

Taken for granted and remorsefulness



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Being Taken In

How much of a role does deception play in courtship? In marriage? In Volume I of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Henry and Mary Crawford engage in a conversation with their sister, Mrs. Grant, concerning this very question. The conversation occurs soon after the Crawfords arrive at the parsonage to stay with Mrs. Grant, and becomes an early introduction into the characters' beliefs, as well as their opinions of the Bertrams. The passage not only employs dramatic irony, it foreshadows the romantic turmoil that lies ahead and also gives the reader a closer look at the characters' beliefs concerning marriage and courtship.

The passage displays two instances of dramatic irony. The first is Henry's assertion that "Miss Bertram is very much attached to Mr. Rushworth," which is followed by his declaration that he "think[s] too well of Miss Bertram to suppose she would ever give her hand without her heart" (34). Both of these statements reflect his opinion of Maria Bertram's motives, but they also hint that he favors her. His sisters view these statements as evidence that he has been "taken in" or, in other words, deceived (34). As the reader may already know at this point, Henry's initial assumptions are, in fact, false. This is an example of dramatic irony: because there is "a discrepancy between a character's perception and what the reader or audience knows to be true" (Murfin and Ray 224). This dramatic irony is seen again in Mary's thought that Tom Bertram "had more liveliness and gallantry than Edmund, and must, therefore, be preferred; She knew it was her way" (Austen 35). Mary's other words and actions in this part of the novel reveal that she doesn't just want Tom because he is lively and gallant,

but also because he is the eldest of the Bertram sons and will, therefore, inherit the estate. This early deduction and decision on Mary's part to "prefer" Tom over Edmund is, just like Henry's initial opinion of Maria, soon proven false. Mary turns out to favor Edmund for the simple reason that Tom was out of town for a long period of time. When the reader encounters this change in Mary's decision, he/she is reminded of Mary's early resolution and how easily it was forgotten. This isn't the only instance in which Mary betrays her own beliefs about how women should behave during courtship.

In this passage, Mary expresses her view that being "taken in" is a natural part of any marriage, where it is, of all transactions, the one in which people expect the most from others, and are least honest themselves (34). This statement is evidence of her belief that marriage is a "maneuvering business," where people must deceive each other in order to gain favor and acceptance. This assertion, however, is inverted later in the novel when Mary continues to bluntly voice her disgust about clergymen and their salary, yet Edmund, who is determined to become an ordained minister himself, continues in his pursuit of her. Even though she is being brutally honest about her views, he isn't discouraged, and still seeks her hand in marriage. She doesn't try to hide her true feelings, even though they are distasteful and offensive to Edmund, and yet none of this keeps Edmund from chasing after her. This disproves her early sentiment that marriage is initially based on deception and that all married (and soon-to-be married) couples deceive each other in hopes of gaining the other's favor.

The passage also sheds light on Mrs. Grant's views on marriage. She believes that all married couples will eventually disappoint one another, but

that human nature motivates them to seek consolation in other “ scheme[s] of happiness” (34). The use of the word “ scheme” in her statement hints at her opinion that marriage is indeed based at least partly on deception, even though she asserts the opposite notion in her argument. Her remark correlates with her own married life: it is obvious that her husband is lacking in many areas, including his treatment of her, his work ethic, and his extreme fondness for alcohol. Her assertion that, when faced with disappointments in marriage, one must look elsewhere to find happiness, is obviously inspired by her experiences in her own marriage. In a way, she is trying to rid Mary and Henry of their ignorance on the trials of married life by giving them a glimpse into her own.

In Mrs. Grant’s words, she is trying to “ cure” Mary and Henry of their naivete. She sees that Henry is already being deceived by Maria about her motives and that Mary is still unaware of the trials that marriage and courtship bring. In her own words, she wants to “ cure [them] both” (35), and believes that Mansfield can assist her in doing so. Later, it becomes obvious that Mansfield will indeed “ cure” their ignorance, but only by subjecting them to disappointment and heartache. As the reader knows by the end of the novel, Henry runs off with Maria, only to find it impossible to live with her after their initial facades wear off and they are exposed to one another’s real personalities. Mary’s fate is just as depressing, mainly because her own belief in the importance of deception in courting contrasts directly with Edmund’s (not to mention the fact that she is more interested in his money than anything else). Mary believes that at least some of Edmund’s personality is a disguise, especially in her assumption that his determination

to become a clergyman can be easily discouraged. Edmund, however, remains truthful in his words and actions, and as a result Mary ends up digging her own grave, so to speak. In a way, Mansfield Park really does “cure” Henry and Mary of their naivete, but not without subjecting them to instances of disappointment and heartache along the way. The cliché phrase “they learned it the hard way” certainly appears applicable in this situation.

This short passage gives the reader a deeper look into Mary and Henry’s motives as they enter into courtship with the Bertram youths, foreshadowing future events and their consequences. It also offers a brief glimpse of Mrs. Grants emotional struggle in her own marriage, and her desire to convince the Crawfords that no marriage can be happy without a great deal of effort. The dramatic irony in the passage is used to set both Henry and Mary up for falls later in the novel, when their initial assumptions are proven wrong and, as a result, they wind up alone.

Works Cited

Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park*. Ed. Claudia L. Johnson. New York: Norton, 34-35.

Murfin, Ross, and Supryia Ray. “Irony.” *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2003.