



## Mansfield Park (Oxford World's Classics)

*By Jane Austen*

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

Though Jane Austen was writing at a time when Gothic potboilers such as Ann Ward Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* were all the rage, she never got carried away by romance in her own novels. In Austen's ordered world, the passions that ruled Gothic fiction would be horribly out of place; marriage was, first and foremost, a contract, the bedrock of polite society. Certain rules applied to who was eligible and who was not, how one courted and married and what one expected afterwards. To flout these rules was to tear at the basic fabric of society, and the consequences could be terrible. Each of the six novels she completed in her lifetime are, in effect, comic cautionary tales that end happily for those characters who play by the rules and badly for those who don't. In *Mansfield Park*, for example, Austen gives us Fanny Price, a poor young woman who has grown up in her wealthy relatives' household without ever being accepted as an equal. The only one who has truly been kind to Fanny is Edmund Bertram, the younger of the family's two sons.

Into this Cinderella existence comes Henry Crawford and his sister, Mary, who are visiting relatives in the neighborhood. Soon Mansfield Park is given over to all kinds of gaiety, including a daring interlude spent dabbling in theatricals. Young Edmund is smitten with Mary, and Henry Crawford woos Fanny. Yet these two charming, gifted, and attractive siblings gradually reveal themselves to be lacking in one essential Austenian quality: principle. Without good principles to temper passion, the results can be disastrous, and indeed, *Mansfield Park* is rife with adultery, betrayal, social ruin, and ruptured friendships. But this *is* a comedy, after all, so there is also a requisite happy ending and plenty of Austen's patented gentle satire along the way. Describing the switch in Edmund's affections from Mary to Fanny, she writes: "I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that everyone may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people." What does *not* vary is the pleasure with which new generations come to Jane Austen. --*Alix Wilber*

### From School Library Journal

Grade 9 Up-Jane Austen paints some witty and perceptive studies of character.

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### From Library Journal

Austen is the hot property of the entertainment world with new feature film versions of *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility* on the silver screen and *Pride and Prejudice* hitting the TV airwaves on PBS. Such high visibility will inevitably draw renewed interest in the original source materials. These new Modern Library editions offer quality hardcovers at affordable prices.

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