



Short Story Assignment 28

- If you have received your corrected speech, begin or continue memorizing it for speech night. You will be delivering the speech in front of the class on the **fourth Friday in April**.
- Read Chapters 17–23 in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. Answer the questions in the study guide, which is on the assignment page. Do not complete any of the writing assignments.

Long Range Assignments

- Your book report will be due the first week of May.
- You will be delivering the speech in front of the class on the **first week in May**.

The Play in *Mansfield Park*

When Miss Austen wrote *Mansfield Park*, she could rely on her readers being familiar with the play *Lovers’ Vows*, which is central to the climax of the first volume of the novel, but for

the modern reader, it is easy to walk away wondering what all the fuss was about. Here, you can read the play for yourself, read a synopsis of it to see what the play entails (though the play isn't very long and is a quick read), or look at an analysis with respect to the novel.

The play opens with a woman, Agatha, begging for help on a road. A soldier, Frederick, comes along and, without her even asking him for help, he offers her some of the little money he has. She recognizes him immediately as her son, who has been away in the army for five years. He is so distraught at finding her in such a bad condition, he immediately spends the remainder of his money to buy her some wine to revive her. He tells her that he has come home for a copy of his birth certificate, because he wants to change to a different career, but no one will hire him without it. This then leads to the mother's confession that he is a 'natural son', that is to say, an illegitimate child, and because of this, she was not permitted to register his birth in the church. He demands to know who his father is and how she had been abandoned by him. She tells her son that after a wealthy man, Baron Wildenhaim, had promised her marriage, she had given herself to him. He then left her and married a wealthy woman at the behest of his family. The abandoned woman then found she was pregnant and was driven out of her village. She made her way to the city where she used her education to find employment teaching and raised her son. The mother is so exhausted from lack of food and from telling her tale, that she is near fainting. The son manages to find a kind couple nearby, the Cottager and his Wife, who will take them in.

The son leaves her with them, and goes to beg from passers-by on the road. A hunting party comes past him, and he asks two wealthy men for money. One of them gives him a little, and the son says that it is not enough. One of the men leaves, and Frederick draws his sword in order to rob the other. The man raises a ruckus and Frederick is arrested and taken to a nearby castle and is locked in a tower. There he learns that the man he tried to rob, and the man who owns the castle are his father, the baron. The baron's private minister, Anhalt, comes to Frederick and tells him that the baron believes Frederick must die for his crime, but the minister also says the baron might be lenient if Frederick explains himself and asks for his life. Frederick agrees. The baron and Frederick meet in private, and Frederick divulges the truth of his paternity. The baron is shocked, but he had been looking for Agatha for years and now wishes to try to clear his conscience about abandoning her.

The baron sends his minister to bring Agatha to the castle, and the minister tells her that Frederick informed the baron of his existence and that the baron is his father. The baron tells Frederick that he will recognise him as his son and give Agatha a nice house to live in not far from the castle. Frederick says that is not good enough, and that the baron must marry Agatha, or Frederick would not accept the baron's name. The minister agrees with Frederick and tells the baron that, if he wants to truly make amends and clear his mind, he must marry Agatha--and do so publicly, so all can see her redeemed to respectability. The baron agrees and the reunion between the baron and Agatha takes place.

There is also a second story line centering on the baron's daughter Miss Amelia Wildenhaim. She has one suitor, Count Cassel, whom her father is trying to get to know and to decide whether he will marry his daughter to him. Amelia seems greatly indifferent, and every time the minister, Anhalt, enters the room she seems very delighted to see him. The count, who was the other man in the hunting party that Frederick begged from, turns out to have loved and abandoned many women. The baron is shocked to learn of this--and it hits home, because of his abandonment of Agatha. The baron decides the count is not the man for Amelia. Meanwhile, Anhalt, who has acted as Miss Wildenhaim's private tutor, appears to be as smitten with her as she is with him, but knows she is too much above him to make a move. In light of the baron's

forced marriage and his abandonment of the woman he truly loved, Agatha, he had told his daughter he would not force her to marry someone she did not like, and if she truly liked someone, he would allow her the marriage. Amelia takes advantage of this and does what Anhalt will not--tells Anhalt of her love, and gets Anhalt to confess the same. When the baron tells Amelia that the count will not be her husband, she confesses her love for Anhalt. In the end, due to Anhalt's service in the matter of tracking down Agatha and counseling the baron to marry her, the baron allows the marriage.

So the play ends with the baron and Agatha reunited, Anhalt and Amelia engaged, and Frederick recognised by his father.

Central to the play is the fact that the baron and Agatha had pre-marital relations which produced a bastard son. Though such topics were well known, and certainly Jane Austen used characters such as Harriet Smith (from Emma) in her work, to have a genteel household perform a play centering on such issues could cause a problem, and with a father such as Sir Thomas, who was a strong advocate for proper decorum, it could certainly cause problems within the family upon his return, when he discovered what had been occurring.

Edmund's objections were that respectable ladies did not involve themselves in the theater. From the time of Shakespeare into our own century, the theater was not considered an appropriate place for a lady to earn her living, but a place for loose women. Another of his objections was to the plot of the play itself and the illicit act at the heart of it. His final objection was specific to Maria playing the role of Agatha. If Maria Bertram were to enact the part of Agatha, she would have to speak of her fiancé's betrayal and abandonment, as well as words such as: "Oh! oh! my son! I was intoxicated by the fervent caresses of a young, inexperienced, capricious man, and did not recover from the delirium till it was too late." If an engaged woman were to talk of the fervent caresses of her fiancé, even while acting a part, it could be considered quite improper.

<i>Frederick</i> Mr. Crawford	<i>Count Cassel</i> Mr. Rushworth	<i>Amelia</i> Miss Crawford
<i>Anhalt</i> Edmund Bertram	<i>Verdun (Butler)</i> Tom Bertram	<i>Cottager</i> Mrs. Grant
<i>Baron Wildenhaim</i> Mr. Yates	<i>Agatha</i> Maria Bertram	

Knowing the synopsis of the play, explain why each (all but the butler and cottager) was appropriate or inappropriate for the part. Which if the parts are *especially* indecorous? Which parts have a special significance outside the context of the play?

Source:

<http://www.austen.com/mans/vows/>