Power in *Mansfield Park*: Austen's Study of Domination and Resistance

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Mansfield Park is a novel about power relations—about domination and resistance. I take a lead from James C. Scott, two of whose books describe and analyze the "prosaic but constant struggle" that "*everyday* forms of peasant resistance" entail, often over many years. His earlier book, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985), documents the covert but stubborn resistance of relatively powerless people. Scott describes the "ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups" as "foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth" (*Weapons* 29). Crossing barriers of geography, culture, and historical periods, Scott identifies the ways that a "social avalanche of petty acts of insubordination" and other forms of resistance have eviscerated the policies of widely disparate authorities. In all these cases, "passive noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion, and deception" characterize the relatively successful modes of resistance by powerless people to the authorities, whose schemes are sometimes "nibbled to extinction" by peasant resistance (31).

His later book, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990), puts into words what Scott calls the "hidden transcripts" of relations between the powerful and the powerless, identifying what is spoken by each in private, in contrast to their public declarations. Public confrontations, he says, are usually laden with deception. The powerless pretend to be deferential, and the powerful subtly make their mastery felt. Behind the backs of their antagonists, both express mockery and disdain of the other. Scott himself sees the

applicability of his thinking to literary works, in *Weapons of the Weak* drawing on the writing of George Eliot, Orwell, Brecht, and Ralph Ellison but not, in either book, on any novel by Jane Austen.

Even though Scott's works are about groups of people—the relatively powerless and the powerful in hierarchical societies—the provocative terms of his analysis offer language for analyzing power relations in *Mansfield Park*, Austen's supreme study of the exercise of power and the resistance of the weak to coercion. Many critics have thought that Fanny Price is too "silent" or "passive" to be a compelling heroine, but insights from Scott's books explain Fanny Price's struggle to resist the demands of her adoptive family. It might be argued that the whole of Austen's novel is constructed to examine the uses of power and Fanny's resistance to it, during the theatricals in Volume One and, even more, from the last chapter of Volume Two through fifteen of the seventeen chapters of Volume Three, in the determined effort by Henry Crawford and Sir Thomas Bertram to persuade, coerce, threaten, scold, or manipulate Fanny into marrying Henry or, on failing to break her resistance, to punish her with banishment. In *Mansfield Park*, the kind of mutual deception suggested by Scott's term "hidden transcripts" is effectively conveyed in the way the narrative moves back and forth between internal thoughts and dramatic speech, especially in key scenes of confrontation.

Scott's ideas make startlingly clear how heroic Fanny is, since the groups he examines at least know that others share their plight and their feelings. Fanny has not even one ally against the powerful united forces of Henry Crawford, Sir Thomas, and Mary Crawford: not even Lady Bertram defends Fanny's right to refuse Henry's proposal, and Edmund's betrayal of Fanny in urging her to accept Crawford against her feelings demonstrates how completely alone she is.

Among the weapons of the powerless that Scott identifies are a few that Fanny Price does use. Quite often, she finds dissimulation, false compliance, or feigned ignorance necessary. But in Austen's narrative of domination and resistance, the relatively powerless Fanny is not a rule-breaker like the peasant resisters in Scott's books, where he finds that pilfering, arson, malingering, and sabotage are actually forms of political action. In *Mansfield Park*, the powerful people violate the codes of conduct that the novel implicitly endorses: respect for people's feelings, respect for promises (like an engagement), respect for the implicit values of a family, respect for integrity above wealth or convenience. Fanny is repeatedly shocked that at key moments the Bertrams do not actually uphold these values. It is the powerful who violate the rules. Fanny's

most important weapon is simply her inner life, where she struggles to make sense of "what she *ought to do*" (179), in order to cope and survive. Austen locates the power of Fanny's resistance in her inner struggles: in her conscience, in her effort to figure out what to do, in her very consciousness.

Austen does not narrate the first part of Fanny Price's story from her own point of view, but from the vantage point of her adult relatives—her uncle, Sir Thomas Bertram; her aunt, Mrs. Norris; her own mother, Mrs. Price—as they consider in Chapter 1 the propriety and "benevolence" of a scheme to relieve the Price family of one of their nine children. The effect on Fanny Price of her abrupt uprooting from her home when she is ten years old is rendered in Chapter 2 of the novel in some of Austen's most affecting prose. The little girl is "as unhappy as possible," "longing for the home she had left," and missing "the brothers and sisters among whom she had always been important as play-fellow, instructress, and nurse" (14, 16). This brief glimpse of Fanny's life as eldest sister makes clear that even in the chaotic Price household, Fanny had a place, a role as sister and even leader, twinned with her beloved older brother William; at Mansfield Park, she is "[a]fraid of every body, ashamed of herself" (14), "forlorn" in every room (16), and feeling acutely the "separation from every body she had been used to" (15). Because of her age, temperament, size, class, and gender, and the abrupt uprooting from her family, Fanny is almost powerless in the Mansfield household.

In Chapter 3, when Fanny is fifteen, Lady Bertram casually announces to Fanny that she will soon be moved to live with Mrs. Norris. This news is "as disagreeable to Fanny as it had been unexpected," for, as the narrator comments, she "had never received kindness from her aunt Norris, and could not love her" (28). This announcement, especially if it were to come true, would indicate Fanny's powerlessness in the Bertram family, in which she could be suddenly transplanted from one house to another without any consultation of her wishes, just as she had been abruptly uprooted from her Portsmouth home when she was ten. Fanny's conversation with Edmund about this move, brief though it is, demonstrates her ability to express herself clearly and even passionately, and to express feelings and thoughts that Edmund, rather obtusely, fails to understand.

She opens with a strong statement of feeling, incidentally revealing that she and Edmund have disagreed before. She calls him "'Cousin'" and says, "'[S]omething is going to happen which I do not like at all; and though you have often persuaded me into being reconciled to things that I disliked at first, you will not be able to do it now'" (29). When Edmund attempts to persuade

her that a move to her aunt's house will be good for her, he adds, "'I hope it does not distress you very much, Fanny'"; she replies, "'Indeed it does. I cannot like it. I love this house and every thing in it. I shall love nothing there. You know how uncomfortable I feel with her.'" Using strong language—"I cannot like it," "I love this house and every thing in it"—and reminding Edmund of what he already knows of Fanny's feelings about Mrs. Norris, Fanny states her deeply felt objection to the plan (29).

Edmund predicts that Fanny will become "'important'" to Mrs. Norris once Fanny is her "'only companion,'" and his prediction elicits Fanny's plaintive statement that echoes the loss of the brothers and sisters "among whom she had always been important": "'I can never be important to any one.'" Edmund misses the chance to respond with the perfect correction, "You will always be important to me," and instead pedantically corrects Fanny's use of language. He says, "'As to your foolishness and awkwardness, my dear Fanny, you never have a shadow of either, but in using the words so improperly'" (30). Fanny clearly perceives Edmund's failure to respond appropriately. She also detects his gratuitious reminder of his family's generosity in his mention of her "'grateful heart,'" as is evident in her back-pedaling reply: "'You are too kind . . . ; how shall I ever thank you as I ought, for thinking so well of me? Oh! cousin, if I am to go away, I shall remember your goodness, to the last moment of my life'" (30). Her excessive gratitude covers her distress and perhaps might be construed as a moment of feigned ignorance.

His argument, that "'*Here*, there are too many, whom you can hide behind; but with *her* you will be forced to speak for yourself'" (30), does not answer what is the deepest reason for Fanny's horror at living with Mrs. Norris: that Mrs. Norris does not love her. In her reply, Fanny does not surrender her argument but complies with Edmund's: "'I cannot see things as you do; but I ought to believe you to be right rather than myself, and I am very much obliged to you for trying to reconcile me to what must be'" (30–31). Fanny's strategies in arguing indicate that she is not passive; nevertheless, her position as ward in the Mansfield household, her ingrained awareness that she must be grateful to her adopting family, and the necessity that she recognizes for negotiating carefully, even with Edmund, all lie behind her apparent compliance, statements of deference and respect, and declarations of love rather than open opposition. The hidden transcript of Fanny's thoughts is her correct insight that Mrs. Norris doesn't love her and that living day and night with Mrs. Norris would be unrelieved misery. The narrator clearly endorses Fanny's hidden observations by noting, rather acidly, that for all the good the conversation

might have done for Fanny, it "might as well have been spared, for Mrs. Norris had not the smallest intention of taking her" (31).

A pattern of enforcing Fanny's powerlessness continues throughout Volume One; it is evident in Edmund's forgetting of Fanny while Mary borrows her horse, in Mrs. Norris's effort to keep Fanny out of the visit to Sotherton, in Edmund and Mary's leaving Fanny sitting alone on a bench in the "wilderness," and in Edmund's drifting away from Fanny and the window during the "glee" in Chapter 11. But the most intense and protracted pattern of enforcing Fanny's feeling of powerlessness in Volume One occurs in the last six chapters, during the theatricals.

Watching, observing, pondering the behavior of her cousins and the Crawfords, Fanny at first has Edmund as her ally in disapproving the plan to put on a play. They both remain on the sidelines until her cousin Tom suddenly demands that Fanny take the part of the Cottager's Wife. She repeatedly protests, "'I cannot act,'" "'I really cannot act,'" and though she looks "distressfully" at Edmund, he doesn't defend her: "kindly observing her, but unwilling to exasperate his brother by interference, [he] gave her only an encouraging smile" (171–72). When Tom's entreaties are joined by those of Maria, Mr. Crawford, and Mr. Yates, and Fanny feels besieged by the "altogether . . . quite overpowering" urgency of all the voices (172), Mrs. Norris adds her insulting pressure to the mix: "'What a piece of work here is about nothing.—I am quite ashamed of you, Fanny, to make such a difficulty of obliging your cousins in a trifle of this sort,—So kind as they are to you!'" Edmund finally speaks up to defend Fanny against Mrs. Norris: "'Do not urge her, madam. . . . It is not fair to urge her in this manner.—You see she does not like to act.—Let her choose for herself as well as the rest of us.'" Mrs. Norris retaliates: "'I am not going to urge her, . . . but I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her aunt and cousins wish her—very ungrateful indeed, considering who and what she is'" (172).

The weapon Mrs. Norris uses to exert power over Fanny is to bring into the open her persistent interpretation of Fanny's presence at Mansfield Park, that Fanny was brought from squalor to comfort by the Bertrams' and Mrs. Norris's benevolence and that Fanny's consequent obligation is to be grateful and compliant, presumably for the rest of her life. Both her aunts see Fanny more as a servant than as a family member, and Mrs. Norris here brings social class explicitly into the conversation to compel Fanny to take a part in the play.

The hidden transcript of Fanny's feelings is more complicated. Because she believes that Sir Thomas would disapprove of the whole acting scheme, she feels obliged to resist her cousins' pressure for her to join it; beneath her

genuine dread of acting is criticism of her cousins and her aunt, which she cannot express. Fanny's expression of her dread of acting could be classified as a subtle act of dissimulation. She does dread acting, but that protest is more acceptable as a reason for her resistance than outright criticism of her powerful relatives. In the next chapter of Volume One, in some of Austen's most searching prose, Fanny attempts to figure out how she should respond to the "charge of obstinacy and ingratitude," "enforced with such a hint at the dependence of her situation" (176), by consulting the objects in her private space, the East room.

The problem is that by now "she had begun to feel undecided as to what she *ought to do*. . . . Was it not ill-nature—selfishness—and a fear of exposing herself?" (179). Fanny finds, despite her belief in "Sir Thomas's disapprobation of the whole," that her resistance to the powerful people urging her to act is weakening because of her own uncertainty. Of course, she feels the weight of the others' power, but she is also engaging in self-scrutiny. She seeks her own inner voice, and in these pages, Austen presents Fanny's effort to arrive at self-knowledge and to figure out what would be ethical conduct. Her bewilderment is interrupted when Edmund comes to the East room to seek her approval of his new decision to take a part in the play. Fanny's shock at his decision, surprise at his inconsistency, and jealous recognition that his change is because of Mary Crawford bring Fanny to despair. She is now alone: "The doubts and alarms as to her own conduct, which had previously distressed her, . . . were become of little consequence now. . . . Things should take their course; she cared not how it ended. . . . She was beyond [her cousins'] reach; and if at last obliged to yield—no matter—it was all misery *now*" (184). Edmund's defection here and, two chapters later, his urging Fanny to take the part of the Cottager's Wife "with a look of even fond dependence on her good nature," lie behind her capitulation on the night of the final rehearsal to her cousins' renewed entreaties that she accept a part in the play. Fanny resists as long as she can against the pressure from her cousins and the Crawfords, but when she is completely alone, she finally yields and agrees to "do her best" (201).

But what has happened during these agonizing days is that Fanny has marshalled remarkable inward power, the power of saying no. She uses a variety of strategies to defend herself against the pressures on her to take part in the play. But strongly expressed resistance, open refusal, repeated self-deprecating assertions—"'I really cannot act,'" "'I should only disappoint you'" (171), pleas that Tom "'must excuse me, indeed you must excuse me'" (172), efforts to "escape . . . to the East room" (196)—are all finally insufficient. She is saved by the sudden, unexpected return of Sir Thomas.

In Bruce Stovel's excellent essay on the structure of *Mansfield Park*, he argues that in this novel, as in *Emma*, the first volume presents an action that is mirrored in the more complex action of the second two volumes. This pattern of powerful pressure on Fanny and her attempt to resist it in Volume One is repeated in the much lengthier and more crucial struggle in Volumes Two and Three when she resists the enormous pressure of Henry Crawford, Sir Thomas, even Lady Bertram, and, more shockingly, Edmund as they all try to persuade or shame her into accepting Henry's marriage proposal. Henry brilliantly reveals first that he has arranged for William Price's promotion to lieutenant and then follows that stupendous announcement with his declarations of love and his proposal. He has seen that Fanny's deepest feelings are for her brother and that William is chafing under the fear that he will not be promoted. Shrewdly using his power to pull the necessary strings for William, he puts Fanny in a totally weakened position by forcing her to feel the most unanswerable gratitude to him for a gift that she cannot repay.

Austen examines the various forms of powerful pressure on Fanny, the attempts at domination, and the reasoning behind the actions of those trying to influence Fanny in both dramatized and narrated conversations that are interwoven with the spoken and hidden transcripts of her resistance. The most important actions of the whole novel occur in these conversations between Henry and Fanny, and then between Sir Thomas and Fanny, Edmund and Fanny, Mary Crawford and Fanny, even Lady Bertram and Fanny, as they all urge her to change her mind and to accept Henry. Fanny's thoughts and feelings during and between these conversations do indeed constitute a hidden transcript of judgment and resourceful thinking as she tries to figure out how to persist in upholding her right to refuse an unwanted suitor without revealing her secret: her own transgressive love of Edmund.

Her powerful uncle comes to Fanny's East room after Henry's first astounding proposal, and he is Fanny's most vehement accuser in this traumatic, fully dramatized conversation, where she tells him that she has refused Henry's proposal. She explains, "'I cannot like him, Sir, well enough to marry him'" (364). She privately assumes that "to a man like her uncle, so discerning, so honourable, so good, the simple acknowledgment of settled *dislike* on her side, would have been sufficient. To her infinite grief she found that it was not" (366–67). He angrily berates her:

> "I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and

> which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you—without even asking their advice. . . . You do not owe me the duty of a child. But, Fanny, if your heart can acquit you of *ingratitude*—" (367–68)

Sir Thomas's reproaches echo Mrs. Norris's most shocking words: "obstinate" and "ungrateful." The weapon Sir Thomas uses to exert his power on Fanny is strong, indignant language, calling her independence "'offensive and disgusting,'" her refusal of Henry "'wilful and perverse'" and a "'wild fit of folly'" (368), accusing her of disrespect and of ingratitude for his kindness to her, and raising the idea that if his daughters had refused Mr. Crawford without consulting him, he would consider it a "'gross violation of duty and respect.'" Fanny's tears accompany her inner thoughts, in which she repeats the words of his accusations: "Her heart was almost broke by such a picture of what she appeared to him; by such accusations, so heavy, so multiplied, so rising in dreadful gradation! Self-willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful" (368–69). Nevertheless, Fanny directly states a reason for her refusal. She tells Sir Thomas that it is "'quite out of my power to return his good opinion'" (363). When he asks her if she has any reason to think ill of Mr. Crawford's "'temper,'" she longs to say that she has reason to think ill of his "principles," but she cannot tell him what she has observed. To describe Mr. Crawford's "misconduct," she would have to "betray" her cousins, especially Maria, so she cannot defend herself by telling him what he doesn't know (366). As she does in resisting a part in the play, Fanny goes beyond silent thoughts to articulate her reasons, though her uncle's pressure also forces her to dissimulate, or to state only a partial explanation.

Sir Thomas's arguments, that Fanny is "'throwing away'" an "'opportunity of being settled in life, eligibly, honourably, nobly settled, as will, probably, never occur to you again'" (368), that she is being courted by a young man of "'fortune, and character'" (364), who might bring "'advantage'" (367) to her parents and brothers and sisters, all suggest that Henry's wealth and situation are key to Sir Thomas's sense of his eligibility. Fanny explains, "'I am so perfectly convinced that I could never make him happy, and that I should be miserable myself'" (369), thinking that "that great black word *miserable*" would surely persuade her uncle that she should not marry Henry. In the next chapter, Fanny revises her opinion of her uncle: "He who had married a daughter to Mr. Rushworth. Romantic delicacy was certainly not to be expected from him.

She must do her duty, and trust that time might make her duty easier than it now was" (382). Fanny twice uses the word "duty" to characterize the reason she must refuse Henry, and here seems to believe she has the inner strength to do it.

Sir Thomas's argument about the value of a good estate to a woman without her own wealth resembles the views of both Mary Crawford and Lady Bertram. Mary "'would have every body marry if they can do it properly; I do not like to have people throw themselves away; but every body should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage'" (50). Lady Bertram tells Fanny "'that it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this'" (384). This reiterated opinion suggests that the very society in which Fanny exists assumes that it is not even conceivable for a woman to refuse a wealthy man if he is otherwise eligible, no matter what she feels. Unmarried women are particularly powerless, and Fanny is both a young woman and a poor relation in comparison to the landowning Bertrams.

The most important hidden truth that Fanny suppresses in the scene with her uncle is her secret love for Edmund, unsuspected by Edmund and implicitly forbidden by Sir Thomas. When her uncle asks her point blank if her "'affections'" are already engaged, "her lips formed into a *no*, though the sound was inarticulate, but her face was like scarlet" (365). In effect, Fanny has to lie to preserve her most important secret. As Scott argues, dissimulation is a necessary weapon for the powerless, especially of a young woman, isolated and alone, who "would rather die than own the truth" (365). The narrator later says, Henry "knew not that he had a pre-engaged heart to attack" (376), and neither does Sir Thomas, which makes Fanny's refusal of Henry incomprehensible to him. In the East room, Fanny and her uncle sit silent for a moment after her "lips formed into a *no*": "He was deep in thought. His niece was deep in thought likewise, trying to harden and prepare herself against farther questioning. She would rather die than own the truth, and she hoped by a little reflection to fortify herself beyond betraying it" (365). Fanny's weapon against her uncle's questions is "reflection" in her own mind; she seeks to "fortify herself" and to "harden and prepare herself" by thinking.

After his most resounding denunciation, Sir Thomas "be[gins] to think" he perceives some slight changes in Fanny's resistance. The narrator traces his private reasoning: he "thought it not improbable that her mind might be in such a state, as a little time, a little pressing, a little patience, and a little impatience, a judicious mixture of all on the lover's side, might work their usual effect on" (369). Thus he decides to allow Henry's passion and perseverance to

wear Fanny down, rather than attempting any more himself to force her into accepting him. When Fanny tearfully begs not to have to go downstairs to meet with Mr. Crawford, and when Sir Thomas "looked at his niece, and saw the state of feature and complexion which her crying had brought her into, he thought there might be as much lost as gained by an immediate interview"; he then walks off alone, saying "a few words . . . of no particular meaning" (370). His granting Fanny's wish not to speak to Henry at this moment is a strategic appraisal of the likelihood that red eyes and disordered features might discourage the suitor he wants to encourage. The confrontation between Fanny and her uncle is, as Scott would say, laden with deception on both sides.

Austen either narrates or dramatizes several other conversations in the struggle over Fanny's refusal of Henry's proposal. The next talk between Fanny and Henry is narrated, and the complexity of their interaction is suggested by the complexities of the prose in the scene. Fanny makes a vigorous attempt to repel Henry, telling him "that she did not love him, could not love him, was sure she never should love him: that such a change was quite impossible, that the subject was most painful to her, that she must intreat him never to mention it again"; but Henry "would still love, and still hope!" (377).

The narrator locates the sources of misunderstanding in a paragraph that interweaves Fanny's thoughts with an analysis of how her manner undermines her declarations and misleads Henry.

> Fanny knew her own meaning, but was no judge of her own manner. Her manner was incurably gentle, and she was not aware how much it concealed the sternness of her purpose. Her diffidence, gratitude, and softness made every expression of indifference seem almost an effort of self-denial; seem at least, to be giving nearly as much pain to herself as to him. Mr. Crawford was no longer the Mr. Crawford who, as the clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria Bertram, had been her abhorrence, whom she had hated to see or to speak to, in whom she could believe no good quality to exist, and whose power, even of being agreeable, she had barely acknowledged. He was now the Mr. Crawford who was addressing herself with ardent, disinterested, love; whose feelings were apparently become all that was honourable and upright, whose views of happiness were all fixed on a marriage of attachment; who was pouring out his sense of her merits, . . . proving . . . that he sought her for her gentleness, and her goodness; and to complete the whole, he was now the Mr. Crawford who had procured William's promotion! (377–78).

The repeated word "seem" in the third sentence of this excerpt captures Henry's attempt to read Fanny's hidden feelings. The narrator identifies the many discrepancies between Fanny's meaning and her manner, between the "sternness of her purpose" and her "incurably gentle" manner, which make her "courteous" and "compassionate" behavior open to the sanguine interpretation Henry's "vanity and hope" make of it. Fanny's "diffidence, gratitude, and softness" are part of her habitual behavior but are possibly also tactics to soften the insult of her refusal, and a reflection of her feeling of indebtedness to Henry for William's promotion. Inside herself, Fanny struggles to keep clear what she remembers of Henry's despicable flirtation with Maria during the outing to Sotherton and the theatricals. Her memory of her feelings reveals the horror she felt at his immorality: he was "the Mr. Crawford," who had been "the clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria Bertram." Fanny's hidden feelings about Henry in his flirtation with Maria—he was the man she "hated to see," even "her abhorrence"—have not been stated with such vehemence until now when she is resisting him. Now she has to appraise the new Mr. Crawford, whose "feelings were apparently all that was honourable and upright." The contrast of the two Mr. Crawfords in Fanny's thinking demonstrates the confounding effect on her memory and judgment of Henry's past and present behavior, and her statements to him rejecting his proposal are painfully complicated by her gratitude for what he had done for William.

Two other conversations, the first between Edmund and Fanny, and the second between Mary and Fanny, dramatize the kind of confrontations that Scott analyzes, but through them both, Fanny manages to "escape[ ] . . . without detection. Her secret was still her own; and while that was the case, she thought she could resign herself to almost every thing" (421). But in Chapter 6 of Volume Three, without using conversation and giving only a small speech of William's as dialogue, Austen uncovers hidden transcripts in the minds of six different characters, chiefly the interior monologues of Sir Thomas and Fanny, but incidentally the unspoken thoughts of Edmund, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris, and William Price. In this chapter Sir Thomas plans his most radical attack on Fanny's refusal, and Fanny works out new possibilities for managing her resistance. It is the last moment where the powerful and the relatively powerless confront each other at Mansfield Park before unforeseen events profoundly alter the relations between Sir Thomas Bertram and Fanny Price.

The opening paragraph of Chapter 6 captures Sir Thomas's attempt to read Fanny's feelings from her expression and behavior: "He did not understand

her; he felt that he did not; and therefore applied to Edmund to tell him how she stood affected" (422). He cannot discern Fanny's feelings because she is "always so gentle and retiring" that her inner life is inaccessible to him. However, his assumption that she must feel Henry's absence as a loss reveals how completely he has misunderstood the depth of Fanny's resistance to Henry and to himself. But Edmund misunderstands Fanny's feelings as much as his father does. The narrator traces his inner surprise that Fanny shows no sorrow at losing Mary Crawford's company, which he assumes has been precious to her.

On the contrary, the narrator immediately reveals that the very thought of Mary is "the chief bane of Fanny's comfort" (423). Fanny's own private musings are preoccupied with evaluating the state of commitment in Edmund and Mary's romance, and she sorrowfully judges "that every thing was now in a fairer train for Miss Crawford's marrying Edmund than it had ever been before." Fanny's knowledge of each informs her reasoning, and her most recent, fully dramatized conversation with Mary has persuaded her that Mary's mind is still "led astray" and "darkened" (423). She thinks that if Mary is so little influenced by Edmund in "this season of love," she would never change during "years of matrimony" (424). As a result, she "could never speak of Miss Crawford without pain." Powerless to influence Edmund, forced by him to hear all his confessions of love and plans with regard to Mary (for "he loved to talk of it" with her [423]), the hidden transcript of Fanny's thoughts is her melancholy conviction that the man she loves will marry someone else, a woman on whom "his worth would be finally wasted" (424).

Sir Thomas, says the narrator, "went on with his own hopes, and his own observations," congratulating himself mentally on "his knowledge of human nature," and watching Fanny for evidence that she feels "the loss of power and consequence" that he is sure will affect her spirits (424). He privately assumes that the news that William will soon visit Northamptonshire is what prevents Fanny from showing any sign of missing Henry. But Sir Thomas does not content himself with watching and waiting; he confides to Edmund a plan that Fanny "should accompany her brother back to Portsmouth, and spend a little time with her own family" (425). The narrator captures the silent scheming of Sir Thomas in a languid phrase: "It had occurred to Sir Thomas, in one of his dignified musings, as a right and desirable measure" to have Fanny visit her parents. He has an ethical and principled way of explaining his decision to himself and to Edmund, but he only confides part of his purpose to Edmund. Beneath the apparent kindness of the plan, he is well aware that "his prime motive in sending her away, had very little to do with the propriety of her seeing

her parents again, and nothing at all with any idea of making her happy" (425). He hopes that Fanny will go willingly, not perceiving the opportunity to visit Portsmouth as a banishment, but he expects that the return will make her "heartily sick of home before her visit ended" (425). Sir Thomas's scheming extends to his dealings with Henry, too: "He wished [Henry] to be a model of constancy; and fancied that the best means of effecting it would be by not trying him too long" (399).

Sir Thomas, the "master at Mansfield Park" (427), explains and justifies his actions by mentally casting himself as a doctor prescribing a harsh treatment to a patient who will later appreciate his care: "It was a medicinal project upon his niece's understanding, which he must consider as at present diseased" (425). He reasons that a "residence of eight or nine years in the abode of wealth and plenty had a little disordered her powers of comparing and judging. Her Father's house would, in all probability, teach her the value of a good income; and he trusted that she would be the wiser and happier woman, all her life, for the experiment he had devised" (425–26). Congratulating himself on coming up with an "experiment" to cure Fanny's "diseased" understanding, Sir Thomas does not permit himself to be embarrassed about his coercive purpose in sending her to Portsmouth.

Fanny's private meditations about the plan for her to visit Portsmouth indicate how she conceives the value of being away from Mansfield Park. After she gets used to the idea, she is able to rejoice aloud with William and Edmund, but some of her thoughts are a surprise even to herself, for there are "emotions of tenderness that could not be clothed in words—The remembrance of all her earliest pleasures, and of what she had suffered in being torn from them, came over her with renewed strength," leading her to the painfully ironic expectation that "to be at home again would heal every pain that had since grown out of the separation" (426). She imagines how wonderful it will be to "be in the centre of such a circle, loved by so many, and more loved by all than she had ever been before, to feel affection without fear or restraint, to feel herself the equal of those who surrounded her" (426). These dreams suggest what she has missed in her life at Mansfield Park and totally misapprehend what she will find in Portsmouth (426).

But Fanny also thinks that simply being away from Mansfield Park will help her. She is gladdened by the prospect of being "at peace from all mention of the Crawfords, safe from every look which could be fancied a reproach on their account!" (426–27), and even thinks it will be a relief to be away from Edmund: "At a distance unassailed by his looks or his kindness, and safe

from the perpetual irritation of knowing his heart, and striving to avoid his confidence, she should be able to reason herself into a properer state" (427). In metaphors that evoke conflict and violence, Fanny seeks to be "at peace," "safe," "safe" (again), and "unassailed." "Assail" is defined in the OED as "to assault with violence," and Fanny's desire to be "[a]t a distance" from Edmund suggests that she experiences Edmund's "looks and his kindness" almost as a bodily sensation. Her feeling here is similar to her thought in the moment after Edmund leaves her in the East room, having intimated he is going to propose to Mary, when Fanny feels that "it was a stab; . . . It was a stab" (306). Austen registers Fanny's vulnerability to her experience of Edmund's presence and his love of Mary Crawford as physical pain, as if "looks" can be felt as wounds.

The weapon that Fanny thinks she can muster for herself is her own reason and secret fortitude, though the narrator cannot help expressing pitying amusement at Fanny's dread of a letter from Edmund announcing his engagement: "For this letter she must try to arm herself. That a letter from Edmund should be a subject of terror! She began to feel that she had not yet gone through all the changes of opinion and sentiment, which the progress of time and variation of circumstances occasion in this world of changes. The vicissitudes of the human mind had not yet been exhausted by her" (431). The exaggerations and euphemisms in this summary of her feelings make Fanny's pathetic plan to "arm herself" against being crushed by the news of Edmund's engagement seem all the more heroic.

Fanny's ability to reason herself into satisfaction with this plan is partly based on the resources she has developed in the long, strenuous effort to maintain her inner independence through the weeks of Henry's courtship. The plan that Sir Thomas engineers to make Fanny give up her resistance to Henry Crawford she adapts to her own purposes. That she is bitterly disappointed in Portsmouth, that she longs to go back to Mansfield long before she is summoned, and that she even weakens in her resistance to Henry when he visits her there suggest how relatively powerless she remains in relation to him and to Sir Thomas. Her ordeal stretches out to four months and is abruptly ended by catastrophic events in the family from which she is far distant, events over which she has no control. As with Edmund's vindication of Fanny to Sir Thomas after the theatricals, however, Fanny realizes that Maria's running away with Henry will justify her refusal of Henry to Sir Thomas: "His displeasure against herself she trusted . . . would now be done away. *She* should be justified. Mr. Crawford would have fully acquitted her conduct in refusing him" (523).

When Fanny returns to Mansfield Park and the bitterly chastened and gloomy family, at first the pattern of characters finding each other's inner thoughts impenetrable continues: "Fanny was not in the secret of her uncle's feelings, Sir Thomas not in the secret of Miss Crawford's character" (523). Fanny does not know what Edmund now thinks: "[i]f he would now speak to her with the unreserve which had sometimes been too much for her before, it would be most consoling; but *that* she found was not to be. She seldom saw him—never alone—he probably avoided being alone with her" (524). Still, knowing him so well, Fanny is able to surmise Edmund's probable feelings: "He yielded [to the necessity of giving up Miss Crawford] but it was with agonies, which did not admit of speech" (524). Finally, however, Edmund's narrative of his last interview with Mary Crawford brings his morose silence to an end.

Sir Thomas's remorse is painstakingly narrated through nine of the last chapter's thirty paragraphs, his self-confident authority replaced by bitter contrition. The transformation of the relationship between Sir Thomas and Fanny Price from one of power and resistance to what the narrator terms "mutual attachment" (546) comes about because of events produced by long-standing patterns in other people's characters and habits of behavior, mistakes in parental judgment, and passionate feelings that have all been established in the novel's first two volumes—all outside Fanny's control. Perhaps we could say that Fanny does finally have an ally—in the author herself, who arranges events for Fanny's rescue. But Fanny is vindicated by her own principled conduct, which Sir Thomas finally comes to value, by her moral character and the integrity that he now realizes he failed to instill in his own daughters or to demonstrate himself. In the end, the disaster in the Bertram family is not simply a fortuitous or an ironic narrative contrivance but, in part at least, the result of that powerful family's way of doing business.

For Sir Thomas at last to feel that "Fanny was indeed the daughter he wanted" (546) has required Fanny's prolonged resistance to the pressure of everyone in her life to marry a man she does not love and of whom she disapproves. As with her resistance to the theatricals, in her resistance to marrying Henry Crawford, Fanny holds out for as long as humanly possible and is rescued by the turn of events; the narrator makes clear in the last chapter that if things had been different, Fanny would have been conquered by Henry's siege. Fanny is not depicted as a "heroine" in a glamorous, unreal sense, but in her principled conduct she at last seems exemplary to Sir Thomas, who is finally "[s]ick of ambitious and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the

sterling good of principle" (545). The "weapons of the weak" in this novel are what the narrator at the end calls "the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure" (547). The story of the achievement of that consciousness—rather than the story of Edmund's coming to love Fanny Price—is the heart of *Mansfield Park*.

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