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Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Its Afterlife  
Bachelor Thesis

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dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

*Mansfield Park* is Jane Austen's third published novel. It is her most unique work in terms of themes, tone and public reactions. It has been hated as well as praised and to this day critics do not have a uniform opinion of it. This is perhaps the appeal that draws the attention of the 21<sup>st</sup> century filmmakers. In two most recent adaptations they provide *Mansfield Park* with an interesting afterlife that is based on modern readings of the novel and critiques that appeared in the previous century. This thesis focuses on the most pronounced themes of the novel and the way adaptors interpret its historical and political value to make it appropriate for today's audience.

Jane Austen holds her position as a cultural phenomenon that inspires filmmakers, novelists, or feminists. Her novels receive more attention than any other famous author of classics. *Mansfield Park* has been her most debated novel, because it offers multiple interpretations. Postcolonial critics such as Edward Said have emphasized slavery as means of moneymaking and deliberated on its necessity for the stability of Mansfield Park. The moral is the essence of the novel and was praised by Austen's contemporaries and later Victorian critics. The modern age is not as inclined to appreciating this aspect of the novel, specifically its virtuous heroine and moral compass Fanny Price, who is considered prudent and boring. Recent adaptations of the novel address topics that appeal to the modern audience like slavery, adultery and feminism, because they are unexpected in Austen's works and offer a different view of her as a writer. It is not right to assume, however, that she was an abolitionist as could be interpreted from some of the readings and adaptations.

I argue that Mansfield Park has an exceptional value among Austen's other novels in terms of its staggering themes such as slave trade, social division and the moral. The thesis also evaluates the novel's contemporary relevance for 21st century filmmakers and analyses their approach to the employed themes. First I provide context of Jane Austen's life and her writing career. Then I move on to finding *Mansfield Park*'s place among Austen's oeuvre and analyzing the surprising themes in it. The moral focuses on the contrast between the effect of morals on fate of the Crawfords, the Bertrams and Fanny. I discuss slave trade as an important theme to critics and modern readers, who judge it from the current perspective. Then I discuss social division, theme of poverty and treatment of the poor by the gentry, which is reflected in the Bertrams' treatment of Fanny. Next, I aim to analyse both adaptations and discuss the directors' approach to the novel in order to unveil what aspects of the story are most appealing to

modern viewers. I start with Rozema's 1999 adaptation starring Frances O'Connor, which scrapes almost all of the original text and replaces it with the director's feministic vision. Then I analyse Macdonald's 2007 television adaptation starring Billie Piper and changes he made to the characters and story in order to fit the budget and captivate the current audience.

## 2 JANE AUSTEN'S LIFE AND WORK

Jane Austen, born on 16 December 1775, was the seventh child of Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Leigh. It was common for a woman of that period to bear six to seven children.<sup>1</sup> Tomalin explains that children, including the Austens, were not nursed at home, but in a near village by poor mothers yearning to earn a few shillings a week by caring for children of the gentry. After a year they were brought back home. The Austen children were growing up at the family estate Steventon in Hampshire, where Mr Austen tended to his parish and farm. Austen developed a deep relationship with her older sister Cassandra. Her cousin Eliza was a very close friend to Austen as well.<sup>2</sup>

A big part of Austen's childhood was her father's parish and his school for boys. Austen's own experience, growing up with the boys, playing and joking with them, translated into her novels later on.<sup>3</sup> To illustrate, Eliza Bennet, from one of her earliest novels *Pride and Prejudice*, is never skittish or reserved around men, as most women were, but quite the opposite. She is sharp-witted, confident and recognises men as equals. Mr Austen's pupils and his sons received more stimulating education than Austen and her sister. At the age of seven, Austen, Cassandra and their cousin Jane Cooper were sent to a boarding school in Oxford run by Mrs Cooper's sister-in-law, Mrs Cawley. After a while, they were all taken back home feverish. After a short period of homeschooling, Cassandra was sent to Abbey School and her younger sister insisted on joining her. The school possessed a romantic, mysterious atmosphere of the ruined abbey, ancient tombs and architecture that only deepened Austen's passion for British history. She and her sister were removed from the school just before Austen's eleventh birthday to help at Steventon due to the expense of their education.<sup>4</sup>

Austen's auctorial beginnings were exceptionally promising. She had unlimited access to her father's library as well as his support. He considered her early work 'History of England', which she finished at the age of sixteen, a work of an aspiring author and the family enjoyed it as well.<sup>5</sup> Nokes states that upon receiving a small

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<sup>1</sup> See Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*, (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2003), 97

<sup>2</sup> See Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life*, (Penguin Books: London, 2000), 6-8

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>4</sup> See David Nokes, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), 82-86

<sup>5</sup> See Tomalin, *Jane Austen*, 67-68

writing table for her nineteenth birthday, Austen started writing more ambitious pieces. The first was to be a story of an adulteress and a coquette Lady Susan Vernon. The unfinished manuscript was later revisited by James Edward Austen-Leigh and published long after Jane Austen's death.<sup>6</sup> *Lady Susan* was followed by another letter-formed novel, "Elinor and Marianne".

Shortly before Austen started working on "First Impressions" (working title for *Pride and Prejudice*) in 1796, she met Tom Lefroy with whom she became very close. She wrote about him with admiration to Cassandra and danced with him on three balls. He was a possible suitor, but nothing came of it since his family forbade him to stay in contact with Austen.<sup>7</sup>

A few months after her first love experience, Austen's focus turned to writing. The Austens were no longer accepting new students and that gave Austen the freedom and time to progress with her work. "First Impressions" was finished in the summer of 1797. The early version had been altered and had undergone many cuts before it was published. In November she reconsidered the letter format of "Elinor and Marianne" and decided to change it to a direct narrative. She finished her rewriting process in summer 1798 and gave the novel its final title *Sense and Sensibility*. Reading her stories became a part of the family entertainment. As Nokes remarks: "She loved reading passages aloud to the family after dinner, playing all the parts, and assuming all the voices."<sup>8</sup> The first version of "Susan", a working title for *Northanger Abbey*, was being written from 1798 to 1799.<sup>9</sup> She proved exceptional skill and talent in these four years of her life for she had written three major works of literature under the age of twenty-four.

A period of astonishing creativity was followed by a period of silence. From the age of 25 to 35 Austen did not produce any novels. Around Austen's twenty-fifth birthday, it was decided that the family was leaving Steventon and moving to Bath.<sup>10</sup> It is challenging to outline Austen's stay at Bath. Cassandra most likely burned almost all their mutual correspondence thus biographers do not have enough information to

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<sup>6</sup> See "Lady Susan", Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts, <https://janeausten.ac.uk/edition/ms/LadySusanHeadNote.html> (accessed April 15, 2019)

<sup>7</sup> See Nokes, *Jane Austen*, 159-160

<sup>8</sup> Nokes, *Jane Austen*, 172

<sup>9</sup> See Tomalin, *Jane Austen*, 122-123

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 170



analyse Austen's point of view. "For those three crucial years, from the spring of her twenty-sixth year, till the late summer of her twenty-ninth, we know nothing of her mind, her sensibility or her actions,"<sup>11</sup> Nokes acknowledges. That said, there is evidence of Austen's whereabouts and even of her most significant decision yet.

While visiting the Bigg sisters at Manydown, just six miles outside of Steventon, Harris Bigg-Wither proposed to Austen on 2 December 1802. Despite being five years older, she accepted his proposal. Austen was to become the mistress of a large Hampshire estate, only few miles from her birthplace and close to her brother James. Yet she reconsidered the agreement overnight. In the following morning, she apologised to Harris and left Manydown with Cassandra.<sup>12</sup>

During the subsequent months Austen's and her sister's situation served as an inspiration for a new novel called *The Watsons*, a story about four sisters who depend on their father's income and would face uncertain future if he died. While in Bath, Austen was progressing with the novel "Susan" (working title for *Northanger Abbey*).<sup>13</sup>

Reverend Austen died in 1805 and left his daughters and their mother without a sufficient income. Austen's mother and Cassandra, who never married after her betrothed died at sea in 1797<sup>14</sup>, could produce about "£210"<sup>15</sup> a year, and thus the trio was mostly dependent on the charity of their brothers.<sup>16</sup>

Austen had an admiration for her brother Francis, a sailor. What she heard about him and his actions in the navy inspired her. She had no knowledge, however, of shipboard brutality, secret services to the East India Company or dealings with foreign powers that would certainly ruin her image of naval life. Another honourable seaman from the Austen family, Charles, departed to the North America Station.<sup>17</sup>

After a period of moving around, Austen, her mother and later Cassandra settled in Chawton. Once in a permanent home, Austen could finally concentrate on her novels and most importantly on their publishing. Henry's military connection helped to convince Thomas Egerton of the Military Library, Whitehall to publish *Sense and*

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<sup>11</sup> Nokes, *Jane Austen*, 240

<sup>12</sup> See Tomalin, *Jane Austen*, 183

<sup>13</sup> See Nokes, *Jane Austen*, 264

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-171

<sup>15</sup> "Pedigree of Austen", reprinted with *Austen Papers* (London: privately printed, 1940), quoted in Nokes, *Jane Austen*, 274

<sup>16</sup> See Nokes, *Jane Austen*, 276-277

<sup>17</sup> See Tomalin, *Jane Austen*, 195-197

*Sensibility* in 1811 with the inscription “by a lady”, and later *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813.<sup>18</sup>

*Mansfield Park* was started in 1811, yet the writing process was interrupted by a tragedy. Austen’s sister-in-law and a dear friend Eliza fell ill and suddenly passed away in spring 1813. Nevertheless, Austen was determined to finish her novel and published it in May the following year. The publisher praised its morals but still predicted the novel would not sell as well as the previous ones. After Egerton refused to add another edition of *Mansfield Park*, Austen turned to another publisher, John Murray, to publish *Emma* in 1815. The last finished novel from Austen’s pen was *Persuasion* or as she first called it, “The Elliots”.<sup>19</sup>

By 1816 Austen started to feel ill and her pain intensified. Despite her declining health, she wrote twelve chapters of a new novel, *Sanditon*. She sought medical help at Winchester, where she stayed until her death on 18 July 1817. Henry and Cassandra managed to get the remaining finished novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, published five months after her death.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Tomalin, *Jane Austen*, 220-222

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-249

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 265-268

### 3 MANSFIELD PARK

#### 3.1 SYNOPSIS

The story of *Mansfield Park*<sup>21</sup> centres on a timid 10-year-old girl Fanny Price from a poor Portsmouth family, who is sent off to live with her rich relatives – uncle Sir Thomas Bertram, an owner of a plantation in Antigua, aunt Lady Bertram and cousins Tom, Edmund, Maria and Julia. From the day she arrives, the villain, aunt Norris, constantly reminds Fanny of her low status, inferiority and luck to live at the estate. Fanny falls in love with Edmund, who is the only person at Mansfield kind to Fanny. Once Fanny matures, the Bertrams get acquainted with siblings from a respectable family, Mary and Henry Crawford. Henry's corrupt mind games completely destroy Maria and Julia's moral judgement, while Mary toys with Tom as well as Edmund. Henry's attention later turns to Fanny and he proposes to her, and despite the family's pressure, she has no desire to marry him as she judges Henry's character by his past behaviour. Married Maria elopes with Henry and brings shame on her family. After the Crawfords leave Mansfield, Edmund finally realizes his love for Fanny, who has patiently waited for him her whole life.

Lady Bertram, Mrs Norris and Mrs Price are three sisters, each married into a family of different rank. Lady Bertram is the mistress of Mansfield Park estate with four educated children, while her sister Mrs Price is a struggling mother of eight. The Bertrams adopt a 10-year-old girl Fanny Price to unburden Mrs Price on Mrs Norris's initiative. Fanny is reminded as soon as she arrives at Mansfield Park that she is inferior to her cousins and that she should be immensely grateful for their kindness. Fanny accepts this mentality and that keeps her obedient. Mrs Norris seizes the opportunity to make Fanny's days at the mansion as miserable as possible by emotionally tormenting her. In contrast to Fanny's brittle physical health, she manages to find inner strength and endure the abuse. One person who treats Fanny with respect is her second eldest cousin Edmund, whom she bonds with as a child and, eventually, falls in love with.

Fanny's uncle Sir Thomas Bertram and her eldest cousin Tom set off for Antigua, an island in West Indies, where Sir Bertram owns a plantation with slave workers. Shortly after their departure, a new acquaintance appears at Mansfield Park and stirs the atmosphere—siblings Mary and Henry Crawford. Henry Crawford is expected to woo the youngest cousin, Julia, but he tempts the already engaged cousin, Maria. The

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<sup>21</sup> Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)

beautiful Miss Mary Crawford quickly chooses an agreeable suitor, the returned heir of the estate, Tom Bertram. When Edmund reveals himself to be a much more suitable option, Mary reconsiders. Edmund admires Mary's beauty and character and feels comfortable in her presence. Fanny cannot help but feel jealous, but still hears out Edmund's feelings for Miss Crawford while maintaining her composure. Tom and his London friend stage theatricals at the mansion and all apart from Fanny participate. The play is called *Lover's Vows* and it contains themes such as love affairs and illegitimate children, which is unacceptable amongst gentry. The uncontrolled entertainment comes to an end once Sir Thomas Bertram arrives home.

Family evenings go back to normal and Fanny's complexion and character draw more attention and receive compliments from her uncle, Edmund and Henry. Maria marries and Henry loses interest in her. Fanny, however, strikes him as a perfect naïve girl to be loved by. Fanny is not comfortable with any of his gallantry and eludes his affections. Fanny's favourite brother William arrives at Mansfield as Sir Thomas's guest. He is a seaman and Fanny loves hearing about his adventures. Henry uses Fanny's affection for her brother to his own advantage. Henry's connections ensure that William is made a lieutenant. Henry consequently expects Fanny to accept his marriage proposal. In Fanny's eyes, an act of altruism becomes a mere exchange of favours that she will not indulge in.

Fanny is perceived as ungrateful and her decision is understood as selfish. Sir Thomas Bertram is motivated to take all possible measures to make Fanny accept Henry's offer. He sends Fanny to Portsmouth to visit her family that she has not seen for years. At Portsmouth, Fanny receives an unenthusiastic welcome, but more importantly, she discovers the horrid conditions under which her family has been living. The Prices are visited by Henry, who tries to impress Fanny by acting as a friend of the poor. Despite that Fanny senses a change in Henry's attitude, her answer stays the same. Some weeks later, Fanny learns that Maria left her husband to be with Henry.

The Bertrams are in shock and to make things worse, Fanny's youngest cousin Julia elopes with Tom's friend from London. Fanny is asked to return to Mansfield Park. She is thrilled to leave Portsmouth and to see her dear cousin Edmund again. Mrs and Miss Crawford simply blame Fanny for Maria's and Henry's misfortune, which could have been avoided had Fanny accepted Henry's proposal. Edmund meets with Miss Crawford one last time and listens to how she plans to resolve the situation. He is

startled by her proposition that Maria should marry Henry and realizes he has judged her character wrongly.

Sir Thomas Bertram acknowledges that his children's vanity is caused by privileged upbringing. Maria is forbidden to come back home and instead she moves out of the country to live with her aunt Mrs Norris. Julia's deed proves to be a mere folly compared to Maria's crime and her father forgives her. Finally, Edmund realizes that his love for Fanny might not be only brotherly, but romantic as well. Fanny finds true happiness, which she longed for since she was a child.

### 3.2 PLACE AMONG AUSTEN'S OEUVRE

*Mansfield Park* is Jane Austen's third published novel and was started years after *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice* and even posthumously published *Northanger Abbey*. After the death of her father in 1805, Jane Austen was financially dependent on her family and struggled with minimal freedom until she published her first novel in 1811. *Mansfield Park* could be a reaction to her situation, since it is less cheerful than her previous novels. Collins called it "Jane Austen's Victorian novel"<sup>22</sup>, because it embraces rigid themes such as treatment of the lower classes and morals. In 1810's when Charles Dickens was just born in Portsmouth, Austen was vividly describing the poverty of the lowest classes.

The advertisement for *Mansfield Park* read as follows: "by the author of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*,"<sup>23</sup> and that by itself ensured *Mansfield Park* was sold very quickly and brought Austen a much larger sum of money than her two previous novels.<sup>24</sup> Yet no reviews appeared until 1870. The only reactions available to us from the period are mentions in letters, diaries and Austen's own transcription of her family's varying opinions.<sup>25</sup> Jane Austen's mother thought Fanny boring, Austen's sister Cassandra had some objections and wanted Fanny to marry Henry. Her brother Edward thought Henry's elopement with Maria unnatural, whereas Mrs James Austen was of opposite opinion. Mrs Austen enjoyed Mrs Norris, but Benjamin Lefroy hated her for teasing Fanny. Many of Austen's relations naturally compared the novel to the

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<sup>22</sup> Barbara Bail Collins, "Jane Austen's Victorian Novel," in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, ed. Ian Littlewood (Mountfield: Helm, 1998), 27-28

<sup>23</sup> See *Jane Austen, Mansfield Park: A reader's guide to essential criticism*, ed. Sandie Byrne (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5

<sup>24</sup> See *Jane Austen, Mansfield Park*, ed. Byrne, 2

<sup>25</sup> See *Jane Austen, Mansfield Park*, ed. Byrne, 10-11

previous two and in most cases liked *Mansfield Park* less. The same happened with comparing Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price. Although Fanny was generally praised, Elizabeth was adored.<sup>26</sup>

Fanny is a fragile character. She talks very carefully as not to sound ill mannered. For example, when she is to move together with Mrs Price, she expresses regret over having to leave Mansfield, but quickly recollects herself and adds ““I hope I am not ungrateful, aunt,””<sup>27</sup> to avoid potential scolding. Insecurity, cautiousness, and fear of being rejected are not very appealing traits in a novel heroine and could explain why some critics, including Lionel Trilling, prefer the anti-heroine Miss Crawford. Trilling says in his essay on *Mansfield Park* that no one likes Fanny’s character due to her conscious virtuous behaviour.<sup>28</sup> As I will later explain, Fanny’s virtuosity is the moral compass of the story and without it the novel would not exist.

*Pride and Prejudice*’s heroine Elizabeth Bennet is a complete opposite to Fanny. First of all, her circumstances are fortunate. She belongs to the middle class, has a respectable status and her family all love her dearly. Second of all, she is headstrong and capable of ignoring or returning insults. When she learns that Mr Darcy has been advising Mr Bingley against his relationship with her sister Jane, she conceives hatred for him and refuses his proposal of marriage. And finally, Elizabeth is comfortable with attention and compliments, something that is unthinkable for Fanny. Trilling also notices the difference between the two heroines in their physical health:

“Fanny is in a debilitated condition through a greater part of the novel. [Her] debility becomes the more striking when we consider that no quality of the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice* is more appealing than her physical energy.”<sup>29</sup>

However, there is one similarity between Fanny and Elizabeth that is worth mentioning—Fanny’s refusal of marriage. Just when one expects Fanny to act as Elizabeth’s less confident friend Charlotte and marry in haste for the sake of a comfortable future, Fanny surprises the reader and strongly protests against it. Elizabeth, on the other hand, refuses twice. First she refuses her cousin, Mr Collins, a man with a steady income from a parish. Then she refuses Mr Darcy’s offer, which would make her the mistress of Pemberley and comfortable for the rest of her days.

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<sup>26</sup> See *Jane Austen, Mansfield Park*, ed. Byrne, 10-11

<sup>27</sup> Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20

<sup>28</sup> See Lionel Trilling, “*Mansfield Park*” in *The Opposing Self* (London: The Viking Press, 1959), 212

<sup>29</sup> Trilling, “*Mansfield Park*” in *The Opposing Self*, 212

Elizabeth's reason was purely moral and based on Darcy's presumed immoral behaviour towards Wickham as well as his interference in Jane's relationship with Bingley. Darcy's testimony and a noble favour for the Bennets and Lydia is what dispels Elizabeth's doubts and convinces her to accept Darcy's second proposal. Had she refused him again, she would not have any certainty of ever marrying and possibly could become a spinster. It was essential for the Bennets to marry off their daughters, because they would all face poverty should Mr Bennet die. Unlike Elizabeth, Fanny refused Henry Crawford even though he made her brother William a lieutenant. If Edmund had not realized his admiration for her, Fanny's future would be much worse than Elizabeth's. An example of an unfortunate marriage is Mrs Price's marriage to Mr Price. This is exactly what Sir Thomas hopes would discourage Fanny, when he sends her to Portsmouth.

Pragmatic necessity of marriage projected into *Sense and Sensibility* as well. Three sisters and their mother Mrs Dashwood are forced to leave their home after Mr Dashwood's death and their brother refuses to support them financially. Elinor and Marianne are expected to marry as soon as possible to have their futures secured. But the basis of the novel is Elinor's and Marianne's close sisterly bond. Austen focuses on the contrast between their natures. Elinor is prudent, responsible and suppresses emotion, whereas Marianne is very romantic, energetic and open with her emotions. Their conduct has unwelcomed repercussions, but the author allows them to marry happily in the end.

The sisterly bond between Elinor and Marianne and even Jane and Elizabeth contrasts with the relationship between the Bertram sisters Maria and Julia. Maria is engaged to Mr Rushworth, but flirts with Henry Crawford all the same. She justifies her actions: "There would be no harm in her liking an agreeable man—every body knew her situation..."<sup>30</sup> Julia, on the other hand, does not have a suitor and hopes to woo Henry and marry him. Their interest in Henry triggers jealousy between them and they become rivals. This rivalry shows when the Bertrams and the Crawfords visit Mr Rushworth's estate. Maria criticises Henry's excessive courtesy to Julia: "You and Julia were laughing the whole way," she says and adds: "You think her more light-hearted

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<sup>30</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 35

than I am.” “More easily amused,” replies Henry.<sup>31</sup> Maria is jealous of her sister even though she knows Henry is supposed to be Julia’s suitor.

Austen’s characteristic satire changed tone. The reality of poor and neglected Miss Price is not laughable, but rigid. Amusing characters are in positions of villains, who tease the heroine. The best example of this is Mrs Norris, one of the most hated characters Austen ever created. When Mrs Price has her eighth child, she writes a letter to the Bertrams asking them to employ her eldest son William. Instead, she receives “friendly advice” from Sir Thomas and “money and linen” from Lady Bertram. Mrs Norris only writes the letters. Austen satirically comments on the their generosity: “Mrs Norris was often observing to the others, ... much as they had all done for her [Mrs Price], she seemed to be wanting to do more.”<sup>32</sup> Mrs Norris proposes that they adopt the eldest daughter. As much as Mrs Norris tries to argue her benevolence, her intention is to hurt her struggling sister. A girl of ten could help her mother with younger children; she could help around the house and essentially be the mother’s assistant.

### **3.3 EXCLUSIVE THEMES TO MANSFIELD PARK**

My aim in the following subchapters is to analyse the rigid themes in *Mansfield Park*, which have been emphasised by critics, appear in modern readings of the novel and appeal to filmmakers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **3.3.1 Fanny as a moral compass**

The heart of *Mansfield Park* is Fanny and her morality. She is the moral compass of the novel that is constantly overlooked. Fanny usually accepts orders from her family, but when she feels they are doing something that might hurt them in the future, she gives them advice. If characters do not follow her virtues, they are condemned to misfortune. Her cousin Maria is one of those characters. Fanny advises her not to involve herself with Henry. When Maria slips through an iron gate to be alone with him, Fanny cries: “You will hurt yourself, Miss Bertram... You had better not go.”<sup>33</sup> Maria assures her that she is very well and disappears with Henry. This is a foreshadowing of Maria’s elopement at the end of the novel.

The moral conflict happens between Fanny and the Crawfords, who do not belong to Mansfield Park. Their backgrounds could not be more different. Fanny comes

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<sup>31</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 75

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 79



from a poor family with no connections whatsoever. Her father was once a handsome lieutenant who married a young woman with no wealth. Now he is a drunk, who neglects his family. The Crawfords come from London and their uncle is an Admiral, who does not care about marriage and keeps a mistress. It is interesting to see what effect their upbringing had on each of them. At Portsmouth, Fanny certainly has to help with anything her mother requests and she has to care for her little brothers and sisters. Fanny experiences the reality of living under terrible conditions and once she is at Mansfield, she does not dare to take such luxury for granted. Crawfords, on the other hand, are brought up in the comfort of their London house and are desperate for more.

Yet, Crawfords are those who appear more pleasant. Miss Mary Crawford is considered very pretty and countenance strikes Edmund as attractive. “A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself; and both placed near a window, ... was enough to catch any man’s heart.”<sup>34</sup> Apart from playing the harp, Miss Crawford also rides a horse, jokes, and plays games. Her liveliness is not her only strength; she is also polite to Fanny. She makes her apologies when she keeps Fanny waiting for a horse, she even comforts her after a scolding from Mrs Norris. Miss Crawford and Fanny slowly become friends. Bearing in mind Miss Crawford’s affection for Fanny, the true nature of her character is all the more vile. She forces Fanny to marry Henry despite her refusal, she does not consider Henry’s elopement with Maria immoral and chooses to woo the wealthiest Mr Bertram.

Mr Henry Crawford is as admirable as his sister. At first he is described as “plain”, but after a third meeting the Bertram sisters find him “the most agreeable young man”. Henry knows exactly what to say to incite jealousy between the sisters. After he notices Fanny’s improving grace, all he wants is to be loved by such a naïve girl. When William comes to visit Fanny, Henry envies her Fanny’s admiration. Thus he manages to get William promoted and earn positive feedback from Fanny. He does just that, but does not consider the possibility that Fanny might reject him despite his shallow act of charity. Henry is most likely used to girls falling in love with him over small gestures and Fanny’s refusal is shocking to him. Nevertheless, he continues to woo her. When she still rejects him after he visits her in Portsmouth, Henry yields and elopes with Maria.

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<sup>34</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 51-52

Fanny manages to withstand all controversies and temptations she faces. She does not lose her temper when Mrs Norris scolds her, does not complain once about not having a fire in her chambers, cares about her cousins despite their unfair treatment of her and even when she is yelled at and being convinced to marry a man she despises, she does not yield. Fanny's character is the strongest of all Austen heroines.

Harding argues that Austen's choice to make Fanny a virtuous heroine presents a problem, because Austen wrote to her niece Fanny: "—pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked,"<sup>35</sup> and acknowledges his puzzlement over Austen's creation of Fanny Price.<sup>36</sup> I believe Fanny's character is logical considering her neglected childhood and constant hardships she has to endure. It is only natural that she feels grateful to live at Mansfield Park when her siblings and parents have to live in poverty. Her whole character is built on difficult beginnings and overcoming them.

Austen could have easily let Fanny marry Henry and give her a luxurious future, but then the characters that were wrong about her would be right and she would become a mere housewife with a promiscuous husband. Sir Thomas would feel right about yelling at her, Henry would get his naïve girl and Mary would marry Edmund, a potential heir to Mansfield Park. Instead, Austen used Fanny's potential and let her triumph over the rest of characters' failure. When Fanny refuses Henry and he elopes with Maria, Fanny becomes the moral victor. It means that she judged Henry's character accurately, was sceptic of Mary Crawford for the right reasons and gave good advice to Maria. Fanny is the one who restores the family's tranquillity and morals even though nobody thought her important.

### **3.3.2 The cost of Mansfield Park**

From the current perspective, one of the key themes of *Mansfield Park* is Sir Thomas's business in Antigua. The novel takes place just before the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, when Antigua was a land used for sugar plantations cultivated by African slaves.<sup>37</sup> This controversy is explored by many postcolonial critics and no longer escapes the judgement of modern readers. Since Sir Thomas is not a picture of

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<sup>35</sup> Letter 155, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deidre Le Faye. 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 335

<sup>36</sup> See D.W. Harding, "Mansfield Park" in *Scrutiny* (1939-40); rpt, "Regulated Hatred" and *Other Essays on Jane Austen* (London: 1998) quoted in Byrne: *Jane Austen*, 62-73

<sup>37</sup> See Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 152

humanity, his line of work led many critics and filmmakers to conclude that he is a merciless tyrant. It is necessary to stress that even though Jane Austen wrote in those difficult times, she was probably not aware of the actual horrors of slavery.

In the late 18th century, Britain's economy depended highly on wealth acquired by enslavement of Africans. Members of Parliament, even representatives of the Anglican Church belonged to a vast number of plantation owners. More than 40,000 Africans were sailed to the New World annually and over a third of them died either at sea or at plantations within few years. In 1780s, people created a movement for abolishing the slave trade. Main mission of the movement was to confront disregard for slavery. In 1787, Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Trade in Slaves was launched and consisted of Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp and James Phillips. William Wilberforce was the Society's chief representative in Parliament, but proslavery politicians repeatedly silenced his motions for abolition. The French Revolution in 1790s was another complication. Abolition was portrayed as dangerous for social stability. Finally, Napoleon reintroduced slavery to the French Empire in 1802 and British abolitionists could link their cause to war effort. Consequently, Parliament voted for the abolition of slave trade in 1807.<sup>38</sup> This was just four years before Austen started working on *Mansfield Park*. Foner states that regardless of the abolition, slaves were still imported into America using schemes to avoid persecution. The cotton and sugar industry was booming and new slaves were needed more than before.<sup>39</sup>

The novel acknowledges Britain's exploitation system and it also expresses the complexity of it. Austen does not judge or criticise the means by which Sir Bertram supports his family. The moral and virtuous Fanny benefits from slavery just like her rich relatives.<sup>40</sup> Rather soon in the novel, it is stated that Sir Thomas Bertram is an owner of a business in Antigua, which concentrated on production of sugar and used African slave trade on a large scale.<sup>41</sup> Sir Thomas is therefore an absentee plantation owner. Absentees resided in Britain and their estates abroad were operated by authorized managers or estate attorneys.<sup>42</sup> The Antigua estate would naturally require

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<sup>38</sup>See Deidre Lynch, *The Norton Anthology Of English Literature*, Tenth edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 95-96

<sup>39</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of Black Americans* (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 36

<sup>40</sup> See Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 87

<sup>41</sup> See Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 152

<sup>42</sup> See Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 159

visits from the owner, when business was in danger. When Sir Thomas' business faces a substantial drop in profit, he has no other choice than to travel to the West Indies himself "... for the better arrangement of his affairs,"<sup>43</sup> Edward Said says in *Culture and Imperialism* that Sir Thomas is obliged to put things in order in Antigua otherwise his family would suffer.<sup>44</sup> From the current perspective, this is one of the greatest moral dilemmas of *Mansfield Park* and the reality of many British families, who owned plantations in the West Indies. Said also notes that the tranquillity and comfort of Mansfield Park depend hugely on slave work and discipline at the plantations.<sup>45</sup>

Said also comments on the meaning of Sir Thomas's return from Antigua and his setting things in order at home, namely intervening the rehearsal of *Lover's Vows*. He notes:

"There is nothing in Mansfield Park that would contradict us, however, were we to assume that Sir Thomas does exactly the same things—on larger scale—in his Antigua 'plantations.' Whatever was wrong there ... Sir Thomas was able to fix, thereby maintaining his control over his colonial domain."<sup>46</sup>

I agree with Said's statement, as Sir Thomas is clearly a respected figure both among his employees and slaves in Antigua and among his family. This is most noticeable in the family's horrified reactions upon his unexpected arrival. All but Mrs Bertram realize that what they have done is unacceptable and they fear Sir Thomas's judgement.

*Mansfield Park* contains a direct mention of slave trade. Fanny inquires about it in an evening family debate as she mentions to Edmund the following day: "Did not you hear me ask him about the slave trade last night?"<sup>47</sup> Fanny's question is followed by "dead silence" and she assumes that her cousins are not intrigued by the topic. She feels disappointed that Sir Thomas's own daughters are indifferent to their father's business.

Austen's perspective of slavery was most likely very limited, but postcolonial research provides information to supply what is omitted in *Mansfield Park*. Namely it is the nature of Sir Thomas's business, treatment of slaves, profitability of slave

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<sup>43</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 25

<sup>44</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 87

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 155

exploitation and slave trade abolition. Said's modern reading of the novel focuses primarily on issues of slavery and its importance to the Bertrams as well as to Fanny.

### 3.3.3 The Gentry and The Poor

Charles Dickens was one of the first people to write novels about poverty of the low classes and to describe child labour. One generation before him Austen challenged her inner Victorian realist and created *Mansfield Park* to demonstrate how gentry treated the poor. Austen is famous for her brilliant portrayal of the middle and upper classes<sup>48</sup>, to which she and her family belonged, but did not focus on the poor. *Mansfield Park* provided her with the opportunity to write about what she was used to, but still focus on the poorest relation Fanny Price.

In *Uses of Austen*, Dow and Hanson note that the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a period of drastic changes in society and that with the events of the French Revolution, upper classes in England feared that the class structure was going to collapse. They also say that the poor were reminded of their inferiority and had to show their complete deference towards the gentry. There were some charities that provided the poor with help such as free education and hospitals, but the situation was not getting better.<sup>49</sup> Austen demonstrates that for a woman it only takes one bad decision to become poor and a right decision to become gentry. Lady Bertram and Mrs Price are born with the same rank and only their husbands can change it. Lady Bertram and Mrs Norris are sisters of Mrs Price but still treat her daughter with contempt. Mrs Price and Sir Thomas treat Fanny like the gentry treats the poor—they treat her as inferior and remind Fanny's cousins to do the same. Although Fanny does lack proper education as a child, she morally triumphs in the end.

Poverty is a theme specific to Jane Austen's novels and serves as a major threat to the heroines. In *Mansfield Park* this threat becomes a reality. Mrs Price is someone's daughter that married for love and did not consider the financial part of such a marriage. Lydia from *Pride and Prejudice* would face similar situation if Mr Darcy had not helped her. Fanny as a poor relation does not have high hopes for a comfortable life. She surprises everyone when she refuses Henry Crawford, who owns an estate in

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<sup>48</sup> Roy and Lesley Adkins, *Eavesdropping on Jane Austen's England: How Our Ancestors Lived Two Centuries Ago* (London: Abacus, 2014), xxvi

<sup>49</sup> See *Uses of Austen*, ed. Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), xviii-ixx

Norfolk<sup>50</sup>. I do not believe Fanny ignores the threat of poverty. When she is in Portsmouth, Fanny admits that: “though Mansfield Park might have some pains, Portsmouth could have no pleasures.”<sup>51</sup> Fanny is also aware of the opinion of the gentry on poverty. When Henry visits her in Portsmouth, she fears her family would embarrass her: “To have had him join the family dinner-party and see all their deficiencies would have been dreadful!”<sup>52</sup> She considered all this and still refused Henry. This implies just how terrified she was of spending the rest of her life with a man that did not love her. Vickery says that marriage was essentially a contract that was almost impossible to terminate and that young women were strongly advised to choose their husbands carefully, because they would never leave them.<sup>53</sup> Instead of immoral Henry, Fanny chooses Edmund, who is a mere clergyman with a small annual income. She is convinced that he will treat her with respect and love and in Fanny’s mind this outbalances Henry’s wealth and connections.

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<sup>50</sup> Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 32

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 308

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 320

<sup>53</sup> See Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, 39-40

#### 4 MANSFIELD PARK'S AFTERLIFE IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

According to Hutcheon and O'Flynn adaptation can be described as “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works”, “a creative and interpretive act of appropriation”, and “an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work”.<sup>54</sup> It is a process of transition between genres, which ensures a continued interest in the original text.<sup>55</sup> In this case it is a transition between a novel and a film. Sanders notes that adaptation can provide a commentary on a source text, which happens most often with a revised view of the text. Adaptation can simplify texts or make them more understandable for new audiences using the process of proximation and updating, which is a practice of many filmmakers, who adapt so-called ‘classic’ novels. Something they have to bear in mind is that the adaptation is for both the readers and viewers not yet familiar with the text.<sup>56</sup>

Hutcheon and O'Flynn note that subtraction or contraction is needed when adapting lengthy novels and cutting off minor, sometimes even major characters is necessary to fit the length of the film. Story has to be sped up and lengthy novel descriptions are contracted to only a few explanatory sentences. Adaptors have multiple reasons why they choose particular stories, for example a wish to supply the story with their artistic vision or to add political value.<sup>57</sup> Adaptors need to take into account the cultural, historical and political context, which is available today and which can shift the context of the novel radically and change the way the novel is interpreted.<sup>58</sup> Genres, media, political engagement, and personal history of authors as well as public history all govern the changes made in adaptations.<sup>59</sup> Film adaptation theory considers the public demand for fidelity to the giants of classics such as Dickens or Austen,<sup>60</sup> but this does not mean that adaptors always follow that demand.

Jane Austen's love stories are generally appealing to the female audience and filmmakers enjoy recreating them according to Parill. She also notes that “Austen” is a name universally recognisable, which makes it a good selling point. Adaptation of

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<sup>54</sup> Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2013), 8

<sup>55</sup> See Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2016), 24

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-5

<sup>57</sup> Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 19-20

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 28

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 108

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

Austen's novels is not particularly expensive, because are in the public domain accessible to anyone and do not require any exotic locations or special effects.<sup>61</sup> However, they require attention to historical accuracy, costumes and access to one or two mansions with vast gardens.

In the last few decades Jane Austen has become a cultural phenomenon and her works have been adapted multiple times. In 1995, there were two very successful adaptations, which kick-started the fascination with Austen. Namely it was the television series *Pride and Prejudice*, directed by Simon Langton and starring Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth; and also *Sense and Sensibility*, directed by Ang Lee with screenplay by Emma Thompson, starring established Hollywood actors such as Alan Rickman, Kate Winslet or Hugh Grant. There are two directors in 21<sup>st</sup> century, Patricia Rozema and Iain B. MacDonald, who turned their attention to the more complex and less cheerful novel from Austen's oeuvre—*Mansfield Park*—and provided it with an interesting afterlife worth discussing.

*Mansfield Park* can be a bit more difficult to adapt and sell to the viewer. Not because of the setting, but because the heroine is unlikable for the modern audience. According to Parrill, it is because Fanny is sickly, judgemental, and can be boring.<sup>62</sup> This might be the reason why directors of the two newest adaptations decided to erase most of her character and transform Fanny into a pleasant young woman with the audacity of *Pride and Prejudice*'s heroine Elizabeth Bennet, beauty of Elizabeth's sister Jane and energy of Catherine Morland from *Northanger Abbey*.

#### 4.1 FILM ADAPTATION BY PATRICIA ROZEMA (1999)

The first film adaptation I will be discussing is Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* (1999)<sup>63</sup>, which opened the 1999 World Film Festival in Montreal and was released in March 2000. Rozema is a Canadian director and screenwriter. She directed *I've heard the Mermaids Singing*, *When Night is Falling* (1995) and recent films include *Into the Forest* (2016) and *Mouthpiece* (2018). Rozema is open about her homosexuality and incorporates lesbian relationships into her films including *Mansfield Park* (Miramax, 1999), in which Mary Crawford (Embeth Davidtz) explicitly flirts with Fanny Price (Frances O'Connor). Rozema made several changes to the novel. She abandoned the

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<sup>61</sup> Parrill, *Jane Austen on film and television*, 3

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>63</sup> *Mansfield Park*, dir. Patricia Rozema (Miramax, 1999), DVD.



novel heroine Fanny and replaced her with a version of Jane Austen herself. The film also contains a subplot focusing on Sir Thomas and his slavery business by which Rozema communicates historical context.

#### **4.1.1 Synopsis**

The film opens with Fanny (Hannah Taylor Gordon) citing Austen's juvenilia to her sister Susan (Talya Gordon) and her following journey to Mansfield Park. Fanny arrives at the mansion before dawn, but nobody is waiting for her and she has to wait outside. She is taken inside hours later, introduced to the Bertrams and showed around the house. Once in her room, Fanny starts crying and Edmund (Philip Sarson) comes to reconcile her. He gives her paper and ink for writing letters to Susan. In the letters, Fanny continues in writing Austen's juvenilia and works on "The History of England" during a transition scene between her childhood and adulthood. As a woman Fanny (Frances O'Connor) reads her stories to Edmund (Jonny Lee Miller) and comments on the incompetence of men. Fanny is full of energy; she runs around the house, laughs and rides her horse called Mrs Shakespeare.

As Fanny brings opium to her tired aunt Lady Bertram (Lindsay Duncan), she witnesses an argument between Tom (James Purefoy) and Sir Thomas (Harold Pinter). Later, Fanny writes to Susan that Sir Thomas sailed off to Antigua with Tom, Maria (Victoria Hamilton) got engaged with Mr Rushworth (Hugh Bonneville) and Mrs Norris (Sheila Gish) lost her husband and moved to the mansion. Mary (Embeth Davidtz) and Henry (Alessandro Nivola) Crawford are introduced to the Bertrams, who are stunned by their beauty.

While Maria and Julia (Justine Waddell) are playing music for the visitors, Tom arrives home from Antigua drunk and proposes to stage theatricals. Tom's idea is well received, but Edmund opposes. Mary Crawford asks Fanny to rehearse with her since Edmund refuses, but lets him watch as she touches her arm and grabs her waist. This is enough to convince Edmund to take up a role in the play. When the stage is ready and everyone is in costumes, Sir Thomas comes back from Antigua and breaks up the rehearsal. The next day, the family and the visitors sit together and talk about Sir Thomas's experience in Antigua. Fanny asks her uncle about the rights of slaves to be freed in England, but receives no answer. Instead, she is praised for her improved beauty and shape and Sir Thomas proposes a ball celebrating her coming out into society. Fanny is startled by that idea and has to leave the house to soothe her anger.

Henry begins to pay more attention to Fanny, which makes Maria jealous. Maria marries Mr Rushworth and moves to his estate with Julia. One day, when Fanny is out in the rain picking apples for Mrs Norris, Mary Crawford takes her inside the parsonage. She undresses Fanny and compliments her on her beauty. Later they talk about Edmund's future profession and Mary Crawford expresses her disapproval. At the ball, Fanny dances with Henry and Edmund and enjoys herself. Henry makes his intentions clear to Fanny and asks Sir Thomas's permission to marry her. Sir Thomas commands Fanny to marry Henry, but she refuses.

As a punishment, Fanny is sent to Portsmouth to her parents, where she is expected to reconsider her decision. The rooms are dirty, children are impudent and her father reeks of alcohol. Susan is Fanny's only comfort. Henry does not miss an opportunity to prove to Fanny that he cares about her and her family by joining them for dinner. Fanny and her mother have a sincere conversation about marriage. Mrs Price (Lindsay Duncan) tells Fanny that she should not be ashamed to marry for money. Fanny takes her advice and accepts Henry's proposal. However, the following day she reconsiders.

Fanny is taken back to Mansfield to take care of Tom, who is seriously ill. There she meets the Crawfords again. In Tom's room Fanny finds his sketchbook with drawings of slave abuse and realizes that Sir Thomas is crueller than she thought. Then she catches Maria and Henry in bed together. Mr Rushworth learns about it the following day and so does the rest of the family. Mary Crawford proposes her plan to let Henry marry Maria and let the crime subside. In her plan she relies on Tom's death. The entire family are alarmed by her impudence.

In the final scenes, Fanny is the narrator, who describes the future of each character. Mrs Norris devotes herself to the "unfortunate" Maria, the Crawfords find suitors more to their liking, Susan moves to Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas abandons his pursuits in Antigua to invest in tobacco instead, Tom recovers from his illness and most importantly Edmund tells Fanny he loves her. Edmund informs Fanny that he found publishers for her stories and suggests a title for them: "Effusions of Fancy by a very Young Lady Consisting of Tales in a Style entirely new", which is how Austen's father titled her juvenile "The History of England"<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Tomalin, *Jane Austen*, 68

#### 4.1.2 Austen as a heroine

Fanny Price is not a typical heroine. She has no great beauty, talent or courage. She has a strict moral code that she does not break a single time. Rozema decided to leave Fanny where she belonged—in the novel. For screen she created a hybrid Fanny consisting of Austen<sup>65</sup> and popular Austenian heroines. Fanny is the narrator of her own story. She quotes the Austen's juvenilia in letters addressed to her sister Susan and addresses the camera directly satirizing male historical figures and female stereotypes,<sup>66</sup> while working on "The History of England".<sup>67</sup> Rozema most likely drew inspiration from Austen's relationship with Cassandra. Fanny writes letters to Susan almost constantly, reflecting on life at Mansfield Park. Austen's letters to her confidante Cassandra were just as frequent and detailed.<sup>68</sup> To emphasise Fanny's talent for writing and her interest in literature, the film is full of literary references. To illustrate, Fanny names her horse Mrs Shakespeare, she mentions reading work of Thomas Clarkson, a famous abolitionist and reads Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*.

Film version of Fanny is very lively and enthusiastic. Compared to Maria and Julia she is tomboyish and shares some characteristics with Catherine Morland, who is mischievous and enjoys reading Gothic novels. Young Fanny does not have access to books, but invents mysterious, terrifying stories. When she gets older, she fools around with Edmund and does not listen to authorities. She ignores Sir Thomas's commands, talks back to Mrs Norris and mocks Lady Bertram's addiction to opium in her letters to Susan. The costumes for Fanny are also less feminine than those of her female cousins. Rozema paid close attention to making Fanny appear as a modern feminist. She is not interested in the Crawfords at all, while others beautify themselves to look their best for them. She makes clear that her interest is in writing, reading and riding, not in courting and pleasing others.

One of Rozema's most controversial choices was to introduce a lesbian relationship into Austen's work. At least that is how reviewers interpreted the two

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<sup>65</sup> Parrill, *Jane Austen on film and television*, 87

<sup>66</sup> *Jane Austen on Screen*, ed. Gina Macdonald and Andrew F. Macdonald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 69

<sup>67</sup> *Uses of Austen*, ed. Dow and Hanson, 103

<sup>68</sup> See *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Le Faye

scenes in which Fanny and Marry Crawford get more intimate than appropriate.<sup>69</sup> In the scene when Mary Crawford is rehearsing the infamous play *Lover's Vows* with Fanny, Mary touches her arm, stares into her eyes and hugs her around the waist. Edmund is watching them silently and his embarrassment is apparent. This sexual tension between characters is something entirely new for any of the adaptations. Fanny does not oppose Mary's flirtations, which, according to Parrill, consequently led reviewers to believe she willingly participates in her lesbian advances. In next scene, Mary undresses Fanny and compliments her beauty. Parrill admits that those scenes might suggest lesbianism since Rozema's earlier films include lesbian characters.<sup>70</sup> Rozema herself is a lesbian and she could have included homosexuality in the film to enrich Hollywood's diversity. However, in her DVD commentary she does not clarify Fanny or Mary's sexuality, she merely says that Fanny is fascinated by Mary.<sup>71</sup>

As I previously explained, Rozema created a film character out of Jane Austen. If she truly considered Fanny to be a lesbian, it would mean that she suspected Austen to be as well. There was a big controversy over Austen's alleged homosexuality. Mazzeno explains the circumstances and says that these suggestions were started by the publication of a book review by Terry Castle in the *London Review of Books*. Mazzeno notes that the book was a 1995 edition of *Jane Austen's Letters* by Deirdre Le Faye. What Terry Castle tried to stress in one chapter called "Sister, Sister," according to Mazzeno, was Jane's close relationship with her sister Cassandra. Based on reading this chapter, Castle's publisher decided to announce the review with a shocking heading "Was Jane Austen Gay?"<sup>72</sup> without realizing how much it would irritate Austen's devotees. Castle had to make a statement saying that she did not intend to suggest Austen was a lesbian.<sup>73</sup> Unlike the publisher of Castle's review, Rozema did not suggest any incestuous romantic relationship between Austen and Cassandra or accordingly Fanny and Susan.

Austen's juvenilia, enthusiasm and supposed homosexuality were not Rozema's only inspiration for Fanny. She used Austen's famous refusal of marriage to change the plot. In the novel, Fanny does not change her opinion on Henry and his proposal. The

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<sup>69</sup> Parrill, *Jane Austen on film and television*, 94

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 94-95

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Laurence W. Mazzeno. *Jane Austen: Two Centuries of Criticism*, 191

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 191

film Fanny, on the other hand, behaves as Austen did when she was asked to marry Bigg-Wither. She accepts Henry's proposal after she realizes that poverty would be worse than any marriage. Overnight she reconsiders and tells Henry that she spoke hastily and that she cannot marry him after all. Austen never married after she refused her one and only proposal. Fanny is luckier and marries Edmund, the love of her life. If Austen was truly Rozema's vision of Fanny, she would marry her darling Tom Lefroy, live with him in a parsonage and publish her novels. Rozema's adaptation of *Mansfield Park* offers an alternative fictional life for Austen that is nowhere near the reality.

### 4.1.3 Slavery

Rozema's adaptation of *Mansfield Park* comments on the politics of the source text by means of alteration and addition. Rozema responded to a gap in the source novel, which had been previously observed by postcolonial critics.<sup>74</sup> She was undoubtedly influenced by critics, such as Claudia Johnson, who pointed at the importance of slavery and oppression of women.<sup>75</sup> Austen only hinted at colonialism and slavery and Rozema exaggerated the theme and created a whole sup-plot about slavery centred on Sir Thomas.<sup>76</sup>

As well as the novel, the majority of Rozema's film is set shortly before the Slave Trade Abolition Act of 1807. The novel gives us little to no information of Sir Thomas's stand towards the issues of slave trade. The only thing Austen reveals is that Sir Thomas is a Member of Parliament. Rozema, on the other hand, describes his opinions on the matter vividly and provides details of his treatment of slaves.

The conversation that plays out in the family's evening circle shortly after Sir Thomas's return implies that Rozema saw Sir Thomas as an extremist and compared his views to those of Edward Long, the author of "History of Jamaica" and a polygenist who believed "Negroes", "Whites" and "Mulattos" are different races. Sir Thomas comments on the beauty and intellect of one of his female slaves and on the supposed inability of "Mulattos" to reproduce. The similarities between Long and Sir Thomas are evident. Sir Thomas uses the author's exact words: "The Mulattos are, in general, well-

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<sup>74</sup> Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 27

<sup>75</sup> Parrill, *Jane Austen on film and television*, 85

<sup>76</sup> Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 27

shaped, and the women well-featured.”<sup>77</sup> The latter comment about beauty and intelligence of one of the “mulatto” women is based on Long’s polygenic remarks as well:

“They seem to partake more of the white than the black. ... The girls arrive very early at the age of puberty; and, from the time of their being about twenty-five, they decline very fast, till at length they grow terribly ugly.”<sup>78</sup>

Long then continues on their “remarkably decent behaviour”, “tenderness of disposition” and “religious attention to the cleanliness of their persons”.

Edward Long published faulty theories about “Mulatto” sterility. Like Sir Thomas, he compared children with White and Black parents to mules, an offspring of a horse and a donkey that is often barren: “They seem in this respect to be actually of the mule-kind, and not so capable of producing from one another as from a commerce with a distinct White or Black.”<sup>79</sup> Sir Thomas uses the same rhetoric and when Edmund confronts him, he refers him to Edward Long’s book as he is convinced that Long’s presumptions are facts.

When Sir Thomas proposes his plan to take one of the slaves back to Mansfield Park with him, Fanny joins the debate and speaks about the right of slaves to be freed once they arrive to England. She refers to the law in England according to which any coercion of a man was illegal, but was ignored by British slave owners all the same.<sup>80</sup>

Towards the end of the film Fanny finds Tom’s sketchbook and notices a drawing of Sir Bertram sexually assaulting one of his slaves. I believe Rozema wanted to bring attention to frequent sexual exploitation of slave women by their masters. In *History of Black Americans* Foner says that plantation owners felt they were entitled to women’s sexual services as part of their position and notes that slave women did not dare to object their masters to avoid harsh punishment.<sup>81</sup>

The moral dilemma of *Mansfield Park*, which forces the reader to consider both points of view, disappears in the film. Edmund is the only character that voices Bertrams’ ambiguous situation. Despite her intelligence and reading on the matter,

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<sup>77</sup> Edward Long, *The history of Jamaica*, vol. 2 (London: T. Lownudes, 1774), 335, <https://archive.org/stream/historyofjamaica02long#page/334>

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 335

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 335

<sup>80</sup> See *Uses of Austen*, ed. Dow and Hanson, 199

<sup>81</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of Black Americans* (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 81-82

Fanny seems to ignore his point and continues to defend her moral stand against slavery. However, she does not take action against it. At that time people protested by small gestures such as not taking sugar in their tea.<sup>82</sup> This would have been an interesting addition to Fanny's character that would correlate with Rozema's vision.

Patricia Rozema's main focus was on communicating the historical context of slave trade and slavery in England and the West Indies at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her intention was to fill the gap in *Mansfield Park* emphasised by postcolonial critics such as Edward Said, Lionel Trilling or Claudia Johnson. She drew inspiration for Sir Thomas's character from polygenic texts, reality of slaves and political situation of England in 1806. In her adaptation, there is less space for contemplating the morality and necessity of British slave trade than in the novel. The assertive heroine makes her views clear and the viewer is expected to follow.

#### **4.2 FILM ADAPTATION BY IAIN B. MACDONALD (2007)**

The second film adaptation I will be discussing is Iain B. MacDonald's *Mansfield Park* (2007)<sup>83</sup>, which was broadcasted by ITV in March 2007. Iain B. MacDonald is a British television director known for directing episodes of television series like *Survivors* (2008-2010), *I'm Dying Up Here* (2017-2018) or *Shameless* (2011-). The screenplay for *Mansfield Park* (2007) was written by Maggie Wadey. MacDonald and Wadey made several alterations to the characters and the story. They followed Rozema's lead and presented Fanny as lively and sympathetic. Since this is a television film with a small budget, the location of all scenes is limited only to one mansion available. This adaptation draws attention to slavery like the previous one, but not as obviously. Mainly it focuses on the characters' blithe disregard for slavery.

##### **4.2.1 Synopsis**

The film opens with young Fanny (Julia Joyce) driving to Mansfield Park and adult Fanny (Billie Piper) narrating the story. At Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas (Douglas Hodge), Lady Bertram (Jemma Redgrave) and Mrs Norris (Maggie O'Neill) discuss the disadvantages of adopting Fanny and then introduce the girl to her cousins. During her stay at Mansfield Park, Fanny grows into a lively young woman. She enjoys badminton, drawing and riding with Edmund (Blake Ritson), whom she loves more than a cousin.

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<sup>82</sup> Lynch, *The Norton Anthology Of English Literature*, 96

<sup>83</sup> *Mansfield Park*, dir. Iain B. MacDonald (UK: ITV, 2007), DVD.

When Sir Thomas convenes a family meeting and announces his voyage to Antigua, Maria (Michelle Ryan) and Julia (Catherine Steadman) rejoice, but Edmund and Tom (James D'Arcy) seem to take their responsibilities seriously. Tom, however, removes himself to London shortly after. Fanny admits that Sir Thomas's departure gives her a sense of freedom and that she has never been happier.

Mary (Hayley Atwell) and Henry (Joseph Beattie) Crawford arrive at Mansfield Park from London's fashionable society and immediately start courting the Bertram children. Fanny is unnoticeable amongst them. She is even dressed worse than everyone else. Edmund and Mary Crawford overlook Fanny when they borrow her horse and let her wait in the stables. Tom comes back from London with a daring proposition to stage a play. Edmund and Lady Bertram disagree. Edmund later insists on playing a part to avoid casting an outsider. While rehearsing, Henry Crawford takes Maria behind the curtain and kisses her. The curtain falls down and they all see what has happened. Julia runs to her room and Fanny takes her part. Sir Bertram suddenly arrives, sees everyone on stage in costumes and thus burns the script.

During a family dinner, Fanny asks Sir Thomas's opinion on the ethics of slavery. The question surprises everyone at the table and Tom remarks that Fanny is a friend of abolition. Maria marries Mr Rushworth and leaves with him and Julia to his estate. Henry Crawford witnesses Fanny playing with a child and decides to "put a hole in Fanny's heart". Fanny's brother William (Joseph Morgan) arrives at Mansfield. They talk and he gives Fanny a cross to wear around her neck. Sir Thomas proposes to throw a ball on Fanny's birthday, but she insists on a simple picnic. At the picnic, Mary Crawford informs Fanny that Henry is taking William to dine with their uncle, the Admiral. Days later, Henry informs Fanny that William has been made a lieutenant and expects her to accept him as a husband in return. Fanny refuses him, which makes Sir Thomas furious. He calls Fanny selfish and ungrateful. The Bertrams leave Fanny alone at Mansfield to visit Lady Bertram's mother in London. Henry visits Fanny and tries to convince her of his pure intentions, but she does not believe him. The Bertrams return with Tom, who is deathly ill. All are happy that Fanny is with them and her refusal of Henry is forgiven.

Sir Thomas is informed that Maria left her home and her husband with Henry and admits that he knows his daughter as much as a stranger. Maria's crime leaves the family in shock. Edmund is disappointed that Mary Crawford does not take the matter as seriously as she ought to and ultimately ends their relationship. Edmund only then



realizes that he loves Fanny more than he thought he did. Lady Bertram encourages them to be together and reveals that she knows that Fanny has loved Edmund all her life. Fanny and Edmund have a wedding in the garden.

#### 4.2.2 Alterations of characters

Neither one of the adaptations shows Fanny's character as it is portrayed in the novel. Fanny Price is played by Billie Piper, a beautiful actress with blonde hair, dark eyes and a healthy constitution. It is the opposite of the character in the novel. The activities they participate in and their energy differ as well. In the film, Fanny is running most of the time, plays badminton, and rides at a gallop. Like in Rozema's adaptation, Fanny seems to share Catherine's characteristics, particularly her enthusiasm for games: "She was fond of all boys' plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls..."<sup>84</sup> This would not be thinkable for Fanny, who would get a headache if she walked in warm sunshine for too long, whereas in the adaptation, Maria is the one in need of a parasol. Critics of the novel (Trilling) were annoyed by Fanny's judgemental nature. In the adaption, Fanny does not judge or advise anyone, but remains loyal to her inner moral guide. To illustrate, when the Miss Bertrams rejoice in Sir Thomas' departure, Fanny does not judge them; on the contrary, she shares their joy claiming that she has never been happier in all her life. She is not as timid as her novel version. For example, during the play rehearsal Fanny tells Julia that she does not participate, because Sir Thomas would not approve and she "cannot afford to displease him." In the novel, Fanny does not so much as think about participating until asked to, and even then protests against it.

Lady Bertram is another character that was altered. She is not as tired and ignorant as in the book and does not use Fanny as her maid. She is observant and quite intelligent. In fact, she is more sharp-witted than Mrs Norris, who is the manipulative mastermind in the book. For example, Lady Bertram is the one who arranges Henry as a suitor for Julia. This small gesture makes her more interested in her daughters than her novel version could ever be. Unlike the other characters, she is aware of Fanny's feelings towards Edmund and in the end encourages them to marry. She is genuinely pleased with that outcome, whereas Sir Thomas cannot comprehend it. Lady Bertram is also one of the characters that jokes and ironically comments. For example, when she asks Fanny to bring her own parasol to Maria and tells her that if Maria gets a headache,

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<sup>84</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (London: Vintage Books, 2014), 6

they shall all suffer. Not only is this pure Austenian irony, it also expresses her opinion on her daughter's character.

Historical context was important to Macdonald as it was for Rozema. He too portrayed Sir Thomas as a merciless slaveholder and a man demanding order both home and in Antigua. When Fanny asks him about his opinion on slavery, he admits that slavery is not essential for society, but order is. After he arrives home from Antigua, Sir Thomas does not welcome Fanny as warmly as in the novel. He starts respecting Fanny only after her brother William arrives and shows his affection for her. Sir Thomas has high respect for William and his occupation, enjoys having conversations with him and takes his opinions into consideration. When William reminds him that Fanny's birthday is the following day, Sir Thomas automatically proposes a celebration and changes his behaviour towards Fanny completely.

William is an important character in this adaptation. Similarly to the novel, Henry uses him as bait to compel Fanny to marry him. William is clearly dear to Fanny, who is beside herself with joy when he comes to Mansfield Park. In the novel, Fanny transforms her entire personality when William arrives. Since Fanny is always smiling and having fun in the adaptation, there is not a clear distinction between her usual cheerful self and her happiness in William's company as there is in the novel.

#### **4.2.3 Budget limitations**

It is not surprising that finances have an effect on all stages of the adaptation process.<sup>85</sup> In the case of television adaptations, the budget is often much more limited than in the case of Hollywood films. The director had to omit several characters and scenes to fit budget limitations and feature length.

The entire film takes place at Mansfield Park, which leaves out essential scenes that would provide a more vivid background for the characters, namely Fanny. Portsmouth, Fanny's siblings and her mother, their unbearable poverty and despair are minimized to a few explanatory sentences. The purpose of Fanny being the narrator is to provide the audience with all needed information. Fanny explains that her mother decided to give her up, for she could no longer afford to keep her and so one of the most fascinating themes in all of Austen's novels is brushed aside. Consequently it also means that Susan does not get the chance to move to Mansfield Park and take Fanny's place after she marries. Fanny also cannot contemplate her refusal of marriage in poverty. Instead the

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<sup>85</sup> Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 88

Bertrams leave her alone at Mansfield Park with servants, while they go visit Lady Bertram's mother in London.

Additionally, producers had to omit one of Austen characteristic pleasures—the ball. The ball is one of the most important events Fanny participates in. It signifies her maturity and coming out to society. To excuse the omission of it, Fanny begs her uncle to organise a picnic instead of a ball. The screenwriter Wadey used this change to write a brand new dialogue between Fanny and Mrs Norris. The aunt scolds Fanny for her selfish wish to organise a picnic and invite so many people, and Fanny is bewildered by her complaints since all she wanted to do was to save Sir Thomas time and money. This time she does not merely listen, but talks back to her aunt and ironically answers that she might enjoy herself too much to remember her lack of consideration.

One of the advantages of omitting potentially expensive scenes is having more money to finance costumes and the building of Mansfield Park itself. Rozema used Kirby Hall in Northamptonshire for both the exterior and some of the exteriors of Mansfield mansion. She wanted it to feel grand, but worn and faded.<sup>86</sup> The rooms are not furnished and more fit for a Gothic novel judging by their cold, uninviting feel. In comparison to Rozema's adaptation, Macdonald's mansion is much more detailed and gardens are accurately landscaped. He used Newby Hall in North Yorkshire. All the rooms are fully furnished, and attention to detail is more than satisfactory. This film provides a historically accurate atmosphere, while staying modest.

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<sup>86</sup> Parrill, *Jane Austen on film and television*, 86

## 5 CONCLUSION

*Mansfield Park* is one of the few Austen's novels that offers unlimited interpretations and certainly does not leave its readers with uniform opinion of its characters and themes. My research focuses on the most pronounced themes of the novel, which have been emphasized by Austen's concurrent devotees as well as modern critics. Adaptors interpret the novel's historical and political value to make it appropriate for today's audience.

Austen also strayed from her usual cheerful tone with witty heroines and created a neglected heroine born in poverty—Fanny Price. Nobody expect her to have any impact on their lives, but they could not be more wrong. Her moral compass and persistence is what makes her the moral victor over everyone else. However, there is a question whether Fanny is relevant for modern audience. Values that were praised in the Victorian era are currently criticized. To the Victorians, it was important to have a morally strong heroine that would be a role model for the society's moral decline. In these days, however, overly moral heroines are considered prudent and audience demand heroines with a bit of mischief. Adaptations take the public demand into consideration and transform Fanny Price into a heroine more characteristic for Austen's fiction.

As my research shows, critics have emphasized one of the most crucial moral dilemmas of *Mansfield Park*, which is the necessity of slavery for the stability of the Bertram family. Sir Thomas Bertram owns a business in Antigua, one of the British colonies that used slave exploitation system. He has to ensure that his estate prospers otherwise he risks the future of his family. Filmmakers decided to pronounce the topic of slavery exceedingly. Rozema's adaptation, in particular, uses historical context to reveal Sir Thomas's vile true nature. She compares Sir Thomas to an infamous polygenist Edward Long.

Rozema's work is controversial not only because of her vivid description of slavery. She also decided to swap Fanny's character with a hybrid of Austen and her more witty heroines. Fanny quotes Austen's juvenilia, writes "The History of England" and shares Austen's refusal of marriage. Rozema suggested Fanny's lesbian relationship with Mary Crawford, referring to Austen's alleged relationship with her sister Cassandra.

Macdonald and his later adaptation are not as controversial as Rozema's vision. Main changes are made because the adaptation respected television format and limited

budget. However, the decision to change Fanny's character remained. Fanny Price is apparently unwanted heroine in the modern era, whose time to guide the society is perhaps yet to come.

It may be concluded that whereas Victorians values virtuosity of Fanny, she has nothing to offer to today's society. Themes like slave exploitation, or poverty at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, are themes that are much more appealing and deserve closer attention.

## 6 RESUMÉ

*Mansfieldské panství* je jedním z románů Jane Austenové, který nabízí nekonečné množství interpretací a nenechává čtenáře s jednoznačným názorem jak na postavy tak na poukázaná témata. Můj výzkum se zaměřuje na témata románu, která byla zdůrazněna jak současníky Austenové, tak moderními kritiky. Tvůrci adaptací interpretují politické hodnoty románu tak, aby uspokojili současné diváky.

Jane Austenová opustila veselý tón jejích předchozích románů a její vychytralé hrdinky a stvořila Fanny Price, zanedbanou hrdinku zrozenou z chudoby. Nikdo z postav od Fanny neočekává, že by mohla mít nějaký reálný dopad na jejich životy, ale pletou se. Její morální kompas a výdrž jsou důvodem k jejímu morálnímu vítězství. Zůstává ale otázkou, zda je Fanny zajímavá pro moderní diváky. Hodnoty typické pro viktoriánskou dobu už dávno nejsou aktuální a nepotřebujeme tudíž hrdinku, která je morálním vzorem pro společnost. Takové hrdinky, jako je Fanny, jsou považovány za prudérní a nudné. Preferujeme hrdinky jako Elizabeth Bennet, která v sobě má trochu neposednosti. Adaptace musí brát v potaz přání diváků a filmaři tudíž mění Fanny v úplně jiného člověka, než jak je vyobrazená v knize.

Můj výzkum ukazuje, že kritici se zaměřují na jedno z největších morálních dilemat *Mansfieldského Panství*, což je nutnost provozovat otroctví k zabezpečení rodiny. Sir Thomas vlastní obchod na Antize, jedné z tehdejších britských kolonií, která se zaměřovala na vykořisťování otroků. Sir Thomas musí zajistit, aby jeho obchod vzkvétal. Filmaři se rozhodli na toto téma zaměřit. Zejména adaptace Rozemy využívá historický kontext, aby odhalila pravou osobnost Sira Thomase. Porovnává také jeho postoje s Edwardem Longem.

Kontroverze Rozeminé adaptace nespočívá pouze v detailním vyobrazení hrůz otroctví. Také se rozhodla změnit postavu Fanny a nahradit ji samotnou Jane Austenovou. Dále naznačila lesbický vztah mezi Fanny a Mary Crawfordovou. Macdonaldova pozdější adaptace se distancuje od takových kontroverzností. Jeho hlavní úkol byl držet se televizního formátu a nepřekročit rozpočet. Díky tomu vzniklo mnoho úprav původního textu. Fanny nebyla ale ani pro něj dost zajímavá hrdinka a její čas tak možná ještě nastane.

Viktoriánské hodnoty, charakteristické pro Fanny, nemají co nabídnout modernímu divákovi. Témata jako otroctví a chudoba, na druhou stranu, zajímají současné filmaře a diváky o mnoho více.

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## 8 ANNOTATION

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Abstract: This thesis researches the unique novel *Mansfield Park* by the genius of British literature—Jane Austen—and its two latest film adaptations. The aim of the thesis is to find out how the filmmakers interpreted the story to introduce it to the modern audience. The thesis analyses themes of slavery, poverty, social status and comments on the moral and rigid qualities, which foreshadow the unforgiving Victorian era.

## 9 ANOTACE

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Abstrakt:	Tato práce se zabývá jedinečným románem <i>Mansfieldské panství</i> od velikánky britské literatury—Jane Austenové—a jeho dvěma posledními filmovými adaptacemi. Cílem práce je zjistit jakým způsobem si tvůrci interpretovali příběh a jak se rozhodli přiblížit ho dnešnímu publiku. Práce analyzuje téma chudoby, otroctví, sociálního statusu a poukazuje na morální hodnoty a přísnost, které předznamenávají krutou viktoriánskou dobu.