beyond repair.
However, we see hope for Mansfield Park towards the end of the novel when Sir Thomas's oldest son, Tom, recovers from a serious illness

...without regaining the thoughtlessness and selfishness of his previous habits... He had suffered, and he had learnt to think, two advantages that he had never known before... He became what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself. (MP 313)

After his recovery, he is ready to begin the process of becoming part of Mansfield Park, as its future master. Tom will learn to become a beneficial link in the historical legacy of Mansfield Park.

Pemberley, Mansfield Park and Sotherton represent such an important part of English identity and culture that Austen leaves us in no doubt as to who her anti-heroines are and what threat they pose to the stability of England. Moreover, her focus on good and bad women in the forms of daughter, wife, sister and mother, creates a strong association between the women and the future of England. Women were commonly considered "as repository and reproducer of the "national" culture, not in the sense of high culture, but as the moral and ethical practices in local, daily existence that together constituted the nation..." (Kelly 14), and as such their worth to not only their families and husbands but to England had to be proven because, as Austen warns us through her writing, if women make mistakes of morality, those mistakes will adversely affect generations to come.
In *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice* we see the heroines rewarded for their ability to make the proper moral choices and for their support of family (often despite the families themselves). The reward consists of an ideal marriage that includes love, mutual respect and financial security. The reward assures that the deserving heroines will perpetuate the legacy into which they have married by raising the next generation of children to have qualities from both the gentry and the middle class that will again strengthen the family unit with strong morals and consequently England. Conversely, the women (and often men) who lack these values pay the price in miserable marriages, humiliation and, as with Maria Bertram, scandalous divorce.

Austen is particularly critical of immoral women, that is, women who are not necessarily evil or villainous but rather lack qualities that, like estates, Austen feels are important to be considered “good.” Just as the heroines have faults, Austen’s anti-heroines have their good qualities: however, the crucial difference is that her heroines have the ability to self-reflect and learn from their mistakes. Austen’s heroines make decisions based on what is best for their social circle and the social circle is representative of the larger picture of England. Therefore, in making good decisions, the heroines strengthen England. Unlike the anti-heroines, whose only motivations are selfish, the heroines’ intentions are always good. The distinction between heroine and anti-heroine is not necessarily whether the character herself is likable, but whether or not she is moral. If a woman is immoral (Mary Crawford and Maria
Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, and Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*), she must be punished. Punishment of these women is especially important since each woman has the potential (due to her social status) to become the mistress of a great estate.
CHAPTER 3
MOTHERS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Since the estates of Mansfield Park and Pemberley represent an idea of gentrified England and English society that is by Austen’s time being threatened by the rapidly upward-moving middle class, it is not difficult to imagine Austen creating female characters to have dual meaning. First, they are meant to be believable representations of the eighteenth-century woman (whether heroine or anti-heroine), and second, they metaphorically represent some of English society’s changing ideas: ideas of individualism, marrying for love, rather than solely for financial security, and the ability to earn one’s fortune (rather than inheriting it), and Austen’s opinions on the negative and positive effects that will be a result of those changes. Austen accomplishes this by directly connecting the female characters to the legacy of the estate through the relationships between mother and daughter. The relationships between Austen’s heroines and their mothers is one of learning and example: the heroines learn, at least in part, by the examples their mothers set.

All of Austen’s novels create situations wherein young women are either rewarded or punished, as individuals, by the way in which their principles decide their actions. Their morality is “the passport [they] had to display to prove that they were abiding by the social code” (Porter 7). As mentioned earlier, the young women
all lack (to some extent) perhaps the most important role model from whom they
should be learning these values: their mothers. While all but two of the heroines have
mothers who are present at some point in the novels (Emma Woodhouse and Anne
Elliot’s mothers are dead), all of Austen’s mothers fall into three basic categories: The
absent or ineffective mother (Mrs. Price and Lady Bertram; Mrs. Bennet) whose lack
of parental skills leaves the heroine vulnerable to the influence of the bad mother
figure or others within the heroine’s social circle; the bad example of a mother figure
(as Fanny’s aunt, Lady Bertram; Mrs. Norris and the Crawfords’ aunt; Lady
Catherine) who are poor examples so that each young woman has something against
which to compare her own morals; and the idealized mother figure (Aunt Gardiner in
Pride and Prejudice, Mrs. Croft in Persuasion, Elinor in Sense and Sensibility) whose
purpose is to model what qualities an ideal mother should have. It is noteworthy (as
we shall consider later) that Mansfield Park does not appear to have an idealized
mother figure.

All the mothers serve a specific purpose in guiding the heroine and the anti-
heroine’s judgment since mothers are a template from which the women build their
own ideas of morality and family. The women either adopt or reject their mothers’
belief system. Anti-heroines Mary Crawford, Maria Bertram and Lydia Bennet all
assume the same undesirable values systems as their mothers and/or mother figures,
and of the three women only Mary Crawford has little choice in her acquisition of
values, since she has no idealized mother figure from whom she can learn a more acceptable value system. She is therefore bound to be an anti-heroine.

Mrs. Bennet, Aunt Gardiner and the Daughters of *Pride and Prejudice*

The relationship between Mrs. Bennet and her daughters is emblematic of what Linda C. Hunt calls the eighteenth-century "[endless debate] over the potential conflict between filial obedience and a woman’s right to marry for love" (11). The preference for marrying for love, rather than financial security, is apparent in all of Austen’s novels; however, she cautions that both must be considered before marrying. Elizabeth Bennet refuses to marry Mr. Collins because she does not love (or even like) him, despite his having a good income and the potential to become wealthy, while Frances Ward (Fanny Price's mother) marries for love without any consideration of finances, and then lives in near poverty. However, when Elizabeth’s close friend Charlotte Lucas marries Mr. Collins, she maintains the past tradition of marrying solely for financial security and then trying to make the best of her life with a man she does not love. Each woman makes her decision based on what she has, or has not learned from her mother: Elizabeth will not marry, as her mother and father did, without love, Frances Ward marries against her family’s wishes, Charlotte Lucas marries to relieve her father of the financial burden of an unmarried daughter.
Louise Maunsell Field argues that “[t]he only method of getting any sort of independence in fiction of either man or maid, without half-orphaning them, was to make the mother either a complete fool or . . . a timid, tender creature. . .” (255).

Additionally, Nina Auerbach correctly comments that in *Pride and Prejudice* (along with Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*)

. . . the mother is indefatigably committed to the administrative “business” of marrying her vividly alive but economically superfluous daughters; it is she who forges the family’s liasion with the outside world of marriage, morals, and money that eligible men embody. (7)

She misses the mark in describing this “dominant female [world]” as “[a] nineteenth-century [version] of the family as an (almost) Adamless Eden, in all its power to repel or retain” (7). Since Austen uses male characters and their estates as metaphors for England, it is still men who retain the right to approve or disapprove of the women from whom they can choose to marry. Furthermore, Duckworth describes Darcy and Elizabeth’s marriage as the culmination of “the education of the hero and heroine. . .” (117), the novel itself reflecting “an individual’s moral duty is necessarily to society. . .” (118); therefore, it is Elizabeth’s proper sense of morality that allows her to marry Darcy while Lydia, with her faulty morality, marries a man with similar morals. The success or failure of these women is inextricably dependent upon their relationship with their mother.
Mrs. Bennet has one goal: to marry all five of her daughters to the highest ranking (and wealthiest) men she can. Her daughters must attract and then be approved by eligible and suitable men. In order for them to accomplish this, they must understand what kind of woman makes a “good” or desirable wife. However, Mrs. Bennet’s failure to properly educate her daughters, to teach them strong moral values, results in her daughters’ struggles to prove or disprove their worth as wives. Since the only “successful” or advantageous marriages come from the two daughters who are least influenced by their mother, and because the youngest daughter who is most like her mother creates a scandal with her marriage, Mrs. Bennet is a failure as a mother: She has not taught her daughters how to be moral women.

Mrs. Bennet is described as “a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper” (PP 4), and from the beginning we see desperation in her, since “[t]he business of her life [is] to get her daughters married” (PP 4). Her relationships with her daughters varies from one of minimal tolerance (with Elizabeth) to great attachment (with Lydia), and her relationships with them determine their paths through the novel: Elizabeth will triumph because she is least like (and therefore least liked by) her mother, while Lydia will fail because she is most similar to (and most liked by) Mrs. Bennet.
Lydia is described by the narrator as

... a stout, well-grown girl of fifteen, with a fine complexion and good-humoured countenance; a favorite with her mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early age. She had high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attentions of the officers... had increased into assurance, (PP 31)

and as “more vacant than her sisters” (PP 20) by her father. Mrs. Bennet’s decision to allow Lydia to “come out” early not only shows her favoritism toward Lydia but also poor judgment: Mrs. Bennet has broken a social rule in which the eldest daughter should be married prior to the youngest coming out into public (thus reducing the number of women within the same family competing for husbands). The similarities between Mrs. Bennet and Lydia become clearer as we find that Lydia (and Kitty) “could talk of nothing but officers; and Mr. Bingley’s large fortune” (PP 20), and Mrs. Bennet reminisces about “the time when I liked a red coat myself very well--and indeed so I do still at my heart. ..” (PP 21). Mrs. Bennet and her two youngest daughters mistakenly believe that a man’s worth is attached to the uniform: therefore, they are all too willing to accept any man in a red coat as a man of great worth. This may be in part due to the shortage of eligible men, who, according to Hazel Jones, were “out of the country...” (46) fighting in France. The difficulty with Mrs. Bennet and Lydia’s ready acceptance of any man in uniform is that, although they were “physical magnets...” for single ladies, “little could be discovered of their backgrounds or characters if they were posted away from their own
neighborhoods” (Jones 47); therefore, as we see with Wickham, a soldier’s character was unknown and could only be determined over time. Lydia’s quick attachment to a man about whom she knows very little is part of her impetuousness and immaturity.

Mrs. Bennet’s close connection with Lydia helps explain why she cannot properly mother her children-- or teach them proper morals--because she herself is still a child at heart, still fantasizing about the soldier in the red coat from her distant past. When she is forced into the role of mother, she becomes sick and “nervous,” having the adult equivalent of a temper tantrum. Moreover, the social-protocol-conscious Lady Catherine De Bourgh is shocked to discover that the Bennets have had “five daughters brought up at home without a governess!--I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education” (110). As an aristocrat, Lady Catherine cannot understand how children can be properly educated without a governess; however, Austen uses Lady Catherine to create a sense of irony: Lady Catherine’s daughter, who has been educated by a governess, is no better off than the Bennet daughters. Indeed, Miss De Bourgh is sickly, quiet, and, despite all the suggestions by Lady Catherine to all her neighbors (and anyone else who will listen) about the proper way to raise a child, has none of the social graces that Lady Catherine believes are important. Moreover, as an aristocrat, the sickly, weak Miss De Bourgh can be seen as part of the old, weakening aristocratic system, and Lady De
Bourgh as a woman struggling to keep the aristocracy “pure” through an arranged marriage of her daughter to Darcy.

Elizabeth reassures Lady Catherine that Mrs. Bennet had not been “a slave” to her daughters education because she knows that Mrs. Bennet’s immaturity, makes her incapable of teaching her daughters. Furthermore, Elizabeth is quick to point out that “... such of us as wished to learn, never wanted the means” (PP 110). The difference then, between Elizabeth and Jane and Kitty and Lydia is not that they did not have access to education, but rather that Kitty and Lydia lacked the desire to learn through any means other than their mother, while Elizabeth and Jane take ownership of theirs through reading and through the example set by Aunt Gardiner. Since Lydia relies solely on her mother for her education, she is bound to be a failure like her. Moreover, in a discussion of “accomplished” ladies, Mr. Darcy remarks that in addition to the trivial craftwork skills that a woman must have, “... she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading” (PP 27). Lydia’s lack of interest in reading, or “improvement” of herself, is a reflection of her inability to grow (and learn) throughout the novel. After Lydia is married, she remarks: “I had no more idea of being married till I came back again! though I though it would be very good fun if I was” (PP 205), as if marriage were a game she has played her entire life. She, like Mrs. Bennet, will remain childlike in the belief that the world she knows is centered around her.
With such a poor role model as Mrs. Bennet, the five Bennet sisters are essentially left to sort out their own belief systems alone. Jane and Elizabeth, who become caretakers to their mother in times of great stress, are mature beyond their years and have filled the gap in education by learning from reading and from their relationship with the idealized mother figure of the novel, Aunt Gardiner. Elizabeth remarks that she is “... not a great reader. . .” (*PP* 26); however, since her comment is in response to Miss Bingley’s criticism that “Miss Eliza Bennet. . . is a great reader and has no pleasure in anything else” (*PP* 26), Elizabeth’s admission is not meant to indicate that she does not read but that she does not read to the exclusion of everything else. This is quite unlike pedantic middle sister, Mary, whom Austen uses as an example of another form of misguided self-education. Unlike Elizabeth, who “. . .[has] pleasure in many things” (*PP* 26), Mary prefers to parrot philosophical views which she has read but does not fully comprehend. Elizabeth’s interest in a variety of things shows that she is a well-rounded woman who enjoys learning for pleasure and her own education, rather than to impress others.

However, Lydia’s dislike of learning and reading is evident when Mr. Bennet teasingly invites Mr. Collins to read aloud to the ladies and “before he had read three pages, [Lydia] interrupted him. . .” (*PP* 47) with talk of soldiers. Mr. Collins declines reading a novel aloud in ironic favor of *Fordye’s Sermons*--a woman’s conduct book that warns of “vanities of pleasure” (*PP* footnote 47). It is not Mrs. Bennet who tries
to quiet Lydia (as it should be), but Elizabeth and Jane. They do not necessarily act
because the book that Mr. Collins is reading is interesting (or because they believe
Lydia and Kitty are in need of education), but because, as a guest in their home (and a
cousin to boot), he deserves the courtesy of his hosts’ attention. Since Mr. Bennet
seems content to be an observer of his guest’s treatment and reaction, and Mrs.
Bennet fails to correct Lydia, it is left to the more learned and thoughtful eldest sisters
to try and teach their younger sisters this social duty. Furthermore, Mr. Collins
(though a thoroughly ridiculous character) poignantly remarks:

> I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books
> of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes
> me, I confess;--for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to
> them as instruction. (PP 47)

While there is irony in Mr. Collins’ statement, particularly because he is hyper-aware
of social protocol, and takes them to an extreme in a (mostly) failed attempt to
ingratiate himself among the upper classes, there is still some significance in his
words. Mr. Collins is a character of extremes, and by commenting that “nothing” can
be so advantageous, he forgets about the influence parents should have on their
childrens’ education, preferring instead to leave a young woman’s education solely to
books, without the guidance of her parents.

Lydia and Kitty, 17 and 15 years old when the novel begins, they are the most
immature of the sisters and lack self-control; therefore, they are the most similar to
their mother and are also the most in need of instruction. However, since Lydia’s behavior is so similar to Mrs. Bennet’s, Mrs. Bennet does not find fault with it, and, since she cannot correct what she does not recognize as improper, the youngest girls are left to do as they please in the name of finding husbands.

Lydia and Kitty are the two who, at first, walk the fine line between “good” and “bad” girls; that is, at 15 and 17 they are still impressionable enough to become moral women and wives. Kitty, the second youngest, is easily and strongly influenced by her younger sister, and Lydia has been heavily influenced by her mother. The two girls talk of nothing but men, and in public have a “total want of propriety...” (PP 130-1), adding to the idea of having “high animal spirits.” Nina Auerbach describes Lydia and Kitty (along with Miss Bingley) as “sex-seekers, or women who “...complete their identity within a narrow concept of sexual roles...” whose “...self-centered aggressions are all based on a superficial, or largely physical, estimate of their own worth” (330), while she also argues that middle-sister Mary’s “intellectual pretensions...[are worn] like Lydia and Kitty displaying their newest ribbons” (330).

As the youngest and closest in personality to Mrs. Bennet, it is Lydia who moves from being a high-spirited young woman with the possibility of being taught to regulate her behavior, to an irredeemable, fallen woman. The point of no return comes when Mr. Bennet allows Lydia to accompany an acquaintance to Brighton.
Mr. Bennet

In making the decision to allow Lydia to travel to Brighton, Mr. Bennet fails Lydia in two ways: First, he selfishly shirks his responsibility as a father by refusing to take the whole family to Brighton because he prefers the quiet of home. In placing his own desire above the paternal duty of supervising his daughter, he loses the opportunity to prevent Lydia’s fall. Second, he fails to follow Elizabeth’s advice:

If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. (PP 151)

Prior to going to Brighton, Lydia is still redeemable but if, and only if, Mr. Bennet teaches her right from wrong. Since Elizabeth knows that her mother is incapable of teaching Lydia, she advises her father in the hopes of forcing him into the role of the educating parent. However, by failing to take Elizabeth’s advice and still allowing Lydia to travel to Brighton, Mr. Bennet denies his responsibility for her education and consequently her morality. Furthermore, since Mrs. Bennet does not have the capacity to educate their daughters, the responsibility should have (as it does with Sir Thomas in Mansfield Park) already fallen to Mr. Bennet, but Mr. Bennet, who is fully capable, yet unwilling to teach his daughters, also becomes a parental failure.

Mr. Bennet is “so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice” (PP 4), as to make him a likable character; however, when it comes to
preparing his daughters for the world of courtship, he fails miserably. Elizabeth “had never been blind to the impropriety of her father’s behavior as a husband” (PP 155); however, he is also derelict in his duty as a father. One imagines that poor Mr. Bennet has been worn away by twenty years of marriage to childlike Mrs. Bennet, “... whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her” (PP 155), and simply no longer has the energy to try to improve his daughters. Still, after Elizabeth accepts Darcy’s second proposal, Mr. Bennet warns her: “My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life” (PP 246). Since Elizabeth is his favorite, he does not wish his own circumstances upon her; yet, the irony is that he has already given his approval for the marriage despite his belief that his daughter is marrying for wealth, rather than love. In addition, despite Elizabeth feeling so strongly

... the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, [and being fully aware] of the evils arising from so ill-judged a directions of talents; talents which rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife, (PP 155)

it is Mr. Bennet from whom Elizabeth has learned to harshly judge, criticize and make fun of others, and it is this flaw that causes her to misjudge, and almost lose, Darcy. However, Elizabeth is able to turn to others, namely Aunt Gardiner, to learn to correct the poor habits her father has taught her.
Mrs. Gardiner, The Good Mother

Mrs. Gardiner, serves as the ideal mother to Elizabeth and Jane Bennet and is described as

... an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces [and] between the two eldest and herself especially, there subsisted a very particular regard. (PP 93)

Her surname alone gives us insight into her powers to nurture and make things grow, provides Jane and Elizabeth with a proper mother figure from whom they can learn; she “plants the seeds,” of morality and good mothering in Jane and Elizabeth, helping them to grow into fine young women. However, Lydia, much like a weed, having “never been a favourite with [the Gardiners]” (PP 182), remains uninfluenced by Mrs. Gardiner. We know that Jane and Elizabeth are influenced by Mrs. Gardiner because “they had frequently been staying with her in town,” (PP 93) and because they regularly write to one another. Although the Gardiners live “in town,” they are not susceptible to the corrupting influence of London because Mr. Gardiner has earned his living (rather than inherited it) through trade. He is a man who lives “... within view of his own warehouses...” [is] “educated” and “greatly superior to his sister” (PP 93). The Gardiners are thoroughly middle class; that is, they have earned what fortune they have by working and therefore do not view themselves as privileged. They are unlike Darcy, the Bertrams, and Crawfords, who as members of the gentry and aristocracy and having gained their fortunes through inheritance, do
not have to work, therefore. Mrs. Gardiner's influence on Jane and Elizabeth is much more grounded in practicality.

As a middle class woman, Mrs. Gardiner is able to give Jane and Elizabeth very sober and honest advice. After inviting Jane to visit them in London, Mrs. Gardiner cautions that if Jane agrees, Mrs. Gardiner "[hopes] . . . that no consideration with regard to [Bingley] will influence her. We live in so different a part of town, all our connections so different, and, as you well know, we go out so little, that it is very improbable they should meet at all..." (PP 95). Moreover, in acting as a mother figure for Elizabeth, she reminds Elizabeth that:

You are too sensible a girl, Lizzy, to fall in love merely because you are warned against it; and, therefore, I am not afraid of speaking openly. Seriously, I would have you be on your guard. Do not involve yourself or endeavor to involve him [Wickham] in an affection which the want of fortune would make so very imprudent . . . you must not let your fancy run away with you. You have sense, and we all expect you to use it. Your father would depend on your resolution and good conduct, I am sure. (PP 96)

As a woman who has the proper skills to raise daughters, Mrs. Gardiner is aware that oftentimes young girls feel the need to rebel against their parents' advice; however, she also knows Elizabeth well enough (unlike Mrs. Bennet) to speak very openly about Elizabeth's prospects with Wickham. Mrs. Gardiner knows that Elizabeth is much more "sensible" than Lydia; therefore her advice will not go unheeded. Mrs. Gardiner also advises Elizabeth to " . . . discourage his coming here so very often. At
least, you should not remind your Mother of inviting him” (PP 97), reminding us and Elizabeth that Mrs. Bennet’s own judgment is flawed. As Elizabeth’s stable, and ideal mother figure, Mrs. Gardiner’s advice is “a wonderful instance of advice being given on such a point, without being resented” (PP 97).

Moreover, unlike Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Gardiner’s judgment throughout the novel is always led chiefly by her sense of propriety rather than emotion. After learning that Mr. Wickham has turned his attentions towards a young woman who has just come into a large inheritance, Mrs. Gardiner remarks “there seems indelicacy in directing his attentions towards her so soon after this event,” while also commenting that “her not objecting [to his attentions] does not justify him. It only shews her being deficient in something herself—sense or feeling” (PP 102-3). Most importantly, Mrs. Gardiner remarks that she “[does] not choose” (PP 103) to consider Mr. Wickham mercenary or Miss King foolish without knowing more of either of them. Unlike Elizabeth, who has been too quick to judge Darcy as conceited and proud, and Wickham as a victim of Darcy’s, Mrs. Gardiner’s steadiness allows her to gather facts, thus reserving judgment until the proper conclusion can be made. It is therefore fitting that it is Mrs. Gardiner who reveals, or “educates” Elizabeth regarding Darcy’s involvement in Lydia’s marriage to Wickham, bringing Elizabeth’s education full-circle, thereby making her worthy to marry Darcy. Moreover, Darcy’s acceptance of
the Gardiners while they are at Pemberley indicates his approval of them as substitute parents. Darcy, too, has a had in Elizabeth’s education.

After Elizabeth angrily rejects Darcy’s proposal, Darcy writes a letter of explanation that teaches Elizabeth that she too hastily judges others, not based on facts, like Mrs. Gardiner, but based on her initial impression. In addition, she is so confident in her first assessment of Darcy and Wickham that she does not reassess her opinions as she begins to learn more about the two. It is only after reading Darcy’s letter that she begins to doubt herself, feeling “[a]stonishment, apprehension and even horror. . .” (PP 135). It is here that she finally begins to reconsider what she has believed about the two men against what Darcy has written in the letter, realizing “how differently did everything now appear in which [Wickham] was concerned!” (PP 136). In retrospect, Elizabeth sees the immorality of Wickham’s behavior while also understanding that Darcy’s behavior has never been “... unprincipled or unjust [or] any thing that spoke him of irreligious or immoral habits” (PP 137). Once she has thoroughly evaluated herself, Wickham and Darcy, “... she grew absolutely ashamed of herself.-- Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd” (PP 137). Elizabeth is thoroughly disappointed in herself and moves to correct herself. Moreover, during her reflection, she must also recognize that “Jane’s disappointment had in fact been the work of her nearest relations, [and] how materially the credit of
both must be hurt by such impropriety of conduct” (PP 138). Elizabeth’s self-reflection gives her the insight she needs to better herself, unlike Mary Crawford and Lydia, who never find fault with their own judgment or behavior.

With Lydia’s flight to London with Wickham, Austen again uses “the city” as a metaphor for the decline of morality, and, as Kitty reminds us “Lydia used to want to go to London” (PP 194). Lydia’s corruption stems from having

... never been taught to think on serious subjects; ... she has been given up to nothing but amusement and vanity. She has been allowed to dispose of her time in the most idle and frivolous manner, and to adopt any opinions that came in her way. ... (PP 183)

When Lydia writes in a note that when her family discovers that she has eloped with Wickham, “what a good joke it will be! I can hardly write for laughing” (PP 189), she exposes her own thoughtlessness and lack of awareness of the seriousness of her situation. Lydia fails to understand that her actions affect the entire family, bringing scandal and humiliation to her parents and “guilt by association” to her sisters. Mr. Collins who out of vindictiveness and smugness overstates the matter: “... this false step in one daughter, will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others, for who, as lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family” (PP 193), while Elizabeth realizes that “had she known nothing of Darcy, she could have bourne the dread of Lydia’s infamy somewhat better” (PP 194). Elizabeth worries that as Lady Catherine’s nephew, Darcy will have the same indignation and
contempt for the entire family; however, Darcy and Bingley, as improved versions of English gentry, and therefore less rigid in their ideas, are easily able to separate the morality and worth of Jane and Elizabeth from the immorality and ruin of Lydia.

When Mrs. Bennet learns that Lydia is to marry Wickham in London, “her joy burst forth” (*PP* 198) with the knowledge that she would have one daughter married. Mrs. Bennet does not comprehend the licentiousness behind the marriage, and since she and Lydia are cut from the same cloth, we know that Lydia will feel no remorse or shame for her actions. Mrs. Bennet and Lydia both believe that marriage of any kind is desirable; however, Elizabeth knows that Lydia will have “neither rational happiness or worldly prosperity” (*PP* 199). Indeed, near the end of the novel, we see the life that Lydia, having become a fallen woman, must live:

> Their manner of living, even when the restoration of peace dismissed them to a home, was unsettled in the extreme. They were always moving from place to place in quest of a cheap situation, and always spending more than they ought. His affections for her soon sunk into indifference; hers lasted a little longer; and in spite of her youth and her manners, she retained all claims to reputation which her marriage had given her. (*PP* 253)

Her life with Wickham becomes her punishment for her immorality. Meanwhile, her younger sister Kitty begins spending time with Jane and Elizabeth, “in society so superior to what she had generally known, her improvement was great. . . [R]emoved from the influence of Lydia’s example, she became, by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant and less insipid” (*PP* 252). The “proper
attention” Kitty receives is through the examples of Jane and Elizabeth as wives and sisters. Moreover, Elizabeth also teaches Darcy’s shy, young sister about marriage:

[Georgiana’s] mind received knowledge which had never before fallen in her way. By Elizabeth’s instructions she began to comprehend that a woman may take liberties with her husband, which a brother will not always allow in a sister more than ten years younger than himself. (PP 253)

Georgiana learns that Elizabeth and Darcy are equals in their marriage; they have both learned the value of the other as a partner and will therefore strengthen the estate of Pemberley and England. We can therefore predict that Elizabeth and Jane will be good mothers, able to teach their children by being positive role models of what women, wives, and sisters should be, rather than the negative role model Mrs. Bennet is. However, Lydia remains a reflection of her mother, and as such we can predict that she will raise children who, like all the Bennet sisters did with Mrs. Bennet, will either reject or embrace Lydia’s belief system.

Mothers and Mother Substitutes in Mansfield Park

There seems to be much controversy surrounding the character of Fanny Price. Scholars and critics have a wide range of opinions as to what Austen was trying to accomplish by creating a character who, in the opinion of many critics and readers, is at the very least flawed, at worst, detestable. Was she being ironic? Or perhaps falling back on the novel of sentiment? Is Fanny Price, as Joyce L. Jenkins argues, a passive-aggressive character who secretly rejoices at virtually everyone’s downfall at
the end of the novel (352)? The debate that surrounds Fanny Price stems from two issues: First, readers of Jane Austen have an expectation that her heroines, like Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, will be self-assured, witty and clever--be spunky, or at the very least, as in the case of Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot, have a strong and quiet sense of self. With such expectations, readers are invariably disappointed that Fanny lacks these qualities. Second, as Jenkins argues, Austen seems to be reverting to the standard type of sentimental heroine from novels of the early to mid-eighteenth century: the poor, pathetic heroine who needs so much but has so little except her own morality or virtue to which she clings like a life-preserver until she is rewarded with marriage to the deserving man of her choice.

Since it seems that the dislike of Fanny Price is based on her readers’ expectations that Fanny should be a repetition of Austen’s previous heroines, it is important to take a closer look at the similarities between Fanny Price and Austen’s other heroines while at the same time looking at who many argue is a much more likable character in Mansfield Park: Mary Crawford. Along with this, we must again consider the connection between the women, their mothers and their potential as wives.

The first few pages of Mansfield Park are dedicated to introducing the reader to the Ward sisters: Maria, Frances, and Miss Ward who then become the mothers (Lady Bertram, Mrs. Price and Mrs. Norris [as a substitute mother]. Providing the
reader with the details of the Ward sisters’ lives before being married and then proceeding to introduce the next generation establishes the important link between past and present. Moreover, unlike any of Austen’s other novels, we meet the heroine as a child and see her struggle into adulthood which further strengthens the lineal pattern of past, present and then future.

From the beginning of the novel, Fanny Price, like Mary Crawford, is at a disadvantage. She is born into a family with too many children and too little income, her mother Frances, having married “. . .to disoblige her family, and by fixing on a Lieutenant of Marines, without education, fortune, or connexions, did it very thoroughly” (MP 23). In being “adopted” by her aunt and uncle and moving from her Portsmouth home to Mansfield Park, Fanny moves from one home with an inadequate mother to another. Not only does Fanny lose her biological mother, but she is also the target of a third bad mother figure: cruel Aunt Norris. With these three “mothers” it is impossible for Fanny to find a positive role-model from whom she can learn to be a good wife and mother and, as Clara Tuite writes, “. . . Fanny’s . . . education must supplement the deficient maternal nature of the Ward [Fanny’s mother, and aunts’] bloodline” (109). Since Lady Bertram has little interest in raising her children and Mrs. Norris’s main interest in mothering falls only upon Maria and Julia Bertram, Fanny must look elsewhere for a mother figure. She does not have an Aunt Gardiner to emulate; however, as we see early in the novel, it is her cousin
Edmund who takes on the role of teacher and parent, much like Sir Thomas has been forced to do with his daughters.

Lady Bertram is incapable of instilling proper social and moral instruction to her daughters; we are told that:

To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needle-work, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter, when it did not put herself to inconvenience. . . (MP 16)

The responsibility for raising them then falls to Sir Thomas; however, as the aristocratic head of the estate, he cannot spend the time necessary to properly prepare his daughters for womanhood; therefore, he shares the mothering duties with aunt Norris. Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris are bound to fail because as a man Sir Thomas does not know how to teach his daughters to become women, to teach them the morality of womanhood. Moreover, in allowing Aunt Norris to assist him, he chooses a woman who is part of a family that cannot mother properly.

Like Mrs. Bennet, Lady Bertram lacks the ability and interest to educate her daughters, and the result is similar: she produces a daughter who fails to be a moral and exemplary wife to Mr. Rushworth. Maria Bertram's failure, in the form of a marriage based on material desire and then an affair with Henry Crawford, damages both Mansfield Park and Sotherton. Here, as in Pride and Prejudice, we see the
youngest sister, Julia, improved by being removed from her sister's influence.

Although she, like Lydia Bennet, elopes, Julia returns to Mansfield Park, "... humble and wishing to be forgiven, and Mr. Yates, desirous of being really received into the family..." (MP 313), not as Lydia does upon her return to Longbourne: pompous, ridiculous and mindless of the shame of her actions. Julia's regret is her redemption.

Sir Thomas reviews his participation in his daughters' education and, like Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy, learns from his mistakes:

He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice... To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments-- the authorised object of their youth-- could have had no useful influence that way, no moral effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility... [H]e had brought up his daughters, without their understanding their first duties, or his being acquainted with their character and temper. (MP 314)

However, for Sir Thomas and Maria, it is too late. As a married woman, her education has already been completed; therefore, her mistakes cannot be rectified. Since the great estates in Austen’s novels serve as a metaphor for England, we can expand that metaphor to include Sir Thomas as “king.” As such, he has the power to, and must, banish Maria from England, removing the threat of her ever becoming the mother of English children. However, as his daughter, and an English citizen, he feels that "-- she should be protected by him, and secured in every comfort, and supported by every
encouragement to do right. . . but farther than that, he would not go” (MP 315). As
owner of Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas has an obligation to protect it, and England,
from the immorality of Maria. Furthermore, Maria’s partner in her downfall, Henry
Crawford, does not face the same punishment as Maria because he is landed gentry;
he is also a “king”:

That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just
measure attend his share of the offence, is, we know, not one of the
barriers, which society gives to virtue. In this world, the penalty is less
equal than could be wished. . . (MP 318)

However, readers have a small measure of solace in knowing that Henry does (though
selfishly) regret his actions, not for Maria’s sake, but for what he has lost: his friends
at Mansfield Park and Fanny Price. Still, Henry never fully understands why Fanny
cannot love him, and his lack of insight into his own flaws is his downfall.

One of the reasons that Fanny cannot love Henry is because she has become
so heavily reliant on Edmund for her emotional needs. Edmund acts as a surrogate
mother; therefore, what would have been mother-daughter love evolves first into the
love between a brother and sister, and then into the love of a woman for a man. The
use of the brotherly love plot device was common, especially during the eighteenth-
century; however, unlike Austen’s use in Mansfield Park, it was generally used to
prepare a young woman for marriage to someone outside the family. Fanny’s
transference of brotherly love from brother William to first cousin Edmund allows her
to eventually marry Edmund, for, although Edmund has acted as her mentor/teacher, there is no social taboo against her marrying him. In addition, since Edmund has acted as brother to Fanny for nearly half of her life, he has unknowingly prepared her to marry him. Once Edmund is ready to marry, Fanny must indirectly teach Edmund about himself through her actions and others’ reactions, to the world of Mansfield Park. This is similar to Darcy indirectly teaching Elizabeth about her tendency to swiftly judge (and often misjudge) others, which causes her to amend her behavior, and Elizabeth in turn teaching Darcy about his snobbery.

Thus, there are several mother substitutes in Mansfield Park, most significantly Sir Thomas and Edmund. Sir Thomas is unsuccessful as a mother substitute for his daughters because he is not a woman; therefore, he lacks the first-hand knowledge of what it means to be a woman. Edmund, as mother figure to Fanny is more successful, in part because Fanny was with her own mother for the first ten years of her life. Although Mrs. Price is a “bad” mother, Fanny is at least able to see her mother in a domestic setting, learning about the choices women must make in marrying, the consequences of those choices, and the particular responsibilities of women. The Bertram daughters only see their mother’s complete and indolent inactivity.
Fanny Price and Mary Crawford

No doubt some would argue that Mary Crawford is a much more likable character than Fanny Price, and not only is she more likable but that she is as lively as Elizabeth Bennet. As previously mentioned, readers are often disappointed with Fanny Price as a heroine, choosing instead flawed Mary Crawford to the seemingly (and some might say, annoyingly) perfect Fanny Price. However, since the estates and the women have dual meanings in *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*, then we can look upon Fanny Price as more than a picture of perfection; she, like all of Austen’s women, is flawed and her passivity and lack of confidence are painful to both readers and herself. However, these flaws are forgivable since she is after all the product of a difficult childhood. Also, although she does not attempt to correct her flaws as Elizabeth Bennet does, she becomes the center of everyone else’s learning; she is the litmus test against whom everyone else is judged. As readers, we judge how others treat Fanny, how they react to her comments, and how she reacts to them and, by the end of the novel, nearly everyone has altered his or her behavior in response to Fanny Price. Those who do not--the Crawfords, Maria Bertram and Mrs. Norris-- are punished accordingly. Only Lady Bertram escapes punishment, because she never really reacts to Fanny, except to exclaim that she is useful.

Throughout *Mansfield Park*, Austen shows us Mary Crawford through several distinct and important perspectives: Through the eyes of Edmund, as the lover of
Mary: Fanny, as the lover of Edmund: and through our own eyes as we read of
Mary’s actions and words (given to us by the narrator). The multiple perspectives are
different from the single perspective given to us in *Pride and Prejudice* wherein we
are limited almost exclusively to Elizabeth Bennet’s viewpoint. Unlike the single
viewpoint from which we must inevitably draw similar conclusions as Elizabeth,
*Mansfield Park*’s multiple perspective allows us to see several characters’ judgment of
Mary, and her reactions to, and interactions with, Fanny, which allow us to begin
forming our own opinions about her—about her worthiness as the potential mistress of
Mansfield Park or as the wife of the clergy-bound Edmund.

Mary is first described as “... remarkably pretty [and] lively and pleasant... warm-hearted and unreserved” (*MP* 31). However, when we are told of her plan to
marry well, we begin to suspect that she is too materialistic to be endowed with the
responsibility of an English estate; however, with such domestic instability as Mary
experienced prior to her arrival at Mansfield Park, it is no surprise when the narrator
informs us that Mary hopes to find constancy in marriage.

At this point in the novel (without knowing anything else about Mary), one
could see Mary as a victim of circumstance. She has endured the death of her parents,
being placed in the home of an uncle and aunt “who [agree] in nothing” (*MP* 30), and
being usurped as the female head of her uncle’s house. However, perhaps most
significantly, Henry, as Mary’s only sibling (and heir to the family estate), fails to
sacrifice his own pleasure for the necessity of his sister by refusing to settle at his
estate thereby providing a home for Mary, and, as Ruth Perry writes, in fiction,

[s]o common was the expectation of the responsibility of a brother for
his sister-- and so commonly was it shirked-- that a brother’s
generosity towards his sister (or lack thereof) became, in fiction, a
fundamental marker of his character. (*MP* 144)

Henry’s unwillingness to put himself out to help his sister then becomes the “marker”
of his selfish character. All of these circumstances, if viewed separately from Mary’s
words and actions, could allow forgiveness for her pragmatic ideas on marriage
because we have seen how drastically marriage (along with death) has affected
Mary’s life. Even with a large fortune, as a single woman society dictates that she
must rely on the men in her family to provide her with a solid home (for young, single
women rarely lived alone), only to have them repeatedly fail her. Thus, for Mary,
marrying “to advantage” (*MP* 32) means marrying someone who can provide the
most *material* stability possible.

Mary tells her half-sister, Mrs. Grant that marriage is

... a manoeuvring business. I know so many who have married in the
full expectation and confidence of some one particular advantage in
the connection, or accomplishment or good quality in the person, who
have found themselves entirely deceived, and been obliged to put up
with exactly the reverse! What is this, but a take in? (*MP* 34)

Even Mrs. Grant sees the fault in Mary’s (and Henry’s) judgment, telling them “... we will cure you both” (*MP* 35). However, our narrator tells us that neither Henry nor
Mary want to be cured, in essence telling us that the Crawfords see no fault in their own beliefs thus decreasing our sympathy for Mary (MP 35). From this point in the novel, Austen moves quickly to change what sympathy we might have left for Mary into dislike.

As we continue to become familiar with Mary, many of her comments, especially on marriage, begin to reinforce our first suspicion that she cannot be trusted with being the mistress of an estate. Cynicism abounds in her conversations with Mrs. Grant, as Mary remarks that “... there is not one in a hundred of either sex, who is not taken in when they marry” (MP 34). This begs the question: Will Mary be the one taken in or the one to take someone in?

Later, Mary again discusses marriage and again exposes her own cynicism and ruthlessness towards marriage:

... I look upon the Frasers to be about as unhappy as most other married people. And yet it was a most desirable match or Janet at the time. ... She could not do otherwise than accept him, for he was rich, and she had nothing. ... and yet there was nothing improper on her side; she did not run into the match inconsiderately, there was no want of foresight. She took three days to consider of his proposals; This seems as if nothing were a security for matrimonial comfort! (MP 245)

Mary’s confusion about there being no security for matrimonial comfort stems from her lack of understanding of what is really necessary to be happy in marriage, and since this is something that she never learns, because she has no ideal mother figure
to teach her by example, not even her brother (and then cousin), as Fanny has, her legacy will be a detriment to English society: she will become a bad mother. Mary’s failed trial is whether she can become worthy enough to marry Edmund, while Edmund himself must learn to make the proper choice between Fanny and Mary. One of the questions that Austen wants us to consider is: which woman will be the best to carry on and improve Edmund’s line? For much of the novel, Edmund himself is “taken-in” by his attraction to Mary.

Early in the novel, after Mary openly criticizes her uncle (showing a lack of respect for the man who stood in as her father), Edmund asks Fanny if “there was nothing in [Mary’s] conversation that struck you, Fanny, as not quite right?” (MP 46). Fanny responds as she should, by remarking:

Oh! Yes, she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished. An uncle with whom she has been living so many years, and who, whatever his faults may be, is so very fond of her brother, treating him, they say, quite like a son. I could not have believed it!

However, despite Edmund’s acknowledgment that Mary’s public criticism of her uncle is a reflection of her poor judgment, as he spends more time with her, he becomes too willing to forget this and other behavior and comments that tell both Fanny and the reader that Mary is not simply “lively” but immoral.

Austen links her characters’ immorality to city life. Her immoral characters have either lived in the city (Mary and Henry), have a desire to live in the city (Maria
Bertram), or have spent a great deal of time there (Tom Bertram). Austen uses London, or city life in general, as the major factor in the corruption of these four characters (along with Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*). Mary, Henry and Tom have all spent considerable time in London being ruined by the materialism and worldliness that come from living in the city, while Fanny has never been to London. Mary prefers Tom to Edmund not only because he is the heir to Mansfield Park, but also “because *He* had been much in London, and had more liveliness and gallantry than Edmund, and must, therefore, be preferred...” (*MP* 35). That Mary felt “an early presentiment that she *should* like the eldest best. She knew it was her way” (*MP* 35), shows us that Mary is not confused about, nor struggling with, her motives for marrying. Moreover, it is ironic that while all four prefer the modernity of city life with all its trappings to the traditional country estate life shown at Mansfield Park, the men rely on country estates for their sources of income and reputations as landed gentry and Mary conforms to conventional ideas of marriage (marriage for convenience) by wanting to marry a suitable gentleman--one with a traditional country estate. In preferring city life to Mansfield Park, Mary, Tom, Henry and Maria are not only morally corrupt they are also rejecting the traditional English values that the estate represents. Moreover, Henry’s failure to remain at his own country estate is essentially his rejection of both familial duty and familial (ancestral) ties, shown
earlier in his rejection of Mary’s request to settle at his estate, which would have allowed Mary to be mistress of his home.

Mary’s exclusion of Edmund as a potential husband further exposes her immorality. Mary quickly learns of Edmund’s quiet, religion-based, morality yet still rejects him as a potential husband: First because of his status as a second son (his lack of material wealth and status), and second, because of his traditional ideas on religion, family and duty. The simple act of rejecting Edmund, a soon-to-be member of clergy, begins a cascade of ideas about Mary’s own belief system: Mary’s rejection of Edmund is also her rejection of the church; rejection of the church is a rejection of traditional morality as taught by the church; rejection of these church-based morals is equivalent to immorality; therefore, Mary must be immoral. Still, in many respects she is likable, and even similar to Elizabeth Bennet. They are both attractive, young, intelligent, lively, adventurous young women who speak their minds freely. Neither woman is absolutely good or evil, but through the process of their experiences we learn that Elizabeth’s faults--faults of judgment--can be forgiven, while Mary’s faults--faults of a deeper nature that lie within her corrupt belief system--cannot.

It is because she is, on the surface, likable that Edmund gets “taken in” by her. As Edmund’s affection for Mary grows, he also unconsciously rejects Fanny and the stability she represents; however, because of Fanny’s feelings for Edmund, we may at first be skeptical of Fanny’s opinion of Mary when Fanny is “a little surprised that
[Edmund] could spend so many hours with Miss Crawford, and not see more of the sort of fault which he had already observed, and of which she was almost always reminded by a something of the same nature whenever she was in her company" (MP 48). However, as the novel progresses, Mary’s behavior, as told to the reader through narration and Edmund and Fanny’s perspective, makes it clear that Edmund’s opinion of Mary is misguided, while Fanny’s is more accurate. We read with pain for Fanny as Mary’s behavior becomes more obviously immoral and Edmund remains oblivious to it.

When Edmund teaches Mary to ride using a horse he has purchased for Fanny’s use, he begins to place Mary’s needs above those of Fanny’s. For several days, Fanny is unable to ride (her only exercise), essentially being forgotten by Edmund, the person to whom she is closest in the family. Edmund unknowingly exposes Mary’s selfishness and his poor judgment of her, by telling Fanny: “[Mary] would be extremely sorry to interfere with [your exercise]. It would be very wrong if she did” (MP 51), despite knowing that Mary has already done so on several occasions. Because Austen uses the word “wrong” to describe Mary’s behavior, along with Fanny’s previous assessment of Mary’s continuous questionable behavior “. . . of which she [Fanny] was almost always reminded by a something of the same nature whenever she was in her company” (MP 48), we understand that not only is Mary’s judgment wrong, but it is a flaw in her very nature, rather than one of misjudgment,
that makes up Mary’s character. Fanny questions Edmund’s judgment (though not his character) because of Edmund’s blindness to Mary’s true character.

Fanny does not view the actions of Mary Crawford and Edmund as equally “wrong” because Austen wants her readers to view Edmund as a young man who is neglecting his familial duty because he is falling in love with a woman whose motives and actions are always selfish. Austen tells us later in the novel that “Even in the midst of his late infatuation, he had acknowledged Fanny’s mental superiority” (*MP* 319). Clearly, Edmund’s behavior is meant to be seen as poor judgement clouded by the first pangs of love, while Mary, who admits to Fanny that “[she] knew it was very late, and that [she] was behaving extremely ill [and therefore] selfishness must always be forgiven...because there is no hope of a cure” (*MP* 49), tells us herself that not only is she selfish but that her selfishness must be forgiven. This demand, and her lighthearted dismissal of the flaw negates its moral importance to Mary. Mary further shows her selfishness by stating: “nothing ever fatigues me, but doing what I do not like. Miss Price, I give way to you with a very bad grace” (*MP* 50).

Mary’s reaction to causing Fanny pain is contrasted with Edmund’s eventual repentance when, after four consecutive days of riding out with Mary, Edmund finds Fanny exhausted from not having been under his protection from Aunt Norris and Lady Bertram’s demands:
Vexed as Edmund was with his mother and aunt, he was still more angry with himself. His own forgetfulness of her was worse than anything which they had done. Nothing of this would have happened had she been properly considered. . . He was ashamed to think that for four days together she had not had the power of riding, and very seriously resolved, however unwilling he must be to check a pleasure of Miss Crawford’s, that it should never happen again. (MP 54)

Austen makes the distinction between Mary’s uncompromising selfishness (which she wants us to view as an unforgivable flaw), and Edmund’s “forgetfulness,” which is accompanied by guilt. We can forgive Edmund because he is ashamed by his own behavior; however, as Mary’s behavior shows throughout the novel, her concern is for her own best interest, which includes the pleasure she receives from spending time with Edmund.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of Mary’s immorality and ruthlessness is contained in Mary’s letter to Fanny, in which Mary’s excitement at Edmund’s prospects of becoming the heir of Mansfield Park if eldest brother Tom dies is simply heartless. Mary writes that she will be “rejoiced” if the information about Tom’s “bad chance of ultimate recovery” is incorrect (MP 294); however, she continues to inform Fanny that “. . . if he is to die, there will be two poor young men less in the world; and with a fearless face and bold voice would I say to any one, that wealth and consequence could fall into no hands more deserving of them” (294). More importantly, Mary suspects that her feelings may, under Fanny’s scrutiny be criticized, since she tells Fanny not to
trouble [herself] to be ashamed of either my feelings or you own. Believe me, they are not only natural, they are philanthropic and virtuous. I put it to your conscience, whether ‘Sir Edmund’ would not do more good with all the Bertram property, than any other possible ‘Sir’” (MP 294-5).

Not only is Mary grossly mistaken in the belief that Fanny has the same selfish hope and therefore morals as herself, but she also believes that by including the idea that Edmund could do more good with the Bertram estate than Tom (thereby thinking of the greater good of the estate and its tenants), but she has absolved herself of the viciousness of hoping for Tom’s death. That she seems unaware of how improper her comments are makes her even more irredeemable, and, as such, if she is allowed to marry Edmund, the Mansfield estate (allegorically English country society) would be corrupted with Mary’s immoral and citified values. By presenting Mary and Henry as worldly and citified people who reject common ideas of morality, family and the English estate, Austen is criticizing those who “...[make] a clean sweep of anything that threatens immediate pleasure...” (Knox-Shaw 196), including those, like Edmund and Fanny, who will not compromise their own morals to please the Crawfords.

By novel’s end, everyone has had their due: however, despite Mary Crawford’s regret over Edmund, Henry’s regret over Fanny, Maria’s banishment, and Mr. Rushworth’s humiliation, Austen is very clear that none of these characters change. Mary has regrets, but does eventually “[find] among the dashing
representatives, or idle heir apparents. . . [someone] who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield. . .” (*MP* 318). Henry also has regrets and is sometimes “wretched” (*MP* 318) over his losses, but he does not amend his behavior. Mr. Rushworth was “mortified and unhappy” (*MP* 315) at the divorce, “until some other pretty girl could attract him into matrimony again. . . [perhaps] to be duped at least with good humour and good luck. . .” (*MP* 315). Therefore, although Henry, Mary and Rushworth have momentary regrets those regrets are for their own losses rather than for their poor behavior; they do not learn to correct their behavior. Those who have learned are rewarded. Edmund and Sir Thomas learn to value Fanny’s steadiness, judgment and morality, and intelligence, and so Fanny becomes “the daughter that [Sir Thomas] wanted” (*MP* 320), and a wife whose home is full of “affection and comfort” (*MP* 321). Fanny and Edmund are then able to return to Mansfield Park (to the parsonage) to continue their influence on the estate.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen creates a firm connection between the estate and England and between women and the estate. She accomplishes this by creating an interdependence between the landed gentry and women. Since the landed gentry are symbolic of England and English culture, and her middle-class female characters are the link between England and its strengthened future through the act of reproduction, blending the middle class women with landed gentry (metaphorically becoming "mothers of England"), Austen creates female characters that are either worthy, or unworthy of taking on this role.

Each woman’s worthiness is determined in large part by her relationship with her mother. Since Austen’s mothers are always flawed, we judge the eligible women of her novels in relation to their mothers; that is, women like Lydia Bennet who too closely resemble their mothers in character are seen as flawed, or immoral, while women who reject their mothers’ values become heroines. As we have seen, it is important for the women to be self-reflective in order to be able to identify their flaws, thereby growing into women of worth who can then become part of the English estate. The women who fail to learn and grow (Lydia Bennet and Mary...
Crawford), are punished either through incompatible marriage or, as in Mary Crawford’s case, by the rejection of those for whom she cares.

The marriages of Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price are based on love, mutual respect, and compatibility, with each husband and wife learning something from their spouse. Their marriages begin a new cycle of mother-daughter-wife, with the heroine becoming the “good” mother, thereby replacing the “bad” mother in the lineage of England.
WORKS CITED


