

21L471 Major English Novels

Spring 2004

Topics for take-home exam on Austen, *Mansfield Park* (choose two):

DUE: TUES. MARCH 2 (unless prior arrangements made)

1. Write about Austen's handling of the themes of "interested" versus "disinterested," "partial" versus "impartial" perspectives. How is her treatment of this issue related to the ideals of the European Enlightenment movement that unfolded in the generations preceding Austen? How is Austen's narrative technique related to this issue?
2. Write about the difference it makes to our reading of this novel to know about the history and structure of slaveowning plantations in Antigua – plantations like the one we imagine Sir Thomas Bertram to own, which contributes vitally to the maintenance of Mansfield Park and the way of life carried on there? What does it do to our conception of an "English way of life" (or "culture") if we recognize that that way of life rests on and is to some extent the creature of profits derived from colonized territories offshore?
3. Write about Austen's critique of an emerging conception of society that exalted self-interest and made the individual the fundamental unit of society. Which segment of British society is this emerging conception associated with, and how is it manifested in *Mansfield Park*? Make sure to include comments on the paradox Austen appears to find in the prospect of unfettered self-interest.
4. How does the domestic drama of this novel, narrowly focused on a few families, imply issues of much broader, even *national* impact? How does the story about Fanny and the Bertrams become a story about the fate of an entire social system? How does Fanny's happy marriage at the end of the book participate in an effort to revitalize the traditional rural landowning classes and the social order they dominated? (Consider the question of "estate improvements" in your response.)

Guidelines:

1. responses must be typed and double-spaced throughout, using a 12-point font. (Times New Roman is good). Pages should be numbered and stapled together.
2. Append a title page to your exam that includes your name, the date, and a **signed pledge** reading "This exam represents my own work and does not rely on outside sources, except where noted."
3. You should not need to consult any outside sources to write these responses. If you do, you must cite all such sources, including websites, on a Works Cited list at the end of your exam.
4. Brevity is not a virtue. Thicken your responses with detailed reference to the text. When you cite the text, refer not only to page number but also to Volume and chapter numbers. For example: (p. 311; Vol. III, ch. 2).
5. Please contact me if you have any questions. If you need an extension for any reason, please ask as soon as possible.