

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

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Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?

More Puzzles in Classic Fiction

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scraping the ashes out of his pipe *then* pulling the bell-cord. The natural order would be to pull the bell-cord and occupy the fidgety moments until the arrival of Obadiah by nervously tapping one's pipe. The strongest support for the hypothesis that Uncle Toby rings, then fiddles with his pipe, then speaks, is that Sterne does not specifically say when the bell was rung. Had he written, for example, as opening to II.6, the following there would be no grounds for argument:

———What can they be doing, brother? said my father.—I think, replied my uncle Toby,—taking as I told you, his pipe from his mouth, and striking the ashes out of it as he began his sentence;—I think, replied he,—it would not be amiss, brother, if we rung the bell. *He duly rang the bell.*

But Sterne did not add the italicized comment, or anything equivalent. Nowhere, in fact, is the statement 'he rang the bell' to be found. It floats un-narrated, wherever we choose to place it. It is as logical to place it in I.21 as in II.6. In these dubious circumstances, and with the author's chronic punctiliousness in mind, it seems reasonable to assume that there is no error here, or at most an ambiguity within which 'hypercriticks' can muddle themselves.

The World's Classics *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* is edited by Ian Campbell Ross.

Pug: dog or bitch?

If there was ever an inconsequential quibble in Austen scholarship, the changing sex of Lady Bertram's lap-dog would seem to be it. Tony Tanner, who has done more than any living critic to instruct us how to read the novels, sees it as a litmus test, dividing what is useful to discuss from what is irredeemably petty.¹ Quixotic as it may appear, there is something worthwhile to be dredged up from this, admittedly picayune, detail in *Mansfield Park's* background. It does not substantially alter our reading of the novel, but it does offer a sharper outline of one of its principal characters.

The core of the puzzle is an incidental reference in volume I, chapter 8, as the Mansfield Park party departs in their carriages to visit Sotherton. Whether or not Fanny is to be one of the party is the main preceding issue. Mrs Norris is adamant she shall not go; Mr Rushworth gallantly wants her included; it is left to Edmund to find a solution. In the minutes before departure, there is some fierce skirmishing between Julia and Maria as to who shall be on the barouche-box seat, alongside Henry Crawford. The younger sister wins. Lady Bertram, who is too 'fatigued' to make the trip, sees the company of 'Happy Julia! Unhappy Maria! The former was on the barouche-box in a moment, the latter took her seat within in gloom and mortification; and the carriage drove on amid the good wishes of the two remaining ladies, and the barking of pug in his mistress's arms' (p. 72). It's a vivid tableau. Our eyes are firmly on the carriage and th

sexual warfare seething within it (in her quiet way, Fanny is just as much a combatant as her cousins). But the little dog's bark may momentarily catch our attention. And, we may note from the use of 'his', it is a dog not a bitch.

Pug does not reappear until the third volume. Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram have by now resolved that Fanny must marry Henry. They are using every carrot and stick at their disposal to induce the unexpectedly stubborn young woman to conform to their wishes. 'You must be aware,' Lady Bertram tells her niece, 'that it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this.' The narrative continues by throwing the spotlight back on the mistress of Mansfield Park:

This was almost the only rule of conduct, the only piece of advice, which Fanny had ever received from her aunt in the course of eight years and a half.—It silenced her. She felt how unprofitable contention would be. If her aunt's feelings were against her, nothing could be hoped from attacking her understanding. Lady Bertram was quite talkative.

'I will tell you what, Fanny,' said she.—'I am sure he fell in love with you at the ball, I am sure the mischief was done that evening. You did look remarkably well. Every body said so. Sir Thomas said so. And you know you had Chapman to help you dress. I am very glad I sent Chapman to you. I shall tell Sir Thomas that I am sure it was done that evening.'—And still pursuing the same cheerful thoughts, she soon afterwards added,—'And I will tell you what, Fanny—which is more than I did for Maria—the next time pug has a litter you shall have a puppy.' (p. 302)

The episode perfectly catches Lady Bertram's moral obtuseness and her selfishness. But, out of the corner of our eye, we may note that 'pug' would now seem to be a bitch—the proud mother of puppies.

Pugs are 'toy dogs' (miniaturized bulldogs—the plucky mastiff peculiarly associated with John Bull) and, although they are short-coated, their sex may not be

immediately apparent without indecently close inspection. Narrators are only human and may make the same mistakes as all of us do about such things. A devious reader might further argue that highly strung thoroughbred dogs like pugs are carefully mated, with their owners in watchful attendance as the deed takes place. Typically, the sire's owner takes an agreed share (as much as half) of the subsequent litter. So when Lady Bertram says 'the next time pug has a litter' she could conceivably mean that the next time 'he' sires one, Fanny shall have one of pug's offspring.

Pug makes two other fleeting appearances in *Mansfield Park*. In the first chapter, when it is agreed that Fanny will come to the Park House, not the Rectory, Lady Bertram observes: 'I hope she will not tease my poor pug . . . I have but just got Julia to leave it alone' (p. 8). Pug is here the neuter 'it'. There is a follow-up reference a few pages later in Chapter 2, when we are told that Lady Bertram is 'a woman . . . of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children'. Pugs are ugly beasts like their full-sized ancestor. Unlike bulldogs, however, they are entirely useless—there being no miniature bulls for them to bait. We are to assume that the un-beautiful and useless Lady Bertram, like other dog-lovers, has come to resemble her pet. The dates implied by these early references are perplexing. Fanny, we are told, is 'just ten years old' when she comes to Mansfield Park, where—we may be sure—she will never tease Lady Bertram's pet. Assuming that pug was housebroken before Lady Bertram took possession of 'it', and that it has been in the family some time (otherwise how could 12-year-old Julia have been in the habit of teasing it?) the animal must be going on 11 or 12 years old when Lady Bertram promises 19-year-old Fanny one of its puppies—if she consents to accept Crawford. I am no dog-breeder, but this seems rather late

in the day for thinking of future litters. It might be, that as with other small dogs (miniature poodles, King Charles's spaniels) it is chic to have more than one. The consistent lower-casing ('pug' not 'Pug') suggests a generic rather than an individual beast. But descriptions such as that of Lady Bertram as 'a woman . . . of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children' (pp. 16–17)² make it clear that she has just the one pet dog. Otherwise it would be 'thinking more of her pugs than her children'. One might hypothesize that the old (male) pug died and a younger (female) pug was acquired in the interval between the Sotherton and Portsmouth episodes—but this would be very far-fetched.

One assumes that Jane Austen did make a tiny error and—as Tanner says—it matters not a jot to any sensible reader. The *de minimis* rule applies to literary criticism as it does to law. But once our attention is drawn to the dual-sexed pug with its unusually long sex life, some other useful points can be made. First, about pugs themselves. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes, the little dogs 'came into fashionability in 1794'. They are supposed to have come across with William III, and are among the most venerable of 'toy dogs'. Their tininess made them peculiarly useful as women's accoutrements, as did their placid temperament. The placidity went with a tendency to obesity ('Has anyone ever seen a thin pug?', asks one history of the English dog). By the early decades of the nineteenth century pugs were commonly 'ornamentally' mutilated (ears cropped, tail docked) and the species was generally felt to be almost bred out. It was revived, in the mid-nineteenth century, by enterprising pug-breeders.

Pugs, then, were cherished fashion accessories because they were *petite*, docile dogs which could be held in the arms by women as a kind of canine muff. Essentially they were 'masculine' beasts—mastiffs—genetically re-

modelled as ornaments for the weaker sex. The pug's miniaturized 'bulldog' lineaments rendered it not just fashionable in the late eighteenth century but—at a period of war with France—patriotic. Like the 'Blenheim spaniel' which Tory Mrs Transome has in *Felix Holt*, the pug made a political statement, in an acceptably feminine way.

The main events of *Mansfield Park* are commonly taken to be set between 1805 and 1811, during the Napoleonic Wars,³ and the novel opens with the dating phrase: 'About thirty years ago . . .' It would seem that Lady Bertram (who after the birth of her children never can be troubled to go to London during the season) has retained the tastes of her youth, when she was the belle who captivated Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park. The pug, so fashionable when she was Miss Maria Ward, is a Miss Havisham-like attempt to stop the clock which has rendered her middle-aged and *fade*.

It is also relevant that pugs were the outcome of a strenuous and artificial breeding programme. In this they make another statement about the attitude of Lady Bertram's class to the all-important question: who should marry whom? Lady Bertram's sister, Frances, marries, 'in the common phrase, to disoblige her family . . . fixing on a Lieutenant of Marines'. The Prices' breeding is thereafter undisciplined in the highest degree. When she implores Lady Bertram to take Fanny, Mrs Price 'was preparing for her ninth lying-in'. Since they have been married eleven years (a period of frigid estrangement between the sisters), one wonders when it was that Lieutenant Price ever went to sea. On his part, the lieutenant is in the habit of cursing his unruly pack of children as 'young dogs' (p. 348)—mongrels all.

As elsewhere in *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen sets up a thought-provoking opposition. Too much attention to breeding results in the odious pug, a useless, ugly, 'inbred'

fashion accessory. Too little attention to breeding leads to the jungle of the Price household at Portsmouth—with its stravaiging pack of ‘ill-bred’ young dogs. None the less, Portsmouth—for all its undisciplined breeding—produced William and Fanny. Mansfield Park has produced Julia and Maria. Austen would seem to endorse the principle known to all dog breeders and eugenicists—that breeds must be regularly reinvigorated from outside the pedigree line. The aristocratic Bertrams, on the verge of inbreeding (as was the pug in 1810), need an admixture of mongrelized Price blood.

The World's Classics *Mansfield Park* is edited by James Kinsley, with an introduction by Marilyn Butler.

How vulgar is Mrs Elton?

In 1994 Pat Rogers published an elegant article on small piece of fashionable (or perhaps not) slang in *Emn* entitled: ‘“Caro Sposo”: Mrs Elton, Burneys, Thral and Noels’.¹ The Italian endearment (‘dear husband’) associated indelibly in the reader’s mind with Mrs Elt (née Augusta Hawkins)—heiress of Bristol, whose mon is very new and breeding rather dubious. We first hear h favourite phrase when she returns, victrix, with the Re Elton (‘Mr E.’) in tow as her newly wed husband.

Among the flood of offensive things which Mrs Elt pours out to Emma (whom she regards as a best opponent in love) one remark causes unforgivable offense. Mrs Elton is talking of the descriptions her husband h given her of his circle at Highbury. ‘“My friend Knightle had been so often mentioned,’ she tells Emma, ‘that I w really impatient to see him; and I must do my caro spo the justice to say that he need not be ashamed of h friend’ (p. 250). Fuming after their meeting, Emma thin savagely that her new neighbour at the vicarage is ‘A litt upstart, vulgar being, with her Mr. E., and her *caro spos* and her resources, and all her airs of pert pretension an under-bred finery’.

As Rogers points out, Mrs Elton’s slangy speech, part ularly her ‘easy application of a cant Italianate phrase . . is a strong pointer towards her affectation and vulgarity. But *caro sposo*, he further suggests, may be somethin more than ‘a mark of pretension’. Arguably it carries subtler satirical load. He goes on to survey the rise an

the user to freeze the result, the better to make his count . . . By 1770 the logic of this pursuit of ever finer time measurement led to the appearance of the first center-seconds watches with fractions of seconds marked on the dial; the earliest I have seen show fifths. Who cared about fifths of seconds in those days? Laurence Sterne evidently did.

3. H. K. Russell, 'Tristram Shandy and the Techniques of the Novel', *Studies in Philology*, 42 (1945), 589.

Mansfield Park

1. Tony Tanner, *TLS*, 25 June 1995.
2. The full text reads: 'She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children' (pp. 16–17). Conceivably, it could be the needlework which is of 'little use and no beauty', but I prefer to think Austen meant Lady Bertram.
3. I discuss this question, which remains somewhat ambiguous, in *Is Heathcliff a Murderer?* (Oxford, 1996), 5–9.

Emma

1. *The Review of English Studies*, NS 45: 177 (1994), 70–5.
2. The excellent education Jane has received is described on pp. 145–6 of the World's Classics edition.

Oliver Twist, Great Expectations

1. As many commentators note, there is ambiguity about the historical setting of *Oliver Twist*, and some perplexing pockets of anachronism. The Bow Street Runners who come to the Maylie household, for example, would have been abolished and replaced by modern policemen, around the same time that the Bloody Code was abolished in 1829. In chapter 9, Oliver overhears the Jew musing about five 'fine fellows' who have gone to the gallows—for robbery, one assumes—and never 'peached' on him. They too would seem to be victims of the pre-1829 Bloody Code. It is arguable that we are to assume the execution of Fagin to take place in one of these pockets of anachronism, in the mid-1820s, a decade before other sections of the narrative.
2. As Angus Wilson sardonically notes in his Penguin Classics edition of *Oliver Twist* the murder of a London tart by her ponce

cannot have been all that rare an event in the London underworld of the 1830s.

3. Oddly enough, in *Sikes and Nancy*, the 'reading version' of *Oliver Twist*, Dickens altered the episode, so Nancy does indicate Sikes by surname. See the World's Classics edition *Sikes and Nancy and Other Public Readings*, edited by Philip Collins.
4. Philip Collins, *Dickens and Crime* (London, 1964), 281.
5. *Great Expectations* (Everyman Paperback, ed. R. Gilmour, London, 1992), 442.

Jane Eyre

1. For the popularity of the Bluebeard story in the nineteenth century, see Juliet McMaster, 'Bluebeard at Breakfast', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 8 (1981), 197–230.
2. See Sherrill E. Grace, 'Courting Bluebeard with Bartok, Atwood, and Fowles: Modern Treatment of the Bluebeard Theme', *The Journal of Modern Literature*, 11: 2 (July 1984), 245–62.
3. The 'Sister Anne on the Battlements scene' in the Bluebeard story is alluded to in Jane's visit to the towers of Thornfield Hall with Mrs Fairfax, pp. 111–12.
4. See J. A. Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists, Publishers and Readers* (London, 1995), 55–86.
5. As Michael Mason points out, in his Penguin Classics edition of *Jane Eyre* (Harmondsworth, 1996, p. viii), there is confusion as to whether Bertha is confined on the second or the third floor. She is no madwoman in an attic, or locked in a tower (as the 1944 film suggests).
6. See, for example, the allusions to Byron's *The Corsair* (1814) by the Ingram party (p. 189 of the World's Classics edition).

Shirley

1. According to her nephew, James Austen-Leigh, Jane Austen 'took a kind of parental interest in the beings who she had created, and did not dismiss them from her mind when she had finished her last chapter'. Of *Emma's* characters she told him 'that Mr Woodhouse survived his daughter's marriage, and kept her and Mr Knightley from settling at Donwell, about two years' (James E. Austen-Leigh, *Memoir of Jane Austen* (1871), ed. R. W. Chapman, Oxford (1926), 157).