

Will Mrs. Norris Return to Harass Another Day? Continuations and Adaptations of *Mansfield Park*

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What is this fascination that Jane Austen's characters have for us? We no sooner finish the last line of a novel than we ask ourselves, "What happened then?" or "What would have happened if . . . ?" Even Jane Austen thought about the fate of her characters after the novels ended. She told her family that Mr. Woodhouse kept Emma and Mr. Knightley from settling at Donwell for about two years, Kitty Bennet married a clergyman, Mary married one of her uncle Philip's clerks, and Mrs. Norris gave William Price the "considerable sum" of one pound (Austen-Leigh 148-49).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, authors have ventured to answer "what happened next?" In his *A Bibliography of Jane Austen*, David Gilson lists fourteen continuations and adaptations of the novels between 1913 and 1975. Eighteen have been written since Gilson's *Bibliography* was published in 1982. Most have been written in the last five years as Jane Austen's popularity increases. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* are tied with most sequels and adaptations at eight each, including *Old Friends and New Fancies*, which they share. Because of its popularity, *Pride and Prejudice*, would be expected to have the most continuations; yet *Mansfield Park* has an equal fascination for writers. G. B. Stern in *Talking of Jane Austen*, for example, wishes that she could visit Jane Austen in Heaven and ask "What, Miss Austen, did you secretly feel about Fanny's chance of happiness with Henry Crawford? I mean . . . honestly now, wouldn't she have had much more fun with Henry than with her grave cousin Edmund?" (48). Stern argues that Fanny would have gained more by a marriage to Henry Crawford than to Edmund. Henry "could have assisted her to mental flexibility, a lighter touch on life, a wider tolerance, less dismay on almost every possible occasion" (48-49).

The number of sequels and adaptations of *Mansfield Park* suggests that readers are at the most unsatisfied with the ending and at the least curious about what will happen next to the characters. Will Tom marry? Will Mrs. Norris return to Mansfield Park to harass the occupants? Will Henry Crawford seduce again? All the continuations and adaptations, although they differ in plot and in characters, attempt to answer these (and other) questions. The eight sequels and adaptations of *Mansfield Park* can be divided into three categories: first—those in which the *Mansfield Park* characters join other Jane Austen characters, second—those that follow the characters after the conclusion of *Mansfield Park*, and third—those that are a retelling of the novel from another point of view or with a change in the ending.

Old Friends and New Fancies: An Imaginary Sequel to the Novels of Jane Austen, written in 1913, is the earliest continuation and falls in the first category where *Mansfield Park* characters interact with characters from other Austen novels. In her preface, author Sybil G. Brinton writes of the

problems that all authors have with adapting Jane Austen's works: "The difficulties, as well as the presumption, of such an undertaking, are alike evident; but the fascination of the subject must be our apology to those who, like ourselves, 'owe to Jane Austen some of the happiest hours of their lives.'" Brinton's work of 383 pages follows Elizabeth and Darcy as they travel and meet the other major and minor characters from Austen's works. In the end, Mary Crawford marries Colonel Fitzwilliam, William Price marries Georgiana Darcy, and Thomas Bertram, after first proposing to Georgiana, marries Isabella Thorpe. Of the continuations, *Old Friends and New Fancies* holds the least interest for readers. The book lacks characterization and frequently becomes little more than an exercise in listing as many characters' names as possible.

Gambles and Gambols: A Visit with Old Friends (Based on Characters Created by Jane Austen), written under the pseudonym of "Memoir" and published privately in 1983, is another work from this category. Like *Old Friends and New Fancies*, it is a difficult book to find and also has the distinction of having a distracting number of errors. The novel opens with Edmund, Fanny, and Tom venturing to Canterbury to attend a clerical convocation. Surprisingly, Edmund actually has aspirations to improve his position in life. He is no longer satisfied with being the rector of Mansfield and hopes to obtain a position as assistant to the Dean of Canterbury, or at the least, make connections so that he might improve his lot.

Upon arriving at their destination, they see someone hurrying towards them calling, "'Dear friends! . . . How kind of you! How kind of you! . . . I know you will forgive my trespassing on your privacy. It gives me the greatest pleasure to introduce myself. . . . I see it as my duty and pleasure as a clergyman . . . to make overtures of goodwill to my fellow wearers of the cloth, and consequently, by reason of having arrived some hours sooner than yourselves, I bid you welcome'" (189-90). Who is this fellow clergyman? None other than William Collins, Rector of Hunsford Parish. As the Bertrams's stay in Canterbury continues, they meet Mr. Collins's wife, Charlotte, Rev. Philip Elton and his wife, Augusta, Rev. and Mrs. Henry Tilney, the Right Reverend Mr. Morland and his son Rev. James Morland, Rev. Edward Ferrars and his wife Elinor, and Rev. Mr. Wentworth. Edmund urges Fanny to make friends with the wives in hopes of improving their connections. She enjoys Charlotte Collins's company, but spends some time trying to avoid Mrs. Elton. Mrs. Elton must be in command of everyone's life. When she learns that Tom is unmarried, she remarks, "But, of course, it is to your interest that he should not marry'" (26-27). Fanny is outraged; but Mrs. Elton must have her way: "'Nay, Mrs. Bertram,' said she archly, 'having ventured on the subject, I am not one to drop it. If the world sees it to your interest that Mr. Bertram should not marry, then, to show your disinterest, you must help him to marry. In short, Mrs. Bertram, you must find him a wife'" (26). Even the slow to respond Fanny is amazed at Mrs. Elton's impertinence. In spite of her insistence that Tom can find his own wife, Fanny is soon not only working to advance Edmund's position but also to find Tom a wife.

Before the convocation has ended, the Bertrams have received invitations to visit the Collins and Eltons. Edmund insists that they accept in the hopes that these new acquaintances will have patrons who can advance Edmund's position in the church. The remaining 249 pages finds the Bertrams traveling through the countryside meeting other characters from Jane Austen's novels. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Elizabeth, Darcy, Emma, Mr. Knightley, the Price family, Wickham, Mrs. Grant, Mary Crawford, Mrs. Norris, Maria Rushworth, and virtually all the characters in Austen's novels make cameo appearances.

Although weakened by an excess of errors and characters, *Gambles and Gambols* has some entertaining ideas. Mr. Collins is promoted to Assistant to the Dean at Canterbury (an example of rising to his level of incompetence). The Eltons replace the Collinsees at Hunsford (think about the possible confrontations between Lady Catherine and Augusta Elton!). Susan marries Charles Maddox, horror of horrors, a tradesman. Edmund receives a position at Westminster, and Tom marries Mrs. Grant!

Susan Price, or Resolution, like the previous two works, is a difficult book to obtain. The novel, written in 1930 by Francis Brown, the great-granddaughter of Jane Austen's brother Frank, is the first of the continuations that focuses entirely on the *Mansfield Park* characters and is closest in style to Jane Austen's works. As the title implies, the novel revolves around Fanny's sister Susan and her romance with her cousin Tom. Although Susan has replaced Fanny as Lady Bertram's attendant niece, it rapidly becomes clear that Susan is no Fanny. "Where Fanny . . . had been gentle and acquiescent, Susan was gay and firm. Where Fanny had sympathized and mourned, Susan found a new pattern for woolwork and added a gloss to Pug's coat" (2-3). As the story opens, Dr. Grant has died, and Edmund receives the living at Mansfield. Sir Thomas decides to award Edmund's previous living, Thornton Lacey, to Mr. Turner, Dr. Grant's curate and Mrs. Grant's cousin. Soon Mrs. Grant and Mary Crawford come to visit their cousin at his new home.

Fanny is anxious about this addition to the neighborhood, primarily because Edmund had once fancied himself in love with Mary. Susan, also is anxious, not because of Mary, but because Fanny will be living close by. Why should she not want her sister as a neighbor? Because she has a secret and fears that Fanny, who knows her so well, will discover it: "Fanny was quick to see and to divine much more than she could see. Susan felt it could not be long before all was known to Fanny, and must be deplored by her. . . . This circumstance was that Tom Bertram fancied himself in love with his cousin, and was using all the arts of a lively nature to overcome her opposition" (24-25).

The plot thickens when Tom continues to urge Susan to be his wife, with warnings that Aunt Norris will make Susan's life miserable if she returns to Mansfield Park, as she might since Maria has eloped with Mr. Small, an apothecary. Susan, however, continues to deny Tom's pleas, arguing that Sir Thomas would not approve.

Mrs. Norris *does* return and decides that Mary is the very woman for Tom. Susan's life is made so miserable by Aunt Norris, that she escapes back to Portsmouth, fleeing not only from Aunt Norris but also from her awakening feelings towards Tom. Tom, hero that he is, arranges to follow her when his mother pleads that she cannot do without Susan. While Tom is gone, Sir Thomas incorrectly learns that Tom might be planning to make Mary his wife. Sir Thomas is appalled; the former connection between Henry and Maria makes, in his eyes, a marriage between them totally unacceptable. This bit of news makes him prepared to accept what he might otherwise have thought an evil—Tom's marriage to Susan. Mary Crawford, who for her own reasons, has promoted the rumors of an attachment between Tom and herself, becomes engaged to Mr. Luttrell, who has been pursuing her since the Bertrams' ball. Aunt Norris, who, as predicted, is making everyone miserable, goes to live in a cottage on the Yates's estate—thus relieving Fanny and Susan of her constant scolding. With the suitable placement of all, Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram "feel very glad that long ago they had done what they could for poor Sister Price" (227). In this sequel, as in the others, Fanny remains a rather dull, background character, and Mary Crawford becomes a rather sympathetic one.

More than fifty years passed between the publication of *Susan Price* and the continuations of the 1980s and 1990s. *Ladysmead*, the first in a series of continuations of Austen's novels by Jane Gillespie, revolves around the widowed Reverend Thomas Lockley and his seven daughters. As the novel opens, the second eldest daughter, Sophia, has just taken on the responsibilities of the household upon the death of her mother. Of the daughters, only she and her youngest sister, Lucinda, remain at home. Sophia is depressed for she cannot foresee a time when she will escape from caring for her father and youngest sister and have a home and family of her own. Their neighborhood is very isolated, with little chance of companionship. Lucinda is dispirited because Emily, her best friend and close neighbor, has just moved from Ladysmead. One day they notice smoke coming from the chimney of Ladysmead, and Lucinda excitedly exclaims that Emily is back. The occupants are not, however, Emily and her grandparents; they are Mrs. Norris and Maria Rushton. Janeites are not fooled by the change of Rushworth to Rushton, because Mrs. Norris is still extremely disagreeable and Maria is still filled with anger and meanness. It is not, however, until the end of the novel, after Maria has fascinated Lucinda and attracted the few young men in the neighborhood, that her past is revealed. When Richard Dalby, the new owner of Ladysmead, comes to inspect his property, his friend recognizes and exposes Maria. Mr. Dalby, who finds Maria fascinating, does not seem to care, and the two decide to elope to America, without Mrs. Norris with whom Maria has had a violent argument. Because Mrs. Norris has been abandoned, Rev. Lockley decides to make the ultimate sacrifice and to propose to her. Before Rev. Lockley proposes to Mrs. Norris, however, Maria reconciles with her aunt and takes her to America, where her new husband hopes to find a suitor for her aunt. Sophia marries Charles Williams, the rector whom she loved but dared not hope to marry, and they become the

new tenants of Ladysmead. Although *Ladysmead* answers the “what happened next” question for only Mrs. Norris and Maria, it is a light, yet entertaining continuation.

Joan Aiken’s *Mansfield Revisited* (1985) focuses on Susan. In her preface to *Mansfield Revisited*, Aiken writes: “A sequel to *Mansfield Park*? What presumption! No, not presumption. Love and admiration. *No one* could presume to make any attempt to fill the gap left by Jane Austen. And I have not done so. But, finding myself filled with an over-mastering wish to find out what happened after Fanny married Edmund, and when Susan came to live at Mansfield, I had no recourse but to try and work it out by a mixture of imagination and common sense.”

Indeed she does work it out, mainly by killing off characters. Aiken begins with Sir Thomas Bertram, who dies while abroad on business. Someone must see to the family business, but Lady Bertram cannot be separated from Tom, whom she fears may once again succumb to fever in the West Indies. Edmund, the solid, reliable brother, decides he must go. Fanny insists that she and their newborn son must accompany Edmund. Their three-year-old daughter Mary is to be left in the charge of Susan. While Edmund is away, Mr. Wadham, accompanied by his sister, Mrs. Osborne, will take charge of the parish.

Julia, a meddler in the spirit of her Aunt Norris, objects to Susan and Tom remaining in the same household together now that Sir Thomas is dead; but Lady Bertram replies that Tom has never paid attention to Susan. In fact, she remembers, he used to make fun of her when she first came. Julia will not let the subject drop because she has an ulterior motive. She hopes that Tom will marry Charlotte Yates, the younger sister of her husband John. Tom, however, has other ideas. He is attracted to Miss Louisa Harley, the cousin of the Maddoxes. At this point, he certainly has no interest in his cousin.

Susan becomes friends with Mrs. Osborne and learns that she had served as a nurse to Mrs. Norris while she was ill and dying. Yes, one of the sequels actually kills off Mrs. Norris! Mary Crawford, who is very ill, rents White House, Aunt Norris’s old home, and hopes that the air and seeing her old friends will improve her health. Susan soon falls under the spell of Mary Crawford and visits her almost daily.

Susan’s brother William also comes for a visit; and in his honor, Tom decides to have a ball. Romance is in the air, and Susan becomes attracted to Captain Sarton. Miss Harley, whom Tom had planned to propose to after the hunting season is over, is attracted to William. The party is interrupted when Henry Crawford comes to the door requesting the loan of a chair Susan has promised for his ill sister.

A turning point comes in the novel when Tom and Mr. Wadham suggest a picnic to examine some Roman ruins for the company who attended the party. The outing is a disaster: Julia, meddling as usual, has sent the lunch to the wrong place; Miss Harley becomes engaged to Susan’s brother William; and the whole party is soaked by rain. Tom, upset at the turn of events, unwisely gallops off on his horse Pharaoh, who is not completely trained and still wild. The horse throws Tom right outside Mary Crawford’s window.

Because of the gravity of his injury, he is carried into Mary's home where he must stay until he recovers. When he is well enough to leave White House, he leaves with regret, for he has fallen in love with Mary: "'But to be there, listening to her conversation, listening to her angelic performance on the harp,' he said, 'Oh, Susan! It has entirely changed my life. I do believe that it has changed my life'" (161).

Mary is indeed drained of vitality. She shocks Susan by telling her that she is leaving her money to Susan and that it is her very dear hope that she will marry Henry. A week later, Mary dies. Tom is grief stricken. He blames himself for the added strain his presence has added to her poor health. Susan comforts him. Henry Crawford quits the neighborhood, but leaves Susan a letter in which he writes his hopes that someday she will consider becoming his wife. When Tom learns that Crawford has made Susan an offer, he quickly realizes his own feelings: "'Susan!' cried Tom; astonishing her, and very possibly, himself also, 'Susan! *Don't* take Crawford! Marry me—do, do think of marrying me, Susan! I do not see how we could go on without you, indeed I do not!'" (181). Tom blunders at an important moment. Susan believes he only wants to marry her to take care of Mansfield Park. Mrs. Osborne, however, clears up the misunderstanding. "'You and your cousin are made for one another. . . . He loves you so dearly—he has been worrying at me for ever about you—wondering if you would have him—wondering how he could bear it if you would not—'" (184). Susan further questions her: "'But ma'am—don't you think that he wishes to offer for me—simply so that I shall *not* marry Mr. Crawford? Simply so that I shall continue to look after his mother?'" (184).

"'No, I do not!' said Mrs. Osborne emphatically. 'Other wise I would not advise you to accept him—even if that meant leaving poor Lady Bertram to the tender mercies of Miss Yates!'" (184).

Susan excuses herself and runs to find Tom. "What did Susan say to Tom? No more than she should; no more than a well-brought-up young lady may do in such a situation, but enough to inform him that, in the light of further information received from Mrs. Osborne, she was prepared to listen again to his solicitations; to listen with a softer heart and a greater inclination to receive such offers as he might chuse to repeat" (185). The novel ends with Julia meddling less, with William and Louisa Harley's and Tom and Susan's marriages, and with Mrs. Osborne's returning to her cottage in Cumberland with the promise of visiting every summer the two that she had united.

Unlike the other continuations, Victor Gordon's *Mrs. Rushworth* (1989) focuses on Maria Rushworth's life. The most interesting aspect of the work is the author's use of a novel within a novel. Aunt Norris discovers *Mansfield Park* one day while visiting the new circulating library in Leamington. Realizing that the book is about Maria and her ill-fated adventures, Mrs. Norris quickly purchases all three volumes of the only copy in the library. After reading the book Mrs. Norris declares, "'The author, whoever he may be, has no understanding of what took place or why . . . although some of the facts are superficially correct'" (22). Maria's response to her aunt's analysis gives us the first hint that Maria will be a sympathetic character: "'Yet in

certain ways he—or she, for I suspect a female hand—is perceptive about Fanny. It must indeed have been strange and difficult for her at first. There is some truth in the early part of the book; Edmund was always kinder to our little cousin than the rest of us” (22). When Maria further points out that the author has made Mrs. Norris the strongest character in the book, she is willing to agree the book has some merits. Mrs. Norris, however, points out to Maria that “. . . you are allowed none of the virtues, except your good looks . . .” (23). We learn later in the novel that it was William who has inadvertently given the information about the Bertrams to Captain Austen, who made him a lieutenant, and Charles Austen, his immediate superior. At the time of Maria’s escapades, one or both of the brothers were in contact with one or more characters involved. Since the papers had also given accounts of the incident, it was talked about among the men who then told their sister, the author, the facts with some “embroidery.”

In an attempt to further the reader’s sympathy for Maria, Gordon also gives an explanation for her leaving Mr. Rushworth. Rushworth, apparently, had no interest in his “connubial obligations.” “Apart from Mr. Rushworth himself, Henry Crawford was the only person who realized that her marriage had been consummated by proxy” (26). Maria naively did not realize until too late that Mr. Rushworth’s inabilities as a marriage partner were grounds for her marriage to be dissolved without shame to herself.

Mrs. Norris and Maria go to Liverpool where she becomes involved with theatre people and falls in love with Charles Cheviot, a gifted musician and artist, without money but of good family. Charles is attracted to Maria’s beauty and her wealth. In spite of much meddling by Aunt Norris, Maria and Charles are married by a ship’s captain on their way to America. Mrs. Norris returns to Mansfield Park where she continues her meddling, trying to promote a match between Susan and Tom. “Her open espousal of their union made Tom hesitate at least a twelvemonth before seeking his cousin’s hand” (169).

In *Mrs. Rushworth*, as in *Mansfield Revisited*, Sir Thomas dies. The discussion about a settlement for Maria, following the reading of the will, is marvelously reminiscent of one in *Sense and Sensibility*:

“The only question is, how much?” said Tom.

“And for how long?” added Fanny.

“And in what form?” put in Edmund.

“Suppose I maintain Maria’s allowance for a further year or two? The estate revenues could manage that, I imagine, particularly if the rains reach Antigua in good time.”

“That would be most generous,” said Edmund. “Yet I question whether that is really the kind of arrangement my father had in mind. After all, that is not so much giving money to Maria as taking it away from the estate. Your first duty—for the sake of the whole family—must be to the estate. To deprive it of, say £1000 or £1500 *at this particular time* could be something you would live to regret.”

“The estate must come first, I see that. Well, suppose we shorten the time to nine months or six?”

“Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Bertram considered the new suggestion. “Certainly that seems more realistic. However a payment of, say, £500 in a year when the estate’s expenses are bound to be heavier than usual thanks to the funeral, the legal costs, the legacies, and so forth, would probably exceed anything my father had in mind.”

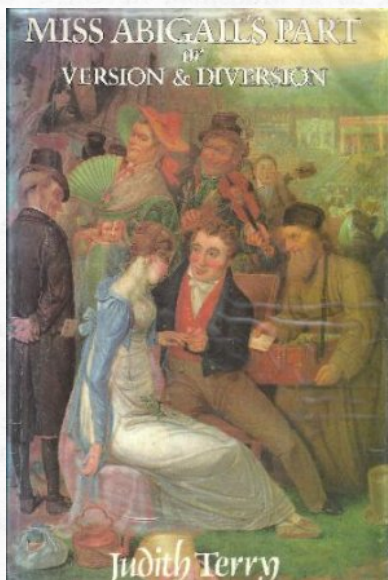
“I had rather, in a case such as this, do too much than too little.”

“To be sure. Yet there is a point beyond which generosity does harm both to the donor and to the receiver. It becomes a form of self-indulgence which leads to pride and the expectation of gratitude on the one side and humiliating dependence on the other.” (224-25)

This passage is an example of Gordon’s delightful portrayal of Fanny and Edmund. They have both become priggish—their worst traits enforced by each other. In the end they have talked Tom into giving Maria only game and fish. Susan, however, later convinces her husband to give his sister an unconditional 100 pounds.

The remaining chapters follow the ups and downs of Maria and Charles’s marriage, which is little better than Maria’s first. She has an affair with her cousin William, has his child, is divorced a second time, and moves again to America to act on the stage.

The remaining two works are adaptations, rather than continuations. The longest, Judith Terry’s *Miss Abigail’s Part or Version and Diversion* (1986, published in the United States as *Version and Diversion*), is a retelling of the Bertram saga through the first person point of view of one of their servants, Jane Hartwell, a lady’s maid to Julia. Both Tom and Henry pursue her. Jane shuns Tom’s advances, but is charmed by Henry’s just as Maria is. When the Bertrams and Crawfords decide to perform *Lovers’ Vows*, Tom hires Matthew Quinney, a professional scene designer, to paint the scenery. Jane becomes friends with Matthew, and when her affair with Henry is discovered she runs off with Matthew to London.



Miss Abigail's Part, unlike the sequels, is a carefully written social history of the period, where the characters become involved in events of their time. Jane, for example, when she runs off with Matthew, finds herself, involved in a labor movement, and later in danger in an area of London unseen in Austen's novels. After much work and hardship, Jane eventually achieves her goal of being a successful actress, under her stage name of Miss Abigail.

Julia comes to Jane in London one day and tearfully reveals that Mr. Crawford and Mr. Rushworth, encouraged by Mr. Yates, are going to fight a duel. Julia begs Jane's help in preventing the duel. Jane goes to the site of the duel, where Maria also later appears. Henry criticizes Maria for being rude to Jane, and Maria raves with jealousy at Henry's obvious preference of Jane and indifference to her. She grabs one of the dueling pistols and screams, "I cannot have him, then you shall not" (314) and shoots Jane. Jane recovers, and Maria flees the country with her Aunt Norris. Although Henry tries to persuade Jane to retire from the stage, she is reluctant to relinquish her career for him. Jane knows he loves her, but she also realizes that he is a man who loves many women and so refuses him. They remain on friendly terms, and through him she meets Lord Grandison whom she marries.

Dorothy Allen and Ann Owen's *Mansfield Park: An Alternative Ending* (1989) is the shortest (only seventeen pages) and most controversial of the adaptations and sequels. The authors suggest that Austen was perhaps influenced by "some authoritarian moralist, possibly a clergyman of the stamp of Mr. Collins. Under his influence, she made Henry Crawford damn himself by decamping with Mrs. Rushworth, against probability, against his own interests, and against his character. As a result, the book, which could have been a comedy, touches tragedy" (Introduction). They further argue that the book is flawed by this near tragic ending: ". . . [A]lthough all the main characters were hastening together towards perfect happiness, (Edmund with Mary, and Fanny with Henry), the course of the novel was arbitrarily changed by Henry's implausible behaviour" (Introduction).

Allen and Owen are able to overcome what they perceive as the novel's flaw by changes in the plot line and ending. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny receives a fateful letter from Mary Crawford that dashes her chances for happiness with Henry Crawford. In this revision, that letter is followed by one from Edmund in which he claims that Henry is blameless. Henry returns to Everingham to put his affairs in order, just as he should, to gain Fanny's approval. Maria follows him to his home, and Henry quickly fetches the clergyman and his wife to stay with Maria, who is hysterical, until Henry can bring back Sir Thomas. Henry is portrayed as a hero, having thought quickly and avoided scandal. When after a suitable period of time, Henry and Mary return to Mansfield Parsonage, Edmund goes to visit them and returns quite late with the news that Mary Crawford has consented to be his wife. Because she is not in love with Edmund, Fanny is no longer jealous of Mary. She loves Henry. Soon after Mary and Edmund's wedding, Fanny and Henry are married. Allen and Owen's ending will satisfy those readers who believe that Fanny should not have married Edmund. In this version, Fanny blossoms

under Henry's influence and becomes a leader in society; and Mary, under the influence of Edmund, becomes an exemplary parson's wife.

Jane Austen's popularity continues to rise. The new film versions of her work, *Persuasion* and especially *Sense and Sensibility* starring Emma Thompson and Hugh Grant, will introduce a new generation to her work, and we hope lead them back to the novels. More continuations or adaptations will surely result, for as Marilyn Sachs notes, Janeites have an "incurable addiction to the fate of her characters and greedily, if disdainfully, gobble up [the] sequels . . ." (374). I expect that the addiction will continue, even if it means that Mrs. Norris will come back to harass another day.

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† The color image has replaced the original black and white image for the on-line edition of this essay. – C. Moss, JASNA Web Site Manager