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DIDACTICISM IN MANSFIELD PARK
AND BELINDA: A CASE STUDY

by

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The title of my thesis is "Didacticism in Mansfield Park and Belinda: a case study." The paper explores the technique of didactic writing found in the two novels in order to examine, through parallels between these two novels, the authors' didactic outlook and intent. The research shows many parallels of characterization and incident common to Mansfield Park and Belinda which point to a unified set of moral values and consistent use of the character types and incidents employed by both Austen and Edgeworth. However, while their moral instruction was similar, their techniques were vastly different. Edgeworth used melodrama to make her didactic points, while Austen limits herself to realistic incident and depictions of character.

The major parallel drawn in this thesis is between the characters of Tom Bertram of Mansfield Park and Mr. Vincent of Belinda. Their stories are similar and have the same moral intent. They also represent the striking difference between the authors' didactic techniques. After this comparison, and a comparison of several other characters and episodes in the two novels, I conclude that these works by Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth reveal the delicacy with which the instructional content of a novel must be handled for it to be effective. Their didactic techniques are complicated and the result of
them is instructional writing which is not dull and dry as one might expect of didacticism, but rather lively and interesting.
The subject of this thesis is didacticism. I have chosen two didactic works - Edgeworth's *Belinda* and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. Although Austen is not usually considered a didactic novelist, her works all contain gentle moral instruction and *Mansfield Park* is her most didactic work. It is for this reason that *Mansfield Park* often is least regarded among her works. I chose *Mansfield Park* and Edgeworth's *Belinda* because they have a lot in common. I have chosen *Belinda* because it is Edgeworth's best long work and because it has an affinity of style, intent and motif with Jane Austen's novel. These two novels are examples of partially successful and successful didacticism - partially successful didacticism in *Belinda*, and successful didacticism in *Mansfield Park*.

My reason for choosing didacticism as my subject is that it is a more rewarding and complex technique than is usually supposed. A novel's didactic content need not be considered its fault, or even its least interesting aspect. The didactic content of a book may be integral to its function as entertainment. In the two novels I have chosen to explore, and especially in the author's treatment of certain characters, I have found the didactic content to be genuinely instructive and entertaining. It serves a real purpose within the novels and contributes to the plot naturally in order to reveal the characters and advance the story.

*Belinda*, by Maria Edgeworth, is not as successful a
didactic comic novel as is Austen's *Mansfield Park*. While it does not come up to Austen's (impressive) standards it is still an impressive work. A proof of this is that Austen read *Belinda*, and was so pleased with it that she mentions the novel in *Northanger Abbey*:

"I am no novel reader — I seldom look into novels — Do not imagine that I often read novels — It is really very well for a novel." — Such is the common cant. — "And what are you reading, Miss ___?" "Oh! it is only a novel!" replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. — "It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;" or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.¹

Edgeworth's didactic process may be at times intermixed with the dramatic plot to the detriment of both functions, and it does at times cloud its purpose with too many didactic observations at once, but the didactic portion of the novel at no time ceases to be entertaining. Surprisingly, Edgeworth has no difficulty in making her moral statements interesting. Her sense of humor, and the general appropriateness of her observations make hearing the narrative voice of guidance or censure a pleasure. It is generally supposed that moral guidance is dry and uninteresting — she proves that this is not so. It is also

supposed that the dramatic episodes of a novel of this sort will be superior in quality to the intellectualism of moral instruction because the former is more easy and natural than the latter style. However, Edgeworth's narrative voice is so knowing and at times playful that the intrusion of the narrator's moral voice is generally welcome. Edgeworth's work is not perfect, nor is it up to the standards of a Jane Austen, and yet it is a good work, particularly a good example of partially successful didacticism. When Edgeworth errs it is usually in the direction of melodrama and is not a flaw of her didacticism. The book is frequently too sensational, not too dry.

The moral instruction in Mansfield Park is done with more skill and is less intrusive than that of Belinda. Austen has succeeded in making her moral observations indispensable to the reader and important to the reader's enjoyment of the rest of the novel - its dramatic portion. She does not fall into the errors of melodrama which mar Edgeworth's novel. Her situations and characters are realistic. Instead of attempting to make her moral observations interesting by presenting them in highly dramatic situations, she makes them interesting by placing them in realistic situations with which her readers can more readily identify. A comparison of these two books will reveal a complexity of structure which shows that didacticism is not a simple device and that the authors who
used it, Austen and Edgeworth, were always aware of their technique and had a firm grip on it. One may see that Austen's technique is similar in some ways to Edgeworth's and in some ways transcends it.

Writing on the revelations of individual speech patterns, Marilyn Butler says that Edgeworth's characters discern each other's moral character by their speech. She says:

To most modern critics this technique of an engaging heroine and reader in a game of ethical detection is a characteristic of Jane Austen's novels, and of hers alone. But before any of Jane Austen's work appeared, Maria Edgeworth had completed her oeuvre in the 'feminine' novel - domestic comedy, centering on a heroine, in which the critical action is an inward progress toward judgement. This is an example of the merit which may be seen in Edgeworthian didacticism, and it is an example of how Jane Austen was able to draw on some of Edgeworth's technique.

The main action of the plot of Edgeworth's Belinda is this: Belinda is a young woman who is making her first entrance into London society under the protection of Lady Delacour. Lady Delacour turns out to be a dissipated, amoral character. At her house Belinda meets Lady Delacour's friend and flatterer, Clarence Hervey. Belinda likes Clarence Hervey but cannot accept his frivolous habits. From these two characters Belinda learns something of Lady Delacour's life and of her enemies including Harriott.

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Freke and Mrs. Luttridge with whom Lady Delacour once fought a duel. Although Lady Delacour had deep habits of coquetry and selfishness, the goodness of Belinda's character and Belinda's unceasing attempts to reform the woman's habits begin to teach her the value of morality and lasting friendships. Belinda's virtuous example begins to reform Clarence Hervey, who is eager to win Belinda's affections when he discovers her to be an artless and sincere young woman. Hervey does have some healthy friendships to help support him in this endeavor. Chief among them is Mr. Percival who is also a good friend of Belinda.

Although Belinda becomes increasingly attached to Clarence Hervey as he makes moral progress, she is forced to give him up as a potential husband when she learns that he is engaged to marry another woman. At this time she becomes acquainted with Mr. Vincent who has come to England from the West Indies to live with his guardian, Mr. Percival. Mr. Vincent becomes an admirer of Belinda. Mrs. Luttridge and Harriott Freke scheme to rob Mr. Vincent of his fortune in order to hurt Lady Delacour whom they hate, by hurting her charge, Belinda. Clarence Hervey, whose morals are mending and who is engaged to a woman whom he does not love, tries to save Mr. Vincent from his fate. Hervey does this because of his love for Belinda and his desire to secure her happiness even though she will marry someone else. Eventually he fails Mrs. Lutt ridge
and Harriott Freke and extricates himself honorably from his engagement. When Belinda breaks her engagement with Mr. Vincent, Clarence Hervey is finally able to marry her.

The novel *Mansfield Park* has many things in common with *Belinda*. Some ideas important to the stories of Mr. Vincent and Tom Bertram are identical and show that the authors were in agreement on some important points. In *Mansfield Park* the emotional and financial happiness of the entire Bertram family hinges upon a few central actions. Tom Bertram is a character whose actions have this importance. He and his sisters each, at some point in the novel, fall under the influence of London, its society and its pleasures. For Tom this action and his behavior upon confronting the pleasures of London have disastrous consequences. In London he is tempted to gamble and to make the wrong kind of friendships. As in *Belinda*, the young man finds the city life to be too full of temptation to vice. The authors agree that city life is unwholesome, and they agree upon the course of action once the young man has yielded to temptation. In both *Mansfield Park* and *Belinda* there is stress on reform. Tom Bertram is earnestly entreated to reform by his father, but he does not listen. His continued careless behavior helps to lead the other members of the family into moral lapses. (Maria is urged to act in a play with a lover she is expected to give up.) Tom does reform but not until the family circle
is disrupted. Mr. Vincent's moral lessons are hard learned also and also cost him a lot of his early security. In Belinda and in Mansfield Park there is a profusion of mentor figures. They range in character from virtuous and helpful to the education of the young women to amoral and detrimental to it. Belinda begins the novel under the influence of Lady Delacour. She finds a better mentor in Lady Percival and finally becomes a mentor figure herself, reuniting the Delacours. Fanny has a negligent mentor in Lady Bertram, and a malicious one in Mrs. Norris. She overcomes this to become a useful and conscientious mentor to her young sister near the end of the novel. The mentor figure is not only female in these novels. There are male mentors also.

Although there are many similarities of characterization and plot, I have chosen to compare Tom Bertram of Mansfield Park and Mr. Vincent of Belinda because their stories are very similar and because they best illustrate the authors' respective merits and show most clearly how Austen develops some of Edgeworth's themes. It is easy to see the didacticism of the story of Mr. Vincent in relation to the dramatic elements because his story is condensed into one chapter of continuous narrative. Austen takes almost the same story and adapts it for Tom Bertram. Although she allots less space to the tale, her story is told in a much more sophisticated way and this is obvious when the two are compared.
The history of Mr. Vincent's moral and financial downfall through gambling is given in one chapter near the end of the novel. This is not the first which the reader has heard of him or his weaknesses but it is the first extended discussion of his particular errors in judgment, and the first mention of his tendency to gamble. The author leaves the proof of Mr. Vincent's unsuitability for marriage (especially marriage to a woman like Belinda) until this point, when Edgeworth is interested in dispatching him as a suitor with all possible speed as she readies Clarence Hervey to take his place. The story of Mr. Vincent's trials at Mrs. Luttridge's E.O. table is told in detail. It is a story of intrigue, deception, passion and violence told with all of the excitement and drama of which the author is capable. It is also a didactic tale of the moral education of a lax young man. These two aspects of the story, which cannot be easily separated under the headings entertainment and moral instruction, do not always coexist with ease.

This story is contained in chapter nine. The chapter begins not with Mr. Vincent, but with Clarence Hervey, who is walking by himself to town. We are permitted to know what he is thinking as he walks. He is contemplating his situation and reflecting upon what moral strengths he will have to draw on in order to behave most honorably. The author says:
As he saw no possibility of receding with honor, he, with becoming resolution, desired to urge things forward as fast as possible, and to strengthen in his mind the sense of the necessity of the sacrifice that he was bound to make.  

This becoming resolution has the author's approbation, and the reader who is already acquainted with Clarence Hervey's gradually increasing control over his impulses can understand and approve when next reminded that: "His passions were naturally impetuous, but he had by persevering efforts brought them under the subjection of his reason." It is this hard-won resolve on the part of Clarence Hervey which serves as a contrast to the faults of Mr. Vincent.

It is Mr. Vincent's love of gambling which is the direct cause of his misery. He gambles away his fortune at Mrs. Luttridge's E.O. table. However, Edgeworth is careful to explain the indirect cause of his trouble - a lack of will power, and a romantic sensibility which leads him to brave the danger of continual visits to Mrs. Luttridge's gaming tables in order to prove his immunity to their attractions. Mr. Vincent enjoys exposing himself to vice to prove his strength. He ignores Mr. Percival's prudent advice about avoiding temptation.

Edgeworth attempts to make Mr. Vincent's conduct understandable. She develops his character in a passage

3 Maria Edgeworth, Tales and Novels (London: Whittaker and Co., 1848), III, p. 405.
4 Ibid., p. 405.
designed to give Mr. Vincent life and a believable motivation for his excesses. In so doing she presents an anatomy of a sinner for the purpose of moral instruction. The reader is offered whatever dramatic interest is to be obtained from this relation of incidents from Mr. Vincent's past life and of their sad implications for his future. This passage serves a dramatic and a didactic purpose, and here the two rest easily together.

Edgeworth's history of Mr. Vincent's vices is this: Mr. Vincent had been the son of a man less interested in giving his child moral instruction than in working to give his son a fortune. Although the child's penchant for gambling was observed by his father, the man did nothing because he did not make a connection which Edgeworth obviously wishes made between habits of youth, and habits of adult life. Mr. Vincent's father didn't realize that the boy was forming a lasting habit:

His father used to see him, day after day, playing with eagerness at games of chance, with his negroes, or with some of neighboring planters; yet he was never alarmed; he was too intent upon making a fortune for his family to consider how they would spend it.

Having isolated the cause of Mr. Vincent's taste for gambling, Edgeworth tells the reader what should have been done to stop it, not by stating directly what should have been done, but by discussing what wasn't done by his

father and showing how even the normally intuitive Mr. Percival made a mistake. The Edgeworthian answer has already been given by Clarence Hervey - the only way to combat a dangerous tendency is by self-rule and a resolution to avoid the vice. Mr. Vincent's father and Mr. Percival are two examples of what should not be done by parental figures to help a young person to learn these habits of self-control.

Mr. Vincent's father's sin was a sin of omission. He failed first in not recognizing a potential flaw in his son when he saw it. And he failed in not seeing that his son be taught the necessary self-control over gambling. In a larger sense he failed in not teaching his son the value of self-control.

Mr. Percival's failure is easier to understand. It does not spring from neglect. Mr. Percival accepted, as Mr. Vincent's guardian, the duty of moral instruction. His problem, as Edgeworth points out, is that he was taking over the education of a young man whose weaknesses and early education were unknown to him. His mistake was in supposing that Mr. Vincent had sufficient control over himself to benefit from the mild admonitions of reasonable argument. Mr. Percival was urging reason upon a young man who had never learned to be governed by reason. He needed not only to be taught will power, and the value of it, but he also had to be shaken out of some habits of belief which he had picked up on his own.
Mr. Vincent's ideas on the subject of vice or any other danger are all sentimental. He has not only avoided reason, he has actually rejected it as a problem-solving device. Like a true man of feeling, Mr. Vincent hopes to find the solution to his problems by relying upon his emotions, his sense of what is right:

Unfortunately he disdained prudence, as the factitious virtue of inferior minds; he thought that the feelings of a man of honor were to be his guide in the first and last appeal; and for his conduct through life, as a man and as a gentleman, he proudly professed to trust to the sublime instinct of a good heart.  

as Butler says of Edgeworth:

She believes in the individual man's capacity for great virtue, but conceives that he realizes his potential by a conscious exercise of reason, and not by the so-called 'moral instinct'. Maria Edgeworth reveals her poor opinion of the moral instinct in her treatment of two characters who trust in it, Mr. Vincent in Belinda and Olivia in Leonora.

Altogether, this story of a rejection of reason would be a very useful and workable moral lesson if Mr. Vincent's conduct were entirely the result of these problems. The author could then make a very intriguing and straightforward moral lesson about the dangers of trusting one's sensibilities rather than one's powers of reasoning. The novel would, at this point, be a story about a young man whose neglected childhood left him with dangerous tendencies

6 Maria Edgeworth, Tales and Novels (London: Whittaker and Co., 1848), III, pg. 411-12.

toward vice, and no proper way to deal with them. It would be the story of a misguided theory of moral conduct proving itself wrong. Unfortunately, in order to move the story along and to bring Mr. Vincent to confront his vices quickly and dramatically Edgeworth adds a new element. It is an element extraneous to the didactic story, and confusing to it.

Mr. Vincent hears what Mr. Percival has to say about avoiding vice. He reacts in exactly the opposite way, not because of his theories on the natural instincts of a man of honor, but because of a strange quirk of his nature. He held, in addition to his belief in his good instincts, a belief that it was more manly to overcome vice by exposure to it rather than by asserting his will to avoid it. This feeling is what brings Mr. Vincent to grief, but it is one which has no relation to his first sentimental belief that one must judge by his feelings. Furthermore, as an error in judgment it so far overshadows his first error that for a moment it obscures the first intent of the argument about reason. Impulsiveness of conduct and a desire to learn about life by experiencing it is what came to be known as a characteristic of romanticism. The novel predates the concept of romanticism but perhaps anticipates it here. Edgeworth may have wanted to mention this as an incidental caution for her readership, feeling that both notions are usually inspired by the same kind of novels. This caution would be fine if one part of the story didn't overshadow
the other. Dramatically, too, it is a mistake since this unexpected rashness does not give Vincent a believable reason for flying to Mr. Luttridge's gaming tables.

It is interesting to note that Belinda ultimately rejects Mr. Vincent because of the flaw in his character, that is, the one overlooked by Mr. Percival who didn't know his charge. It is not his tendency towards gambling, which could be overcome, but his refusal or inability to accept reason as a suppressant to this tendency which makes him unsuitable for Belinda. Edgeworth compares him unfavorably with Clarence Hervey whose success in overcoming his own tendencies toward vice has elevated him to the rank of the exemplary character. Edgeworth does not deal with the moral questions raised by Mr. Vincent's thoroughly selfish and willful desire to confront vices in order to overcome them. This disregard for his own safety and that of Belinda (whom he intends to marry) is inexplicable. It is a much greater character flaw than the first rejection of reason and with no innocent explanation, which Edgeworth herself only remarks in the voice of the narrator: "Yet often as this has been repeated, how difficult it is to impress the truth upon inexperienced, sanguine minds!"  

In spite of the didactic and stylistic inappropriateness of this incident there may be one level upon which it

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8 Maria Edgeworth, Tales and Novels (London: Whittaker and Co., 1848), III, p. 413.
functions adequately. It does get the reader's attention because of the violent effect which it produces, and because it provides the reader with a presentiment of danger. Many readers are likely to be interested in reading further after encountering these statements:

His guardian's doubts of the infallibility and even of the existence of this moral instinct wounded Mr. Vincent's pride instead of alarming his understanding; and he was rather eager than averse to expose himself to the danger, that he might prove his superiority to the temptation. 

...Whilst young Vincent was immediately under his guardian's eye at Oakly Park, his safety from vice appeared to him inglorious; he was impatient to sally forth into the world, confident rather of his innate than acquired virtue.

Mr. Vincent's fall from grace is described in lavish detail. He races off to test his strength against the attractions of gambling in a move motivated by pride rather than moral theory. This deviation from the didactic core of the story about reason vs. feeling is accompanied by more dramatic happenings which are also deviations from the aim of the tale. When the author is through with the tale of Mr. Vincent, it is unclear whether the man met his fate at the hands of his unusual moral system of feeling, his desire to confront vice, or the intrigue of Mrs. Lutteridge and her rigged gaming table.

When Mr. Vincent goes to the Luttridges to test his strength of mind, he meets more than a temptation to gamble. He meets not gamblers, but crooked gamblers. This

Maria Edgeworth, Tales and Novels (London: Whittaker and Co., 1848), III, p. 412.
meeting is unnecessary because Edgeworth has the reader expecting the temptation of gambling itself to be too much for him. Edgeworth's novel is often marred by melodrama. She often includes subjects in the interest of drama which jeopardize the believability of the story. Mr. Vincent's suicide attempt is another example. Here again the extra action of vice upon vice may be to warn the readers whom she wishes to instruct about some of the evils which travel hand-in-hand with the evils in her tale. It may be meant to serve this purpose and the purpose of renewing the reader's enthusiasm with the story. It is at junctions like this that the didactic and dramatic elements, the instructive and entertaining portions of the story coincide. It is difficult to say which idea was uppermost in Edgeworth's mind when she created these situations. However, they are far more convenient from a dramatic point of view than from a didactic one. I have said that it is not easy to separate Edgeworth's instructive and dramatic impulses. This is because incidents like Edgeworth's asides on the subject of romantic pride and crooked gambling serve both purposes, but it is also because this is primarily a didactic novel, and everything in this novel may be said to have been written for the purpose of instruction. Any entertainment therein would not be for its own sake but rather to dramatize certain virtues in the most inspirational way possible and to attract an audience of impressionable minds, making them yet more impressionable to the author's
instruction by providing the moral lesson in the guise of an interesting and moving tale.

Edgeworth's tale is certainly moving enough, and the section on Mr. Vincent's life is one of the more compelling portions of the novel. And yet the sympathy which the reader develops for the young man may actually militate against the reader's acceptance of the virtues which he supposedly learns. The problem is that Vincent, who is by this time a fairly three-dimensional character, and who as an admirer of Belinda has our good will, represents vice. If he represented virtue (the way Clarence Hervey does at this point) there would be no problem. However, it is easy for sympathy for Mr. Vincent to extend itself into sympathy for his shortcomings. This is what makes Edgeworth's dramatic presentation of his story confusing. Mr. Vincent goes to Mrs. Luttridge's, handsomely refuses at first to gamble, is drawn into gambling because he feels that Billiards as a game of address is not actual gambling, and makes only small bets. Belinda makes him forget billiards for a while, but when she leaves he goes back to it out of boredom:

Emotion of some kind or other was become necessary to him; he said that not to feel was not to live; and soon the suspense, the anxiety, the hopes, the fears, the perpetual vicissitudes of a gambler's life, seemed to him almost as delightful as those of a lover's. 10

10 Maria Edgeworth, *Tales and Novels* (London's Whittaker and Co., 1848), III, p. 413
At this point he is waylaid by a plan of Mrs. Luttridge's to marry him to her niece. Her ugly trick backfires when Mr. Vincent reacts rashly but loyally and defends Belinda, whose honor has been called into question. In these and in all of Mr. Vincent's other actions, he acts with foolishness, innocence or rashness, or with the determination of a man who has pledged to live his life by a romantic code. He does nothing overtly amoral, at least not on purpose - he honestly doesn't realize his own transgressions. To any reader whose own sympathies lie with the romantic personality, Mr. Vincent can easily emerge the hero. What keeps a reader from this sympathetic assessment is an occasional narrative interjection such as this:

...and when he considered of how little importance a few hundreds or even thousands could be to a man of his large fortune, he could not help feeling that it was sordid, selfish, avaricious, to dread their possible loss; and thus social spirit, courage, generosity, all conspired to carry our man of feeling to the gaming table. Once there, his ruin was inevitable."

It would be very easy for the predisposed reader to side with Mr. Vincent and his human impulses in spite of the narrator's sarcasm, and even her open remarks.

Mr. Vincent's combination of rash moves carry him out of danger as abruptly as they carried him into it. He rushes from the Luttridges to defend Belinda. In this he

proves himself to be so unstable as to be impossible to manage even by Mrs. Luttridge. He fluctuates between risking virtue (his own) and defending virtue (Belinda's), alternating these actions at the strange whims of his overriding combination of romantic feeling and impetuous pride. His actions as a man of feeling and pride lead him a merry chase, which should be entertaining to the rational reader, especially because of the effect which it has on Mrs. Luttridge. It ruins her matrimonial schemes for Annabella. But Mr. Vincent's conduct is still subtly biased in favor of romanticism because of the pleasant drama which it produces - drama which Edgeworth is unable to give up, whatever her reasons. Thus Mr. Vincent can look like a fool for rushing to meet a bad end and for having such a nervous system of behavior. But to the reader his entrance into folly may seem brave and wonderful, and his exit from it on Belinda's behalf even more brave and wonderful.

The difference between the two men in this tale is that Mrs. Luttridge can never trap Clarence Hervey in her schemes while he is practicing self control, and that by persevering she can ultimately trap Mr. Vincent by playing on his tendency to gamble:

Mrs. Luttridge, whilst she held his doom in her power, hesitated only whether it would be more her interest to marry him to her niece, or to content herself with his fortune. His passion for Belinda, which she saw had been by some means or other increased, in spite of the
anonymous letter, gave her little hopes of Annabella's succeeding, even with the assistance of Juba and delicate sensibility. So the aunt, careless of her niece's disappointment, determined that Mr. Vincent should be her victim; and sensible that she must not give him time for reflection, she hurried him on, till, in the course of a few evenings spent at the E.O. table, he lost not only thousands, but tens of thousands... but his ruin was not yet complete - he had thousands yet to lose, and Mrs. Luttridge would not thus relinquish her prey.12

Mrs. Luttridge regained Mr. Vincent after he had gone to Belinda because, happily for Mrs. Luttridge, Pelinda left and Mr. Vincent got bored. He felt that a man of feeling must have something to feel - "not to feel was not to live".13 He gives, perhaps, a partial explanation for his original decision to overcome vice with a natural feeling as a man of honor and by confronting it directly on purpose to overcome it. Mr. Vincent seems to be addicted to thrill. He does in the name of virtue what other young men do in the name of entertainment. Clarence Hervey may have spent his early life pursuing new sensations, but when he chose a more virtuous path he was serious about giving up those thrills, a seriousness which the use of reason demands in many cases. Mr. Vincent's adolescent tendencies are revealed in the statement; "Not to feel was not to live".14 It reveals his personal shortcomings, his selfishness and a taste for thrilling employment. This taste for thrill is shared by Tom Bertram.

13 Ibid., p. 415.
14 Ibid., p. 416.
The character of Tom Bertram in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* is more realistically drawn. His story tells essentially the same moral story, though it is told much more subtly. Tom Bertram's activities are not described all at once, nor is the character of Sir Thomas Bertram's eldest son prominent. Tom Bertram appears, or is alluded to, only a few times in the novel, and then only briefly. In fact, Tom Bertram is away from the scene of the action most of the time. He is a major character, though, because the effects of his conduct and his circumstances are felt keenly by everyone living at Mansfield Park. He is important as the eldest son, heir to Sir Thomas's title and fortune, and he is important as the brother of Edmund and as a close family member who is loved and cared for even though absent. Many of the tensions central to the novel are caused indirectly by his actions. Edmund's living, his future, and his fortune are dependent upon Tom's actions, a condition which affects Edmund's life to a great degree. Tom's claim on familial affection is tested during his illness, and the domestic upheaval which his illness creates resolves some of the novel's largest concerns. Tom, the character, although he stands apart from the other characters in the novel and their daily concerns, is important on these two levels. Once his importance is established, Austen's moral education of Tom Bertram assumes importance. Like Edgeworth, Austen wishes to show how a moral lapse can have wide and unhappy consequences.
Mr. Vincent brings himself to the brink of ruin. Tom, with similar faults of character, nearly brings himself to the same end.

Tom is mentioned first in *Mansfield Park* during a discussion of whether or not Fanny should be brought to live with her aunt and uncle. At this point the children are young, and the boys, 16 and 17, are mentioned together briefly with the other children. Mrs. Norris calls both of them "dear sweet-tempered boys". A little later in the novel, after Fanny's first introduction, the children's personalities begin to emerge. Austen as the narrator says of Tom:

...she had nothing worse to endure on the part of Tom, than that sort of merriment which a young man of 17 will always think fair with a child of ten. He was just entering into life, full of spirits, and with all the liberal dispositions of an eldest son, who feels born only for expense and enjoyment. His kindness to his little cousin was consistent with his situation and rights: he made her some very pretty presents, and laughed at her."  

This is a very economical character sketch. It has affinities with the sketch given of Mr. Vincent by Edgeworth. It also has some more realistic touches. While Mr. Vincent's childhood was probed for a single underlying cause of his later mistakes, Tom is called typical. In his youth he was no more unusual than other youngsters.

16 Ibid., p. 18.
But for his being the eldest son, he is at this age almost indistinguishable from Edmund. Austen doesn't probe his past because his later profligate behavior is not very wonderful considering his situation and rights. To dredge a particular incident or instance of neglect out of his past would be to digress from the immediate story. Austen does not commit this error as Edgeworth does. We know of Tom that he is thoughtless (he laughs at Fanny at a time when she is most in need of gentle attention of the sort which she receives from Edmund) and that he is full of spirits, a condition which is explained adequately by the information that "he was just entering into life".¹⁷

The fact that Tom's motivations are not probed for meaning in Mansfield Park as Mr. Vincent's are in Belinda makes Tom's actions seem less unique. It is important to the didactic intent of his story that he not be considered different from most young men. Mrs. Vincent shares a penchant for gambling with a segment of the monied population, but Tom, whose feelings are more general, could be anyone with a zest for entertainment, anyone who, "feels born only for expense and enjoyment". There is no need to explain why he feels as he does as long as the reader agrees that such feelings are both common and wrong.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 18.
Once Austen has depicted him as a fairly typical young man, surrounded by temptations at his tender age, she offers a slight value judgment. The judgment is not of Tom who is put in his place as an adolescent by Austen's scathingly true-to-life depiction of his adolescent behavior: "...he made her some very pretty presents, and laughed at her." It is a judgment against his upbringing. The line, "he was just entering into life, full of spirits, and with all the liberal dispositions of an eldest son, who feels born only for expense and enjoyment" exposes an important gap in his education. Like Mr. Vincent, Tom has not been impressed with an idea of the responsibilities which go along with his situation in life. This sentence also suggests that all eldest sons feel this way, not just Tom. Many young Toms in the world need the instruction which will be offered by this story.

Austen has made Tom typical for this reason, and she achieves the effect by sacrificing what the average writer of novels would cherish as one of the most potentially interesting stock figures - the handsome young man of title and fortune. Edgeworth militates against the success of her moral tale by trying to exploit Mr. Vincent's romantic possibilities. His romantic beliefs and melodramatic

20 Ibid., p. 18.
actions have been discussed. He is meant to be unique and as Belinda's suitor (although one of two) is made to possess an uncommon appeal. Tom behaves typically in the situations contrived for him by the author which are themselves completely typical - unlike the crooked E.O. table in Belinda. Tom meets only with common folly, which he makes for himself with no help from evil persons.

After this brief entrance, Tom leaves the story until he resurfaces at the death of Mr. Norris. Chapter Three begins with the line, "The first event of any importance in the family was the death of Mr. Norris, which happened when Fanny was about fifteen, and necessarily introduced alterations and novelties." It may be said, however, that the first event of any importance in the family was not the death of Mr. Norris, which did not produce any effect which had not been anticipated and planned for. The first important event was the ruin of the plan to establish Edmund in the vacant parish of Mansfield when he came of age. This was entirely Tom's fault, and it is an instance of how he, or his behavior, may be considered central to the novel although his actual appearances in the novel are rare. It is also an instance of real evil being done not by any exotic or deadly plot against the protagonists, but rather by the common dangers

of everyday existence - of having the family fortune in the hands of someone too young and too unstable of character to use it properly. It is fitting, therefore, that Tom be present to take his punishment personally so that he may by his reaction reaffirm his commonness for the reader once again.

First, Tom's punishment for his extraordinary lapse of judgment is nothing worse than a stern talking to by his father. As she does so often in the novel, however, Austen manages to select those occurrences in life which are dramatic when they occur in reality and to translate them to paper with no loss of drama. Thus, while the reader may not be treated to the sight of Tom with a pistol at his head like Edgeworth's Mr. Vincent, his situation is still able to produce dread in the reader. It is no small thing for a young man to be confronted with an accusation so just and so great. He is also confronted with it by his own father, Sir Thomas, whose manner Austen has shown is formidable, especially to young people. Thus the scene is a very dramatic one without the author's having to resort to melodramatic language or romantic motifs. It is the reader's consciousness of Tom's errors which provides the drama. Austen's superiority to Edgeworth in presenting a moral attitude may be seen in this passage. Edgeworth never uses the shifting point of view to promote a moral point. Here the voice is sometimes that of the narrator and sometimes that of Sir Thomas. The readers are on Sir
Thomas's side but feel themselves in Tom's shoes. One reason for the reader's being on Sir Thomas's side is that the reader is given an unexpected insight. We hear Sir Thomas mentally preparing himself for the task of making Tom conscious of his mistakes. In a passage which may represent a continuation of the narrator's voice or a change to the internal voice of Sir Thomas we hear that:

There was another family-living actually held for Edmund, but though this circumstance had made the arrangement somewhat easier to Sir Thomas's conscience, he could not but feel it to be an act of injustice, and he earnestly tried to impress his eldest son with the same conviction, in the hope of its producing a better effect than anything he had yet been able to say or do.  

Certain formal phrases make this passage seem to represent Sir Thomas's actual internal speech to himself - phrases like "he could not but feel it to be an act of injustice" and the parental-sounding "in the hope of its producing a better effect than anything he had yet been able to say or do" sound like Sir Thomas's usual formal manner. This combined point of view - the narrator's and Sir Thomas's, places the reader's sentiments on Sir Thomas's side, and should leave young Tom in a very unenviable position. Tom is now at his lowest point in the novel - confronted by his most harmful lapses in judgment and conduct and forsaken by narrator, father, and reader alike. His position parallels

23Ibid., p. 22.
24Ibid., p. 22.
that of Mr. Vincent at the moment when, realizing himself the victim of his foolishness, he loses control and puts a gun to his head. In this scene, however, Austen has let realism take control. Not only is there no danger of Tom's feeling sensible enough of his errors to wish to end his life, but because of the alliance of the narrator with Sir Thomas he is also in no danger of being more appealing to the reader because of his folly. Tom is no martyred hero.

Maria Edgeworth tells the story of Mr. Vincent's self-destruction all at once in a chapter of its own. Jane Austen allows Tom Bertram to disappear from the story from time to time, and she reveals his personal nature and the nature of his moral complaint a little at a time. This treatment allows for greater flexibility in the story. Mr. Vincent's story is structured so that the episode is only allowed one climax. Mr. Vincent's story progresses until he loses his entire fortune - this is his lesson, and he learns it in the end of the story. Jane Austen is in no such haste to tell Tom's story. She does not compress it into so small a space, but lets it play itself out a little bit at a time. In Tom's story, as in real life, events happen gradually and their importance varies. It is only in an artificially structured story that each new event must be more important than the last. Because of the form of Edgeworth's story the climax has to be striking and to come at the end of the tale. In Austen's story, if there is a climax, it is at the point where Tom is taken to task.
for losing Edmund's living, a point which happens not in the end but near the beginning. Although Tom's actions indirectly affect the family's fortunes in the rest of the novel, never do they make such a direct impact upon the lives of its members as they do here.

Putting this climax near the beginning makes the unfolding of events seem more natural. It also gives the reader an early insight into the working of Tom's mind by showing the reader early how impervious Tom is, and at the same time how impervious most lax young men are to the results of their folly. This, to Austen, is just the starting point. Reasonably, she has little didactic or sensationalist interest in how Tom came to be the way he is. It is enough that he possesses the flaw, and a common flaw it is. She does not have the interest of a Christian apologist in seeing God punish Tom for his misdeeds. Indeed, Tom is not punished in any way for the great wrong which he has done his brother. Instead, Austen finds her interest and her utility in examining what happens to Tom after he is established as a sinner. It is only fair to say that Maria Edgeworth makes this study a large part of her work in Mr. Vincent's story. However, Edgeworth's combination of motivations in Mr. Vincent's post-gambling behavior is so far removed from the story of gambling that it constitutes a separate story. It at least introduces so many new complications that there is no possibility of making Mr. Vincent's next
problems a useful continuation of his first moral struggle.

Tom's reply to his father is brief, appalling, and somewhat to be expected. The text of his reaction is this:

Tom listened with some shame and some sorrow, but escaping as quickly as possible, could soon with cheerful selfishness reflect first, that he had not been half so much in debt as some of his friends; secondly, that his father had made a most tiresome piece of work of it; and, thirdly, that the future incumbent, whoever he might be, would, in all probability, die very soon.

In response to the narrator's information that Dr. Grant, the incumbent "a hearty man of forty-five, seemed likely to disappoint Mr. Bertram's calculations", Mr. Bertram reflects, "no, he was a short-necked, apoplectic sort of fellow, and, plied well with good things, would soon pop off." Tom's initial reaction should be recognized by anyone who has ever done wrong and been made to realize it. He rationalizes his position. Tom could have denied to himself that he did wrong, but he is not stupid. He could have, like Mr. Vincent, embraced his sin with remorse and a belated desire to right his wrongs. This is not the usual human reaction, however, and Austen doesn't evoke it. She doesn't make Tom tear his hair in grief any more than she makes him suffer a divinely ordained punishment for his sins (such as Mr. Vincent perhaps met with when he fell in

26 Ibid., p. 22.
27 Ibid., p. 22.
with shady gamblers) Tom's reaction was more common. He refused to torment himself by thinking of his "feelings as a brother". Instead he criticizes his father's stilted, grave manner and consoles himself with the assumption that Dr. Grant - even at forty-five - will not be long of this world. In the long run Tom's reaction and the reaction of Mr. Vincent are the same. There is only dramatic irony in Mr. Vincent's belated remorse. There is no moral revelation accomplished by this inclusion. Mr. Vincent's later conduct is not changed a whit by his melodramatic scene. He might as well have rationalized his errors away since his remorse is not lasting enough to reform him for long.

Mr. Vincent's fate as a reformed sinner is preordained by Miss Edgeworth's novelistic conventions. Her design is to rid the narrative of Clarence Hervey's rival, and to provide a moral lesson along the way. After the suicide scene, Mr. Vincent's reputation can not be salvaged. After he has seen the light, Mr. Vincent is, unfortunately, a marked man. His novelistic life is over, and his didactic usefulness is so exhausted by this that he no longer functions as a moral example. This is probably due to the fact that as a good character Mr. Vincent was no longer salvageable. His timely dramatic downfall seems to have directly affected his life as a

moral character. This is understandable since it is not in Miss Edgeworth's design or the scope of her novel to educate persons who are excluded from polite society. In this respect she feels the same as Jane Austen. In limiting her novels to the kind of people she understood - the gentry - Austen made the same decision Edgeworth made, a moral as well as a dramatic one. Austen chose not only to portray life in polite society, but also to write for members of that same society, and to confine her moral instruction to problems which they would have. She drew the line at following characters who excluded themselves from this society by their own deeds into either their new social class or their new moral classification. She does not write further about Mrs. Rushworth or Henry Crawford after they run away together. Her answer to the problems of disposing of characters who drop out of her line of vision, so to speak, is, however, much more realistic and open than that of Maria Edgeworth. As mentioned before, Edgeworth simply allows Mr. Vincent to depart the novel, she takes no more narrative responsibility for discussing his post-fall acts than to tell how, even repenting, he will continue to embarrass himself with those who depend on him. He concocts a scheme to cover his losses at gambling from Mr. Percival with the aid of a moneylender. This scene adds action to the novel but no moral insight; it serves only to show what the reader has already learned, that Mr. Vincent cannot be
trusted with his responsibilities. Edgeworth's response to the dual problems of Mr. Vincent's moral and social fall is to have him condemned in speeches by Clarence Hervey and Mr. Percival, two men of honor, as an unsuitable match for Belinda, the flower of English gentlewomen. He recedes abruptly after this and has no further importance in the novel. Austen deals with the didactic and dramatic problem posed by Tom Bertram with characteristic and unflinching realism. The first improvement which she makes on this aspect of the Mr. Vincent motif is to keep Tom from any unforgiveable social behavior. It is not Tom who runs off with a married woman, nor does his gaming carry him any more into debt after the loss of one of Edmund's livings. By keeping Tom out of extreme situations the author can continue to follow his history and can, as Austen does, make the main thrust of her story not the fall of a sinner, or the history of a sinner, but the reformation of a sinner, an aim of much more practical importance to readers than Edgeworth's story could be. Austen does not close her eyes to the consequences of moral lapses which she has accepted as existing commonly in the class about which she is writing. She is of use as a moralist to readers engaged in or contemplating lives of this type of sin, and she is also of use to those of her readers whose lives have brought them to the point where Tom is when he is confronted by his extravagance.

But Austen does not suggest that in her novelistic
world no character can bring him or herself to ruin.
Austen's world is no less realistic than is Edgeworth's world. In Edgeworth's world men can ruin themselves beyond hope of recovery. In Austen's world this is also true. Though Tom does not come to the end of his dramatic rope, his sister does. When Mrs. Rushworth runs off with Henry Crawford she dams herself in two ways simultaneously. She forces herself out of her position in society and she reaches a depth of moral turpitude from which she cannot be redeemed. Unlike Edgeworth, Austen does not shut her eyes to Maria because of her new situation. She tells us what becomes of Maria - about her new life and her moral state of mind. She does not, however, break her own rule about widening the scope of her novel to follow Maria into her new life. Instead, she treats her like a distant character - which she is by this time, physically as well as intellectually or dramatically. Maria never returns to Mansfield Park, and the narrator who traveled so well between Portsmouth and Mansfield Park when Fanny was away refuses to do so here. The narrator is present at Mansfield when it is decided what is to be done with Maria:

Where she could be placed, became a subject of most melancholy and momentous consultation...
Sir Thomas very solemnly assured her [Mrs. Norris] that, had there been no young woman in question, had there been no young person of either sex belonging to him, to be endangered by the character of Mrs. Rushworth, he would never have offered so great an insult to the neighborhood as to expect it to notice her. As a daughter - he hoped a penitent one - she should be protected by him, and secured in every comfort, and
supported by every encouragement to do right, which their relative situations admitted; but further than that, he could not go... It ended in Mrs. Norris resolving to quit Mansfield and devote herself to her unfortunate Maria, and in an establishment being formed for them in another country - remote and private, where, shut up together with little society, on one side no affection, on the other, no judgment, it may be reasonably supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment.

While Tom pursues his own ruin heedless of his responsibilities and the useless entreaties of his father, Sir Thomas does do one commendable and positive thing to help change Tom from a good-for-nothing into a respectable young gentleman. Sir Thomas is very scrupulous himself about his fortune, and maintaining his holdings abroad. He has trouble with his holdings in Antigua, so like the responsible businessman he is, he determines to go there. This is a serious decision because the trip must be a long one - some months at least. The reader may wonder whether a boy like Tom would be more a help or hindrance on such a trip, but if companionship were necessary or wanted, Sir Thomas could have chosen a better traveling and working companion than his unbusinesslike son Tom. Edmund would have no doubt been his preferred choice had such a choice been necessary. With these doubts in mind, it is interesting that Sir Thomas determines to take Tom with him. It seems to be a commendably selfless act. He

hopes that Tom will benefit from the change of scene and occupation:

Sir Thomas found it expedient to go to Antigua himself, for the better arrangement of his affairs and he took his eldest son with him in the hope of detaching him from some bad connections at home. They left England with the probability of being nearly a twelvemonth absent.

The necessity of the measure in a pecuniary light, and the hope of its utility to his son, reconciled Sir Thomas to the effort of quitting the rest of his family, and of leaving his daughters to the direction of others at their present most interesting time of life.30

This attempt to change Tom's long-standing habits of irresponsibility is well-meant, but little more efficacious in the long run than is Mr. Percival's speech to Mr. Vincent upon the subject of reason. There are parallels between the two. Mr. Vincent's father left him to develop his own character, unfortunately, and after it was developed, flaws and all, a more solicitous Mr. Percival stepped in to try to prove through reason that some of Mr. Vincent's ideas were wrong. In Mansfield Park Sir Thomas is shaken out of his early way of dealing with his son - which was, as the narrator says, simply to chastise him too gravely when he was wrong without trying to get to know Tom's character. It is good of him to try to know Tom at least or at least to try to educate him by the use of example. This is at

least as good as trying to educate him by the use of rational argument. Sir Thomas takes Tom to Antigua where he can keep an eye on him personally and be sure that he is away from the influence of friends like Yates, who appears later in the story. However, Austen feels as Edgeworth does, that too late an interference is as bad, as ineffective, as none at all.

Austen says of the departure:

Tom Bertram had of late spent so little of his time at home, that he could be only nominally missed; and Lady Bertram was soon astonished to find how very well they did even without his father, how well Edmund could supply his place in earning, talking to the steward, writing to the attorney, settling with the servants and equally saving her from all possible fatigue or exertion in every particular, but that of directing her letters. 31

Add to this the opinion of the Misses Bertram on their father's departure (they were happy at their new freedom rather than sad) and the fact that even gentle Fanny could not grieve ("Sir Thomas, who had done so much for her and her brothers, and who had gone perhaps never to return! that she should see him go without a tear! it was a shameful insensibility") 32 and we have no very flattering picture of the affection which Sir Thomas had been able to create in his own family. This is a

32Ibid., p. 28.
failure Sir Thomas and Tom have in common. Neither has taken enough interest or spent enough time becoming a part of his family as he should. Tom's father has been a very distant and uncommunicative patriarch. Tom follows at least some of his conduct by spending as little time at home as he can. His prolonged absences are mentioned often. A similar relationship is represented by Edgeworth when she makes a point of picturing Mr. Vincent's father as a man less interested in family than in business. But the conclusions which the two authors draw are fairly different. Edgeworth speaks of Mr. Vincent's father briefly, and censures his conduct. She shows how this defect in his conduct affects Mr. Vincent. Jane Austen makes a more rounded, and therefore a more convincing, case for being a real part of a family circle. When Tom and his father leave for a trip of a year's duration they are scarcely missed. It is Edmund who takes their place. Edmund is and always was a part of the family circle, and he understands the family well enough to be a real influence for good and for order.

There is no awkwardness in the transition from Sir Thomas to Edmund. If he has difficulty in standing between his sisters and folly, he at least has the advantage of having a thorough knowledge of characters and can spot potential dangers - such as acting in the play. Austen shows what an unfortunate thing it is to be so little capable of being a part of one's own family that
one has no function which cannot be better performed by another person. This is sad as well as deplorable. She gives the two men more of a motive to rue their behavior than Edgeworth does with her strict moral censure. Sir Thomas's extended stay in Antigua - away from his normal life at home - away from his whole country - changes him. He learns to appreciate at a distance what he could never learn to appreciate at home, the importance of being surrounded by those who love you. His son does not have the same revelation while he is away with his father, but he does have a similar one later in the novel which seems to produce the same lasting effect. Both of these men learn to wish for family and familiar faces. The fact that they receive what they wish for is not due to any rights they may have as family members dear to the hearts of their loved ones. Tom's acceptance after his problems is due to a gracious acceptance of him by the other family members in spite of his past behavior, not because of it. If the men are not aware themselves of their particular good fortune in being accepted where they had for so long been absent, the reader is.

This is a very useful moral lesson because it is not entirely composed of reprimands and sermonizing. It appeals to its audience by engaging their affections - by a realistic treatment - for home life, which they may never have seen in such a pleasant light before.
Though Sir Thomas's conversion to domesticity begins directly after his return from Antigua, Tom's conversion is delayed. He no more learns the lesson which his father attempted to force upon him than Mr. Vincent learns the lesson offered him by Mr. Percival. Both Edgeworth and Austen seem to see little usefulness in any attempt by outside persons to solve what is actually an internal problem. They seem to be in accord in saying that if a change is to take place it must be motivated internally, as a result of the individual's own actions. Thus, Mr. Vincent does not have a change of heart until he loses his fortune by gambling, and Tom does not have a change of heart until his folly leaves him ill and friendless far from home.

Tom Bertram comes home from Antigua before his father does. Sir Thomas sends him home. Tom's problems are still some time in the future. Tom Bertram's behavior seems to be unchanged, and since his trip to Antigua is never mentioned again, there is no reason to suspect that it has had any effect at all on him. When Miss Crawford arrives and gets an opportunity to see Tom, she likes him, not much of a recommendation considering her personality. She is not a young lady who is able to see anything good in Edmund at first. This is partly due to her desire to concentrate upon young men with money and with rank. However, her original estimation of him takes in his personality as well as his social status, and these
observations reveal a young man who is almost unchanged since his business trip and the short separation from his bad connections. The narrator's voice joins Mary Crawford's in this passage and helps to confirm that Tom's moral state has not been much elevated:

Tom Bertram must have been thought pleasant, indeed, at any rate; he was the sort of young man to be generally liked, his agreeableness was of the kind to be oftener found agreeable than some endowments of a higher stamp, for he had easy manners, excellent spirits, a large acquaintance, and a great deal to say; and the revision of Mansfield Park, and a baronetcy, did no harm to all this. Miss Crawford soon felt, that he and his situation might do.]

In this encounter between Mary, Edmund, and Tom, much is revealed about the characters of all three, but it is Mary who is the center of interest. Mary is presented with a choice between the two brothers, both of whom make their moral positions clear. Mary does not choose Edmund because she does not respect or perhaps even notice his superior understanding and sense of conduct. Edmund's endowments are of a higher stamp, but Mary is too uneducated herself to prefer them yet over the agreeableness of Tom. In this scene Mary reveals all of her bad habits. She tells a satiric story and Tom follows her lead in introducing his own stories. Their stories are witty, and by joining in, Tom is only doing what Miss Crawford wants him to do - he is dallying


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with her. When Miss Crawford says, "I do not pretend to set people right, but I do see that they are often wrong." Tom's reply is the gallant, "Those who are showing the world what female manner should be are doing a great deal to set them right." But Edmund's reaction is this:

"The error is plain enough," said the less courteous Edmund; "Such girls are ill brought up."  

The extent of Tom's waywardness may be seen in his desire to fall in with the type of character represented by Miss Crawford, and to urge her on (and himself) instead of taking the opportunity, as Edmund does, of helping to educate her understanding.

The proof of Tom's return to his old habits is, of course, in his leaving Mansfield Park immediately after his return. Miss Crawford "began accordingly to interest herself a little about the horse which he had to run at the E____ races." Austen writes:

These races were to call him away not long after their acquaintance began; and as it appeared that the family did not, from his usual goings on, expect him back again for many weeks, it would bring his passion to an early proof. Much was said on his side to induce her to attend the races, and schemes were made for a large party to them, with all the eagerness of inclination, but it would only do to be talked of.

36 Ibid., p. 40.  
38 Ibid., p. 38-39.
Tom resumes his old habits and has not even learned to rue them. He is enthusiastic about taking a party of people to see his horse race. This happy acceptance of a life of entertainment and schemes is a more common condition among young men than is Mr. Vincent's addiction to violent sensation. Tom's pleasures may be gaudy, but their primary danger is that they can lead to expense gradually and unconsciously and without any single, notorious episodes. He is not dragged to the races by his insatiable addiction, or curiosity or pride - he likes to do these things because they appeal to his sense of fun. Their powers of attraction do not have to be any stronger than that for them to engage the full attention of a young man at a time when he should have better things to do.

Near the end of the novel Tom finally learns all that his father has been trying to teach him, and what his Sir Thomas has experienced recently himself. Tom becomes ill in the company of his fashionable friends. They abandon him and it is up to his family to go to him, nurse him, and bring him home. During his long illness his brother Edmund is his most valued companion. Austen says,

*Edmund was all in all.* Fanny would certainly believe him so at least, and must find that her estimation of him was higher than ever when he appeared as the attendant, supporter, cheerer of a suffering brother. There was not only the debility of recent illness to assist; there was also, as she now learnt, nerves much affected, spirits much depressed to calm and

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raise; and her own imagination added that there must be a mind to be properly guided. And of his recovery Austen says;

There was comfort also in Tom, who gradually regained his health, without regaining the thoughtlessness and selfishness of his previous habits. He was the better for ever for his illness. He had suffered, and he had learnt to think, two advantages that he had never known before; and the self-reproach arising from the deplorable event in Wimpole Street, to which he felt himself accessory by all the dangerous intimacy of his unjustifiable theatre, made an impression on his mind which, at the age of six-and-twenty, with no want of sense, or good companions, was durable in its happy effects. He became what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself.

Austen and Edgeworth are alike in their belief that something other than resolve is necessary to change a weak character into a steady one. No outside interference by friends and family can change these people, although it can contribute to the change. It is necessary for there to be a shock to their attitudes severe enough to jolt them out of their habits. This they usually bring about themselves by their habits. The authors do believe, however, that there is a place for reasonable argument and example, but that it alone cannot make a difference to a weak character.

The characters and stories of Tom Bertram and Mr.

40 Ibid., p. 308.
Vincent are strikingly similar, and because Jane Austen borrows many of her characterizations and episodes from *Belinda* and other didactic and comic novels which came before *Mansfield Park*, there are many other parallels to be found between the two novels. Many of the characters in *Mansfield Park* may be seen in *Belinda*. Apart from the similarities discussed between Tom Bertram and Mr. Vincent, and Sir Thomas and the two mentors of Mr. Vincent, his father and Mr. Percival, there are other outstanding ones. Since Jane Austen adapts these characters freely to fit her own novel a character like Belinda may appear as more than one character in *Mansfield Park*.

Parallels may be drawn between the heroines, Fanny and Belinda. As exemplary male characters who work to achieve this status, and as love interests to the two heroes, Edmund and Clarence Hervey have much in common. The good and bad mentors, Lady Percival and Lady Delacour, are represented in *Mansfield Park* by Fanny's aunts, Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris. Here the shifting of characteristics for variety and utility is noticeable. In *Belinda* the two female mentors were opposites in virtue. In *Mansfield Park* there is no one good female mentor, and the qualities of the bad mentor from *Belinda* are divided between Lady Bertram who is indifferent and Mrs. Norris who is actively bad. However, in each case the qualities of the earlier book are adapted without any
change in the moral outlook. No flaw in a character in Belinda is considered a virtue in Mansfield Park, for instance. The only change Austen makes is in the presentation of the characteristics.

In this comparison I have found Austen and Edgeworth have much in common in their use of didacticism. In neither novel does didacticism impede the telling of the story, nor does it dull the story. In fact, in both cases the didactic element actually adds to the quality of the entertainment offered by the novel. While their didactic techniques differed widely, both authors have a single outlook on their characterizations and motifs which gives them a common morality.

Austen and Edgeworth were aware of the difficulties involved in juggling the elements of drama and didacticism in their stories and both authors used a delicate touch. They both developed techniques which were intended to keep the didactic content from encroaching upon the dramatic content. Edgeworth's technique, unfortunately, has its own perils. Instead of erring on the side of dryness she errs on the side of melodrama and this flaws the novel. Austen's technique is more subtle. She cloaks her moral content in realism instead of melodrama. They have proved that the didactic content of a novel can be a positive good to the whole novel, to its style and quality of entertainment.
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