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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2006

"Mansfield Park" by Jane Austen -- The Popsurfing Review

Mansfield Park by Jane Austen ** 1/2 (out of 4)

I've been working my way through the collected works of Jane Austen. If you're in NYC, a small bookstore just two blocks uptown of Film Forum has a great little boxed set containing all her works in tiny little volumes with good-sized type. (Most novels are offered in two books, ie. *Pride & Prejudice* Vol. 1 and 2.) At \$15 for the whole set, it's much cheaper than buying paperbacks and the little volumes are so pleasing and so perfect for carrying on the subway, if I were filthy rich I would have every new book I wanted to read custom-published this very same way. *Pride & Prejudice* was nigh on perfect and *Sense and Sensibility* was only slightly less so. Both were a delight to read. So I'm all the sorrier to report *MP* is a bit of a let-down. In her first two books, Austen created spirited, wittily charming heroines. The center of this book, Fanny Price, is a bit of a pill. She's timid in thought and deed, so her musings are far less satisfying. Fanny is so self-less that when relatives take her in and then treat her poorly, she's ashamed to let such ignoble thoughts cross her mind. If she's shivering in her dayroom because a fire is forbidden to her even in winter, Fanny immediately denounces herself for wishing for one instead of realizing how lucky she is. The "bad" girl of the book is Mary Crawford, who perks things up whenever she's around. Mary and her brother Henry wreak havoc on Fanny's relatives. Mary sets her sights on Fanny's secret beloved Edmund (also quite a prig) and Henry toys with two other young ladies, getting them both to fall in love with him before moving blithely on. The decision of the young people to mount an amateur theatrical --such scandalous behavior shocks Fanny, of course -- is the subject of endless discussion and reverberates tiresomely throughout the book. By the finale, Austen's usual canny insights into human behavior are reduced to moralistic scolding. I imagine Austen didn't want to repeat herself with another vivacious heroine. Too bad. Mary would have been much more fun to spend time with. At one point, I had the delicious

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