

This study guide is aimed at students of English and Media Studies at A Level and I3CSE. The guide looks at:

- the challenge at adapting Jane Austen's novel for the screen
- marketing classic texts to a modern audience
- character
- marriage and society

SYNOPSIS

Patricia Rozema's daring adaptation of *Mansfield Park* is a witty look at romance and reality, Jane Austen-style. Rozema has taken Jane Austen's third and most controversial novel and infused its lead character with the irrepressible essence of Austen's own life and writings. The result is an original portrait of a strong-willed, spirited heroine who Jane Austen attempts to outsmart the dizzying maze of marriage and social status - without compromising her ideals or her heart. This is the story of Fanny Price, who emerges from the maze having discovered the rightness of one true love.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Jane Austen - A Life Claire Tomalin (Penguin)

Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England Roger Sales (Routledge)

Is Heathcliff A Murderer? - Puzzles in 19th-Century Fiction John Sutherland (Oxford)

Culture & Imperialism Edward W Said (Chatto & Windus)

What Became of Jane Austen? Kingsley Amis

Reprinted in Jane Austen - A Collection of Critical Essays edited by Ian Watt (Spectrum). (Presently out of print)

Director: Patricia Rozema

Certificate: 15

Running time: 99mins

NOVEL TO SCREEN

It would take most people considerably longer than the 99 minutes (running time of the film) to read the novel *Mansfield Park*. It is therefore necessary for any film adaptation to involve a great degree of 'telescoping' and of actual omission in order to condense a text for the screen.

Make a list of what you believe are the 'key' incidents of the novel, making clear why you believe they merit this designation. Which of these incidents could be excluded from a film adaptation of the novel without in some way, say, harming the narrative or preventing us from an understanding of a character? Review your selection after viewing the film. Which incidents has the director omitted from the film version? To what extent do you agree with the director's selection?

Print and film are two different media, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Why do you think directors insist on adapting plays and novels as a basis for feature films rather than simply working from original screenplays? What do you believe to be the advantages and disadvantages of adapting a famous novel for the screen?

'An inexorable process occurs when you're turning the implicit material of a novel into the explicit material of film. You can photograph mood, feeling or thought but you have to photograph something. So adaptation is not about editorialising a novel, but working out how to convey in a new medium something uniquely literal.'

Anthony Minghella, director, discussing his turn version of *The Talented Mr Ripley*

How, through what she has photographed, does the director, Patricia Rozema, make us aware of Fanny's intense feelings about the developing relationship between Edmund and Mary?

When Patricia Rozema decided to adapt and direct a new screen version of *Mansfield Park* she had no intention of attempting to capture the entirety of the novel on the screen:

*'From the beginning, I didn't want to do another Jane Austen garden party... The one aspect of Jane Austen that has not really appeared so far in cinema is her boldness, her stylistic vitality, and this is what I wanted to capture in this *Mansfield Park*.'*

What do you believe Rozema means by 'another Jane Austen garden party'? Has she succeeded in

MARKETING MANSFIELD PARK

Whenever a classic text is adapted for the screen the challenge arises as to how a well-known piece of work can be given a fresh angle and how it can be made appealing to the audience of the time. Choice of stars, decisions about locations, costumes and the soundtrack are all important factors in giving a text a new look and feel, and the way in which a film is presented to the public through the marketing campaign is vital in creating audience interest.

Patricia Rozema's adaptation of *Mansfield Park* for the big screen is not merely a re-telling of Jane Austen's classic novel, but a fresh look at her world. It is important that the promotional material for the film - the poster, the trailer and the website - make this clear to the prospective audience.

The USA website for the film *Mansfield Park* can be found at <http://www.mansfieldpark.com/>

POSTER

Look at the poster artwork on the front cover of this study guide. This is the main image for the marketing campaign and features on the home page of the website. Comment on the body language, facial expression, background detail and colours used. Even though the image is a period one, how is it made attractive to a modern audience? Why do you think this image was chosen? What impression of the film does it convey?

TRAILER

How is Fanny Price presented to us as a modern heroine?

What aspects of the film does the trailer highlight?

What impression of the film does the music give us?

WEBSITE

What impression of the film does the tag line give? How does it relate to your own knowledge of *Mansfield Park*?

What techniques does the flash preview use to present the film as a new and exciting adaptation of *Mansfield Park*?

How is the film promoted to an audience who may not be familiar with the works of Jane Austen?

Consider the character profiles which appear as you click on each actor. Why have they been included and what aspects of character have been focused on in each? How do they compare to your knowledge of the characters in the novel? Comment on the language used.

Look at the stills chosen to promote *Mansfield Park* that can be seen throughout this study guide and alongside each character profile on the website. What impression of the film do these give, both individually and as a whole? Are there any that you find surprising? How has the film language been used to create effect?

Readers have been divided for years over Fanny Price's strengths and weaknesses as a heroine: the author and critic Kingsley Amis refers to Fanny Price as '*...a monster of complacency and pride...*'. Austen herself recognised that Fanny was problematical and collected criticism of the novel. However, the Fanny Price who appears in the film bears scant resemblance to the character in the novel.

In her screenplay adaptation, Patricia Rozema has removed the morally strong, but physically feeble and insipid Fanny Price and replaced her with a 'construct' of Jane Austen herself produced by incorporating known biographical information alongside quotations from, and references to, Jane Austen's early writings and letters. Her sister, Cassandra, burned the most personal of Jane Austen's letters when her sister died but many still remain. Extracts from these letters and her juvenilia (in particular 'Henry & Eliza and The History Of England - by a partial, prejudiced, and ignorant author') are included in the letters Fanny Price writes from Mansfield Park to her sister, Susan, which are often 'delivered' straight to the camera. Thus it is as if the audience are privileged to watch, through the eyes of the writer-heroine, a work in progress, *Mansfield Park*.

In the film Frances O'Connor plays Fanny Price. She believes that what Patricia Rozema did in the film was to:

'take the essence of Jane Austen's Fanny Price and make her accessible to modern audiences. She made her fun and more boisterous, yet she remains the person I think Jane Austen intended her to be: a woman who tried to be true to herself at a time when that was blasphemy.'

- How does the film emphasise Fanny's status as a spirited, 'pro-active' young heroine? How appealing do you think this version of Fanny will be to a modern audience in comparison to the Fanny of the novel?
- Which scene in the film do you think best shows Fanny being 'true to herself'?
- In the novel Fanny's main correspondent is her sailor brother, William. Why do you think the director has made Susan the recipient of Fanny's letters rather than William?
- Fanny 'looks like a princess' when she attends her first ball and many critics have commented upon the 'rags to riches' fairy tale aspects of *Mansfield Park* with especial reference to 'Cinderella'. What fairy tale/folk tale elements appear in the film *Mansfield Park*? How do you think these will be perceived by a modern audience?

THE CHARACTERS

EDMUND

Jonny Lee Miller plays Edmund Bertram. Miller believes that:

'Edmund sees himself as a sort of pillar of goodness, a man with a grove responsibility for the world. But he takes doing the right thing too seriously and forgets his heart.'

In Jonny Lee Miller's view:

'Edmund's very intelligent but he's not the sharpest tool in the box when it comes to matters of love. When he first sees Mary Crawford he's awestruck and thinks that marrying her would be the right thing to do. he cannot admit his love for Fanny, because she is supposed to be his inferior... He's seduced by Henry and Mary, really, seduced by their sophistication and their freedom.'

To what extent do you agree with Jonny Lee Miller's assessment of Edmund?

THE CHARISMATIC CRAWFORDS

When Henry and Mary arrive at Mansfield Park we hear the whistling of wind on the soundtrack for they are a 'breath of fresh air', 'a wind of change'. However, we have heard that sound before. When Fanny Price arrives in her attic room in Mansfield Park its coldness is emphasised by the same whistling. Thus the arrival of the Crawfords is linked - through sound - to the chilly dreariness of Fanny Price's room; as the film progresses we become aware that the Crawfords possess a degree of cool calculation.

How does the film make us aware of the initially attractive nature of Mary and Henry Crawford?

In the novel the word 'evil' appears over 50 times. It is applied to disease, to Mrs Norris but mostly to the Crawfords. In what ways can the Crawfords be viewed as 'evil'?

With particular attention to the Crawfords, discuss the ways in which the actors' costumes are used to emphasise their characters and motivations.

Embeth Davidtz, who plays Mary, sees her character as:

'...very forward-thinking, very avant-garde. I don't think she intends to be bad in any sense but she just thinks in a very modern, free sort of way. ...Henry and Mary think alike: they are always on the hunt for mischief. I really think that's what drives them: appetite, desire, good times. When they meet the Bertrams, who are very wealthy and very prime for seduction, they see lots of potential for fun.

But what Mary never expects is that she'll fall in love with Edmund. He's not even the first-horn and he won't inherit the money. She gets over that, though, because she is drawn to the potential in him. He's very passionate about things he believes in and that sets her on fire.'

What evidence do you find in either the novel or the film to suggest that Mary really does fall in love with Edmund?

Patricia Rozema thinks that:

'Henry is the ultimate social being, a man who needs the validation of others constantly. He embraces all things modern and he's the kind of a guy you would want at a party.

Rozema told actor Alessandro Nivola that Henry *'was a bit like Bill Clinton - a man with an out-of-control charisma.'*

Comment on the spectacular firework display which Henry arranges for Fanny in Portsmouth. How does this display reflect upon the audience's understanding of Henry?

MARRIAGE AND SOCIETY

Julia, who hopes to conquer Henry but sees her engaged sister making eyes at the dashing newcomer, enquires of Maria *'Must you always win?'* Those few words imply a past of constant rivalry and marriage is a game played for high stakes at Mansfield Park. Mary Crawford will take risks at cards where the ambiguous talk is of 'buying' queens and kings - *'At what price?'* asks Edmund, alert to the subtext of the game and an unsavoury aspect of Mary Crawford that he had not fully recognised before.

As a woman living at the time of Jane Austen, marrying well was of prime importance. In Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas, Lady Bertram and Maria all express that it is a woman's duty to accept a 'good' offer of marriage, since an unmarried woman had no means of supporting herself through work - with the uncomfortable exception of becoming a governess - and so would have to rely on the financial resources and the goodwill of her relatives. When Fanny rejects Henry's proposal on the grounds that she does not love him, she faces considerable opposition.

The society of the early nineteenth century was very conscious of class and position. Fanny is constantly reminded of her status as a dependent relative at Mansfield Park by Mrs Norris, from the moment she arrives. Her lack of status is emphasised by the fact that her mother has 'given her away' - although not an uncommon occurrence at that time, in

the days of extremely large families - and by Tom's instructions to the carriage driver to 'drop her off' as if she were indeed only a parcel to be delivered.

Society conducted itself according to strict rules of etiquette and behaviour. One of these rules was that, in order to be eligible for marriage, a woman had to be officially 'out'. To be 'out' in Austen's time meant being allowed to attend the more grown-up social events, such as balls and assemblies and being presented to suitable prospective husbands; in this way Fanny had entered onto the 'marriage market'. There is considerable concern at Mansfield Park about Fanny's precise status as expressed by Mary Crawford:

'I begin now to understand you all, except Miss Price,' said Miss Crawford, as she was walking with the

Mr Bertrams. 'Pray, is she out, or is she not
Mansfield Park, Jane Austen Bloomsbury 2t00)

- In one of her letters to Susan, Fanny observes that *'Marriage is indeed a manoeuvring business'*. What do you think she means by this? In the novel this remark is made by Mary. Why do you think it has been reassigned to Fanny in the film?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of marrying well in Jane Austen's society and how are we made aware of these in the film?
- Where, in the film, is Fanny made aware of her lowly status in Mansfield House, and how does the film language (camera angles and movement, lighting, sound, editing, mise-en-scène) echo this and the way she feels about it?
- Look at the code of conduct between the sexes in the Regency era available on the Mansfield Park page at Film Education website www.filmeducation.org/secondary/s_archive/docs/mpark.html Can you suggest reasons for each of the rules? Produce your own guide to etiquette for modern men and women.