

From *Northanger Abbey* to *Sanditon*: Austen's Views on Educational Matters Compared



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Introduction

During the Enlightenment, which lasted roughly from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, children were considered *Tabula Rasas*, blank slates, which meant that people believed children would turn out well as long as their education contained all the things that were considered important. To achieve this level of proficiency, children received education at schools where they were placed in classes with sometimes as many as 170 boys as was the case at Eton's Upper School (Le Faye 82). Parents could also hire private tutors and governesses to supervise their children's education, and encouraged their children to read "the Bible, Shakespeare [...] and some respectable novels" (Le Faye 88) as well.

The novel of education, or Bildungsroman, focuses on the growth of the main characters by following them throughout the novel until they have rationally and morally become adults. As the name already indicates, education plays an important role in the plot and characterisation of the Bildungsroman, a form of the novel which came up in mid-eighteenth century Germany. The Bildungsroman, therefore, is "a distinctively German achievement, a product of unique political circumstances and an antithesis of the French and English novels of social realism" (Boes 647), which Karl Morgenstern placed into a "central category of modern literature" in 1819 (Boes 649). It did not take long for the Bildungsroman to become popular in other countries such as England.

In order to specify the characteristics of the Bildungsroman, Hoffman Baruch draws a clear distinction between the male Bildungsroman and its feminine counterpart: the former shows how the male protagonist develops and finds his place in life, while the latter mostly focuses on the duty of the woman to marry a handsome and rich man, advising her how to achieve domestic bliss (335). Jane Austen is one of the most prominent names on Hoffman Baruch's list of writers of the feminine Bildungsroman, alongside Samuel Richardson and

Charlotte Brontë (338-39). However, saying that Austen only wants to marry pretty girls off to handsome men would be falling short of what Austen aims at in her novels. She gives much attention to the education and development of her characters, up to the point where a happy ending is not the goal of the learning but the reward of an education well-handled (Newton qtd. in Newman 693). Unlike Hoffman Baruch's opinions, this is not merely true for the women in Austen's novels. Her male characters also live happily ever after as long as they are willing to put aside their pride and foolishness, accepting that they need women just like women need men. Love then becomes the vehicle for ultimate education because "each [lover] has willingly granted to the other the role of pedagogue" (Fessenbecker 760).

It has been argued that Austen did not agree with the level of importance that was given to bookish education of men and women, nor did she value the required accomplishments of women as highly as her contemporaries did. Where society focused on the amount of education that a woman had had when they formed opinions of the lady in question, Austen calls herself the "most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to call herself an authoress" in a letter to James Stanier Clarke, the then librarian and domestic chaplain to the Prince Regent (Chapman 185).

For a long time, society considered schooling "a hindrance to [girls'] settlement in life, as they would be regarded with suspicion if thought too clever or bookish" (Le Faye 87). However, many feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, fought for equality and education for women, deeming education the most important thing a woman could possibly attain in life. Austen, however, gave more importance to experiencing real life than to the sheer number of books that people read, which is in line with what modern philosopher John Wilson argues: education is subordinate to life experience because it is the latter that is man's formation (328-30). In both *Northanger Abbey* (hereafter referred to as NA) and *Sanditon* (hereafter referred to as SA), Austen takes a look at the forming of the human mind. In NA she tells about

Catherine Morland and her experiences in the world, while in SA she shows her views on the inhabitants of Sanditon, a seaside town that is still in the process of being formed, through the eyes of Charlotte Heywood, an outsider. In both novels, almost all characters' introductions to the reader contain information about their educational background, their personal pitfalls and strengths. Despite NA being the first novel Austen wrote and SA being the uncompleted last, both novels show many similarities on the matter of education, because novels and imagination play an important role in either plot. Also, the expectations that men have of women and vice versa make both novels a very interesting source of comparison between Austen's earlier and later opinions on education and development.

In this paper, I shall look at the many forms and shapes that education can take, and how Austen's views on these varieties changed between finishing NA and starting on SA. According to Austen, knowledge of life can be derived from many different sources: from a tutor in the form of a friend or a love interest, through mistakes that lead to painful situations for the protagonist or her friends, sometimes even through fantasy novels that Austen's characters read, as opposed to the morally heavy books parents forced on their children.

In order to address this topic, I will closely compare the two novels, trying to determine what makes the two novels similar, but also what makes them different in the way they handle education. The first chapter gives an overview of what various critics, most importantly John Wilson and Hoffman Baruch, have to say on the topic of education and the many varieties in which human beings can learn. These theories are then placed in Austen's time, mainly focusing on the differences between men and women, taking feminism into account as well. In the second, third and fourth chapter, NA and S are compared on different aspects of education, and the forms in which these can form the young characters' minds in the novels, namely: through a friend or a love interest who takes the role of tutor (chapter 2),

through life-experiences such as mistakes and the resulting consequences (chapter 3) and through novels which sustain the fantasy (chapter 4).

Chapter 1: Theoretical Background

For knowledge to be multiplied, it has to be conveyed from one person to the other, which can be done in many different ways. Schools are a well-known institution for that purpose, either in the sense of one teacher attending to many students or in a one-on-one situation. In addition, books are also considered invaluable to a sound education. In the following sections, we shall take a look at those two manners of sharing knowledge with other people, as well as the differences between men's and women's education in Austen's time.

1.1: Life as a Teacher, a Suitor as a Tutor

The consensus in Austen's time was that education made a man a good man, someone to look up to. The gender bias is intentional, because for women education was something else entirely, which shall be addressed further on in this paragraph. Contrary to this idea, John Wilson, man is not created by education, but has merely "via a programme of sustained and serious learning above the level of nature, acquired certain kinds of knowledge or mastery" (Wilson 335). This means that people have obtained more theoretical knowledge, but whether to use that for good or bad is something that they have to learn through experience. According to Wilson, education is not automatically desirable, even though the word has mainly positive connotations now (1-3).

In Wilson's usage of the words, education and learning have distinctively different meanings. Education means actively engaging in a well thought-out procedure (Wilson 335), whereas learning is a process that takes place almost automatically: not planned or structured, but almost always more useful than education (Wilson 335). Austen and her contemporaries, however, did not make such a distinction.

In Austen's time, marriage was considered the ultimate school of learning: "The [woman] longs for a marriage that will increase her knowledge, often in some wide

experiential sense” (Hoffman Baruch 336), wishing “to find a mentor” (Hoffman Baruch 338). Baruch explains that there was supposed to be a pedagogical difference between men and women, in the sense that women learn “by breathing ideas” (Hegel qtd in Hoffman Baruch 336) whereas men learn “by means of advancing thought and much skilled exertion” (Hegel qtd in Hoffman Baruch 336). Consequently, marriage becomes for the woman an institution through which she can achieve “increased knowledge, enhancement of feelings and experience” (Hoffman Baruch 340). If this is taken in a broader sense, it is not only marriage through which this can be achieved, but more precisely through a male factor who will “finish [the girl’s] education” (Hoffman Baruch 341).

However, “the pleasure [of romantic pedagogy] lies in the mutual acceptance of a certain type of dominant/submissive relationship, which in this case renders the actual transmission of knowledge secondary” (Fessenbecker 751). This makes the tutor-student relationship less about romance and more about conforming to the then established roles of dominant men and submissive women in marriage. Surprisingly, Fessenbecker also says that both men and women need to “achieve a certain moral maturity before they are capable of love” (749), a statement which triggers ideas of equality, also in the tutor-student relationship.

In short, women, just like man, desired knowledge, which was gained through the intervention of a man, preferably through marriage or courtship. Some argue that this tutor-pupil relationship was based on feelings of domination and submission, while others state that in that relationship there was also a sense of equality.

1.2: Novels, Imagination and Education

When education for children becomes more and more important nearing the end of the 1700s, the teachers at first had troubles making a curriculum that fitted the children well. In the last two decades of this century, many things changed in the British educational system: Sunday

schools were founded, learned books about education for children were written, and criticism on the system was published (Richardson 2-3). Richardson specifically mentions the Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were quite clear on the way children should be educated, focusing on the subject of novels and books (9).

It was quickly decided that books were important for the forming of a young mind, because the Romantics realised that the child is formed by religion, traditions and “literary representation” (Richardson 9). Coleridge, however, was convinced that “novels [had to] be wholly forbidden to children” (Richardson 142). Many believed that fairy tales and other children’s fiction would not form the young mind in the desirable way, but those who wanted children to read novels stressed the innocence of the child and its capability of discerning the didactic lessons woven into the fairy tale plot (Richardson 142).

That knowledge derived from novels which stimulate the reader’s imagination can be used in various professions, not just criticism or literature, is shown by Young and Annisette. Amidst a paper on ethics in accounting, they address the issue of stories and the imagination, and how it can help us form our minds:

Stories help us to look backward over our lives, to reflect and try to understand our actions, motives, thoughts. Stories allow us to organize and connect the disparate and sometimes random events within our lives into a more synthetic unity. Our lives are narratively constructed and made coherent and meaningful through an artful process in which our stories are made and remade. (Young and Annisette 13-14)

Young and Annisette stress the importance of cultivating imagination, and in order to do so it is necessary to step away from what is known (15). Because the novel “engages our emotions”, it enables us to “enhance our discernment [and] explore the demands of conflicting obligations” (Young and Annisette 15-16).

NA is very clearly an example of Austen's go at the principle of the Gothic novel: a haunted house, mysterious men, empty drawers and yellowed notes nourish Catherine's brain and kindle her imagination. According to Robert Hume, the Gothic novel was a "shiftaway from neoclassical ideals of order and reason, toward romantic belief in emotion and imagination" (282). Austen, however, was moralising and rational, a "child of the Enlightenment" (Leithart), and was very unforthcoming in using Gothic elements in her rational novels. For NA, she made the decision to take many Gothic distinctive characteristics and parody them in order to prove a point. However, Gothic novels, which are "the product of serious fancy" (Hume 290), point out "unresolvable moral and emotional ambiguity" (Hume 290) and attempt to make sense of our complex lives (Hume 290). This makes the novel, and even the Gothic novel in particular, a good didactic vehicle, and a prime example of what products of the imagination can offer.

In short, books are important for the education of children, but the question is whether novels are good for that purpose as well, or if they hinder the process of learning instead of boosting it.

1.3: Austen's Time: Men Versus Women

For men, education was different than for women, mostly because girls' education was not supported, and sometimes even discouraged (Le Faye 87). Consequently, many girls were simply not educated much until in the late 19th century. Davidoff and Hall even mention "a small farmer [who] let his sons go to school, but refused to let his daughters go since they need only milk, sew, cook and bear children" (291).

As Le Faye points out, women who were too clever were often criticised; their education formed more of an obstacle than a help (87). For women this resulted in being merely taught a small range of practical tasks that they would need in their own household

once they married, instead of receiving an education equal to those of men for intellectual self-development.

Naturally, there were women who rebelled against the system, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Martineau. The former was chiefly interested in educational equality, fighting the ideas of “natural mental differentiation” (Davidoff and Hall 185), which meant that men were supposedly intellectually superior to women. Martineau, however, accepted that either sex had different qualities: the female was “more susceptible to religion and virtue, [...] the personal and the moral” than men (Davidoff and Hall 185). Consequently, she considered a very thorough, masculine bookish education not vitally important for women’s happiness. On the other hand, both Wollstonecraft and Martineau said that a silly, overly emotional character is a result of women being intellectually repressed by society (Brown 326-7). Bradbrook claims that Austen detested Wollstonecraft’s radical theories (qtd in Brown 328), and it is true that Austen’s focus lay with the experiential part of education and not with schools and bookish education.

One could say Austen merely “uph[e]ld the established order” (Bilger 114), but with her novels she stimulated girls and women to become wiser, and not to be empty-minded gold-diggers unlike many other girls as a result of the educational system at the time. For Austen, it was important to keep thinking critically, and learn as much as one could, be it from novels or tutors in the form of lovers or friends.

The upcoming chapters shall discuss various forms of education in Austen’s novels in more detail, and try to distil her opinions in NA and SA on how best to acquire knowledge. The focus shall lay on the change that Austen’s opinions went through in between writing NA and SA, whether she became more severe or more tolerant when it comes to education.

Chapter 2: Mothers, Friends and Lovers

Wisdom can have several bearers, as Austen's novels point out as well. In both NA and SA, tutors come in many forms, though these do not all have the same significance or efficacy. In this chapter, I shall focus on tutorship which can be given through three different kinds of relationships with the pupil, namely those of mothers, friends, and lovers.

2.1: Mothers: Worth a Hundred Schoolmasters?

A vital part of a child's education starts at home, where its parents will teach it about the world, how it has to behave in order to be accepted in society and what is important for its future happiness. In Austen's time, this task would mainly lie with the mother or older siblings, certainly in the child's early years, which makes their characters and own capacities an important factor in the progress of a child's development. This is for instance true in Catherine's case: "her [mother's] time was so much occupied in lying-in and teaching the little ones, that her elder daughters were inevitable left to shift for themselves" (5).

However, both Catherine Morland and Charlotte Heywood are blessed with sensible mothers: Mrs Morland "wished to see her children every thing they ought to be" (NA 5), and Mrs Heywood, though she "never left home", was "glad to promote *their* getting out into the World, as much as possible" (SA 303). Though less helpful in Catherine's case because Catherine is boyish and not very bright despite her mother's best efforts (4-5), both Mrs. Morland and Mrs. Heywood direct their daughters to be useful to others: Charlotte "had been particularly useful and obliging" to the unlucky Mr. and Mrs. Parker "under her Mother's directions" (SA 303), and Catherine, as the eldest daughter, "was very kind to the little ones" (NA 5) while she was only ten years old. Mrs. Morland is a loving mother, but not blind to Catherine's shortcomings. For instance, after trying to make Catherine learn to play the piano

for a year, “Mrs Morland [...] did not insist on her daughters being accomplished in spite of incapacity” and dismisses the music teacher (NA 4). Also, she sees that Catherine’s education is not as thorough as it should have been: “‘Catherine would make a sad heedless young housekeeper to be sure,’ was her mother’s foreboding remark” (270).

Because SA is not finished, it is impossible to say what Mrs. Heywood’s reaction to her daughter’s travels would have been. In NA, however, Mrs. Morland’s “useful plain sense” (3) is invaluable for Catherine’s hurt feelings: after Catherine has been sent away from Northanger Abbey in the most disgraceful manner and arrives at home alone, Mrs. Morland’s reaction is surprisingly calm and rational: “My dear, you give yourself a great deal of needless trouble [...], depend upon it, it is something not at all worth understanding” (NA 254). When Catherine’s younger sister keeps going on about it, Mrs. Morland says, “It is no matter now, Catherine is safe at home, and our comfort does not depend on General Tilney” (254). Even though Catherine is not happy, because she misses Tilney and thinks she will never have a chance to talk to him again, she “tried to feel an interest in her own amendment” (254) under her mother’s guidance.

Not everyone in the novels is blessed with sensible, capable mothers. In NA, Isabella Thorpe’s mother, for instance, is a simple woman, whose life is centered around “the talents of her sons, and the beauty of her daughters” (23). Mrs. Thorpe is described as a “well-meaning woman, and a very indulgent mother” (NA 26), and her conversation does not show her to be an intelligent woman as she “talked chiefly of her children” (29). However, she does not know her eldest as well as she boasts (141) when Isabella hears how much she and James Morland will receive from Mr. Morland when they marry: she believes Isabella when she says she “never think[s] of [her]self” (140), but all the readers know she is lying, wanting more money than offered. Moreover, when Isabella starts to pay indecorous attention to Captain Tilney, her mother does not reprimand her flirting with another man, which finally results in

the engagement between Isabella and James Morland to be broken off. The mother in SA who is not as bright or sensible as Mrs. Morland or Mrs. Heywood, is Mrs. Palmer. She is, like Mrs. Thorpe, a loving, doting mother, but she is indecisive about everything: “whether [Mr. Palmer] were risking his Fortune or spraining his Ankle, she remained equally useless” (SA 302). She worries about the shade in their garden (308) and about a storm that had happened a year ago (309), appearing silly and empty-minded. Not much is said about her relationship with her children, but it can be easily imagined that Mrs. Parker would have been an adoring but educationally useless mother like Mrs. Thorpe.

Mothers are very important for a young woman’s development in both SA and NA, because they are the one the girls look up to for guidance and advice. A mother’s words and judgment have weight, and they are able to form the child because they have a certain authority which other elder ladies lack.

2.2: Friends: Why Would Anyone Want One?

Friends are the family you can choose for yourself, as the saying goes. In many of Austen’s novels, girls have close friends with whom they share everything, from books they like to read to how they feel about other people of their acquaintance. In NA, Catherine initially forms such a friendship with Isabella Thorpe, because of the topics they could talk about freely: “dress, balls, flirtations, and quizzes” (25). Isabella receives much admiration from Catherine, because she is older and more informed, and therefore capable of telling Catherine a good deal on various topics (25). “They talked much, and with much enjoyment” (27) the moment they meet again, and their friendship deepens when they realise their mutual love for Gothic novels (32). Soon, Catherine follows Isabella in her judgment, because she “had nothing to oppose against such reasoning” (39). In a way, Isabella is showing Catherine many things which the latter had never considered. According to James Morland, who appears to be

an interested party, Isabella has “much good sense” (45), “such a superior understanding!” (46), and James almost urges her to become great friends with her (46). However, this friendship does not teach Catherine anything substantial, and through her engagement with James Morland, Isabella turns out to be conceited and silly: not at all a good friend for a young girl like Catherine. Despite claiming to “know you better than you know yourself” (69), Isabella really does not know what makes Catherine tick, which she shows by laying words in her young friend’s mouth (69).

Catherine realises that Isabella is not a suitable friend for her after she has acquainted the Tilney family. Miss Eleanor Tilney shows “good sense and good breeding” (52) which stand in sharp contrast with Isabella Thorpe’s behaviour (52). Catherine is instantly “desirous of being acquainted with [Miss Tilney]” (52), which, admittedly, is also partly due to her being Mr. Tilney’s sister. When Catherine goes on a walk with Mr. Tilney and Miss Tilney, they talk to her about drawing and perspectives, and Catherine is both eager to accept that she is lacking knowledge and to use the newly acquired information right away, having the confidence to do so (116). Catherine and Miss Tilney also talk about novels and histories in detail (110-115), something that she never does with Isabella. This, combined with Catherine’s not calling Miss Tilney by her Christian name instantly makes this particular friendship more tutor-student related than Catherine’s closeness with Isabella. As often in Austen’s novels, a slow start to a relationship, be it romantic or not, is better than an instant liking, that will sooner or later turn out to be shallow.

In SA, a friendship similar to Catherine and Miss Tilney is formed, namely between Miss Clara Brereton and Lady Denham. At first sight, it seems an odd idea to call it a friendship, but certain details in the novel point into the direction that some deeper attachment than duty made the Lady look after Miss Clara the way she does. It is said that Clara’s circumstances were “more helpless and more pitiable of course than any” (SA 307), but soon

she “was a general favorite; - the influence of her steady conduct and mild, gentle temper was felt by everybody” (307). Lady Denham, whose “faults may be entirely imputed to her want of Education” (SA 305), is felt to benefit from Clara’s presence, because Clara will “guide and soften Lady D. – [...] will enlarge her mind and open her hand” (SA 307).

Clara is the only one in both novels to be younger than the person she educates: in NA, both Miss Tilney and Isabella Thorpe are older than Catherine Morland. Their age gives them the authority to educate Catherine, whereas Clara lacks this authority. However, she is the one everyone in Sanditon looks up to, and she is able to mellow Lady Denham and educate her, because life has taught her to be strong from an early age.

2.3: Lovers: The Ultimate School of Learning

Though education can come from many sources, the most obvious in NA is the relationship between Catherine and Mr. Tilney, who very rapidly becomes her tutor and ultimately also her husband. Tilney is attracted to Catherine because “a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man” (NA 116). During the much-anticipated walk with Miss Tilney and Mr. Tilney, Catherine “confessed and lamented her want of knowledge” (116) on the subject of painting, and Tilney readily takes it on himself to teach her, and he becomes “delighted with her progress” (116). He teaches her about marriage (75-77), and gently guides her opinions on propriety relating to her opinions on his brother’s behaviour towards the engaged Miss Thorpe: “[...] may you not be a little mistaken? Are you not carried a little too far?” (158). She does not mind being guided by Tilney, because “Mr. Tilney must know best” (159), and he always makes her feel at ease and willing to show what knowledge she is wanting.

Mr. Tilney only really becomes angry when he learns that Catherine has been concocting fantastic ideas on how Mrs. Tilney might have been murdered by General Tilney.

He chides her in very plain wordings: “If I understand you rightly, you have formed a surmise of such horror as I have hardly words to – Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained” (212). However, he does not only tell her she is wrong, but also makes her think better about who they are, why she is wrong: “Remember we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable [...] Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?” (212). Catherine takes this advice to heart, “and with tears of shame she ran off to her own room” (212). Moreover, she fully realises she has been wrong, and she “was completely awakened” (213), and she hopes that Tilney can forgive “the liberty which her imagination had dared to take” (213). Mr. Allen had told her that the characters in the books Catherine reads are “unnatural and overdrawn” (192), but Catherine only takes it to heart when Mr. Tilney tells her the exact same, and she fears she has lost Tilney’s love forever (213): “the visions of romance were over” (213).

However, Mr. Tilney does not resent her as severely for it as she dreaded, because “when Catherine had never wanted comfort more, [...] he seemed aware of it” (213), soothing her distress and making her more at ease once more. Moreover, when Catherine receives the news that Isabella’s engagement has been broken off, she “found her spirits [...] much relieved by [Tilney’s] conversation” (222), which consists of calming and reassuring words.

In SA, however, there is not a man who takes the role of tutor for Charlotte Heywood, simply because the novel remains unfinished. Two men who might have become her suitors are Sir Edward Denham and Mr. Arthur Palmer, Mr. Palmer’s brother. However, they are clearly unsuitable to take that part, because they are both silly men.

Sir Edward Denham first strikes Charlotte as a man with “good address, and [his] wish of paying attention and giving pleasure” (320) and he has “a great deal of Conversation. She liked him.” (320). The start of their acquaintance therefore looks promising, but Charlotte

begins “to think him downright silly” (323) after he has misquoted poetry and persisted in his misinterpretations (321-22), and she has soon “had quite enough of Sir Edward for one morning” (323). On top of that, Charlotte also believes he is more interested in Miss Clara, “whom he meant to seduce” (328) in the manner of Richardson’s Lovelace in the novel *Clarissa* (327). More about this shall be discussed in chapter 4.

The other candidate, Mr. Arthur Palmer, is a healthy-looking (335) man of 25 years old, who does not stand up to his rather dominant sisters but instead lets them pamper him: he has “no other look of an Invalide, than a sodden complexion” (335). His sisters “think [him] Billious, but [he] doubt[s] it” (337), but despite that he does not simply tell them he is feeling just like any other person (336). Charlotte is “convinced that Arthur was by no means so fond of being starved as [his sisters] could desire, or he felt proper himself” (338).

Clearly, neither Sir Edward nor Mr. Arthur Palmer are suitable matches for Charlotte Heywood, because she does not respect them, let alone consider their intellect superior to her own. This is exactly the case in NA, where Catherine instantly admires Mr. Tilney for his knowledge. It is a pity there is not more information about Sidney Palmer, who might have been an interesting character. He is “good-looking, with a decided air of Ease and Fashion, and a lively countenance” (345), and from Mr. Palmer we know that he is capable of finding the ridiculous in his sisters’ letters where his brother sees nothing (314).

Sensible mothers are needed for the foundation of knowledge, in that respect Austen’s opinion does not change. In friendships, Austen seems to have deviated from the norm by writing a friendship in SA, in which the younger woman is able to educate the other friend. In NA, she lets a brighter friend take care of the younger, much more ignorant one to teach them about life among other things. When it comes to romantic relationships, Austen chooses in NA to focus on the tutor-pupil relationship, in which the man is the tutor and therefore a suitable

husband. In SA, Sir Edward is unsuitable to become a husband because he is silly, and Charlotte despises him for it. Austen lets almost every relationship, in both NA and SA, center around knowledge exchange. If that stream of knowledge is established, then the friendship or romantic relationship can blossom.

Chapter 3: Errare Humanum Est

According to John Wilson, the best way to learn is to simply live life, and it is commonly accepted that this is Jane Austen's point of view as well. After all, most of her heroines are not educated in schools or by governesses, but through experiencing life they grow up and become wiser human beings. Often, Austen judges and sometimes even punishes her characters when they do not learn enough from what happens to them, for instance Wickham and Lydia in *Pride and Prejudice*. Again, it is difficult to see the entire cause and effect in SA, but an attempt shall surely be made.

3.1: Influences of the Past

When new characters in Austen's novels are introduced, invariably there will be a mention of their age, accompanied with some details of their character and a background of their education. Sometimes, Austen even excuses her characters for their ignorance by mentioning their ages. In NA, this happens with Catherine, who was as "ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is" (8). Being young and naïve may sometimes be a good thing, for example when it comes to attracting suitable men (116), but it can be a severe disadvantage as well, which Austen tells us when John Thorpe is flirting with Catherine: "had she been older or vainer, such attacks might have done little" (45). Catherine is not yet "in the habit of judging for herself" (64), and she does not know much about men and how they ought to behave (64-5) because she does not have any material for comparison.

The age-appropriate behaviour also goes the other way: in SA Austen does not make "apologies for [her] Heroine's vanity" (320) when Charlotte feels flattered by Sir Edward's attentions, and afterwards Austen continues to compare Charlotte's behaviour to that of other girls of her age who are supposedly much more mature. However, when Charlotte goes to the

library with Mr. Palmer and he urges her to spend her money, she feels that she must handle her money with care, because “at two and Twenty there could be no excuse for her doing otherwise” (316). Apparently, Charlotte also sees that a certain age calls forth certain ways of behaviour.

In NA, Isabella Thorpe is introduced as “being four years older than Miss Morland, and at least four years better informed” (25), and she is considered “old enough to know what she is about” (108). She knows more about balls and fashion than Catherine (25), and is very decided in her opinions on men: “I have no notion of treating men with such respect [of avoiding them]. *That* is the way to spoil them” (37). With her carefree behaviour she impresses Catherine, and the two become intimate friends (37).

Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Thorpe are a different story entirely. They are both narrow-minded and only interested in a small range of topics, and they talk, but do not converse (29). They are adult women, married or widowed respectively, and Mrs. Thorpe has to raise children, but she does not fulfill that task very well: John Thorpe and Isabella are allowed to run wild without being called back by their mother. During their childhood, these two women did not learn enough, but now it is too late for them to change their ways. They are supposed to be a good influence on the young people placed in their charge, but because Mrs. Allen does not teach Catherine anything of importance, and Mrs. Thorpe cannot control her own children, it is clear that they fall short.

Miss Tilney’s age is not mentioned, but because she marries with a man who has “been long withheld only by inferiority of situation from addressing her” (272) at the end of the novel, she is probably older than Catherine. Her life has been tough: her mother died when she was young, her father is an unkind, controlling man, and for a long time she could not marry the man she loved. This together combines in a few wise life lessons, which made her character the one it is in the novel.

In SA, there is Miss Clara, who is very young but, as mentioned in Chapter 2, rather clever and capable of educating Lady Denham. Clara, too, has had a difficult past, being “a Dependant on Poverty – an additional Burden to an encumbered Circle” (307). In the Brereton family, she was just a niece, preparing to be a “Nursery Maid” (307). Her character is shown when Austen describes how she interacts with Sir Edward: “there could be no doubt to his Devotion to Clara – how Clara received it, was less obvious” (320-21). Clara is a careful girl, not letting herself look flattered by being addressed by someone like Sir Edward. It is not stated explicitly in the novel, but it is suggested that Clara’s difficult past has made her stronger and wiser than any other girl of the same age.

All the aforementioned examples show that age in Austen’s novels remains very relative, although certain ways of conduct and levels of wisdom are expected at certain ages. SA and NA also show that one does not always need to be young to be in need of learning, or old to be able to teach someone something. It is the past that forms a character, preferably combined with gentle guidance from other people such as sensible mothers. However, because these are often lacking in Austen’s work, their roles are regularly taken up by responsible friends

3.2: Training and Epiphanies

One’s character is an important factor to start out with as shown in 3.1. In an Austen novel, almost everyone learns at least something throughout the course of the novel, whether it is through realising that they made mistakes or through continuing practice, and preferably they alter their ways when they realise that if they continue like that they will end up badly.

The clearest example of learning through mistakes is pointed at by Mrs. Morland, when she expresses her hope that her son “will be a discreeter man all his life, for the foolishness of his first choice” (257). After all, James Morland chose a silly woman as a

future wife, but even though he may have been a fool earlier in his life, not all is lost. Mrs Morland does not judge her son for choosing Isabella, but she does tell him that he must learn from his mistakes.

SA's Mr. and Mrs. Heywood are simple people, satisfied with the small things in life and are, as Austen says, "older in habits than in age" (303). They work at the farm, and have no need to start painting or reading to impress other people. They are caring and kind people, and that is all they need for themselves. Their daughter, though, is encouraged to go with the Palmers and learn from what she encounters on her travels (303).

Mr. Palmer is a simple man as well, but he is also simple-minded and not at all perceptive or an interesting conversationalist. His younger brother, Sidney, sees fun in every letter that their sisters send to Mr. Palmer's house, but Mr. Palmer himself does not see it, although he must have had quite some practice from listening to his brother (314). One would expect he knows his sisters, but he does not see that they are merely hypochondriacs, and he is worried about them and takes their ailments and strange methods quite seriously.

One of the clearest examples of education through realisation is following the moment where Tilney realises that Catherine has been thinking that General Tilney has murdered his wife. When Mr. Tilney questions her, Catherine realises that all her ideas were totally idiotic and unthinkable in Christian England (212-13). In another instance, Catherine realises that Isabella Thorpe was a very unsuitable friend for her, mostly through Isabella's account of the ending of her engagement, which collides with what James Morland has written to his sister. The "shallow artifice" (234) of the letter strikes Catherine, as well as "its inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood" (234). It is through this letter that Catherine learns the truth about Isabella's character. Catherine becomes "ashamed of Isabella, and ashamed of having ever loved her" (234). Contrary to Catherine, Isabella does not learn from what happens to her as a consequence of her flirting with Captain Tilney. The letter that Catherine receives from

her contains blatant lies, but it is clear that Isabella truly believes that she has done nothing wrong. After the letter, there is no other mention of her again, only when Mrs. Morland says that Catherine was “sadly out of luck” (256) with her choice of Isabella as a friend. Not all is lost, because now Catherine has learned what she must value in her friends.

Tilney and his sister are surprisingly without any progress during the novel. Eleanor Tilney is already good to start out with, and she is rewarded with marriage with the man she loves. Mr. Tilney remains the way he always was, still insightful and a bit sarcastic, and eager to teach Catherine. Their father does finally allow his son and Catherine to marry, but that is only through the intervention of his daughter, who now has a title.

In short, epiphanies are often triggered by someone else, as when Tilney urges Catherine to think about what she has done, or when Isabella sends Catherine a letter that is clearly full of lies. Training can come in various forms, such as studying someone, like Mr. Palmer could study his brother, or from going out and learning from what happens to you, as when Charlotte goes on a journey. Life can certainly be a good teacher, but there always seems to be someone nearby to steer the education into the right direction because it never seems to come from within one's self.

In both SA and NA, age is an important indicator of what might be expected from a young man or woman. If one fulfills the expectations, he or she is deemed wise. If this is not the case, Austen's judgment can be harsh. In this aspect, Austen's opinion has not changed very much. Also, in either novel, knowledge has to be passed on from someone else, preferably someone older. Epiphanies are often triggered, just as training is guided, by a tutor. For this, however, the tutor might need tools, such as novels, to bring his message across. Novels and their influences shall be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Chapter 4: The Text-Book Novel

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Austen's contemporaries, for instance poet Samuel Coleridge, did not look favourably upon the novel (Richardson 142). They thought it ruined the young mind with the wrong ideas about life, providing the reader of such novels with an unhealthy love for fantasy. These opinions resulted in Austen's fellow authors allowing their heroines to be considered corrupted if they read novels. Austen disagreed fiercely with this, parrying their self-censure by weaving her own views upon novels into the plot of NA, her own parody on Gothic novels:

Yes, novels; - for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom, so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding - joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. (NA 29)

Not all novels pose a threat to the young developing mind, as Austen tells us on page 29 of NA. She decidedly states there that novel writers have no just reason to disapprove of their own work, and thus NA and SA, as her other books, are filled with examples of when a novel is correctly used, but also when not. In the following two paragraphs, we shall look at both the pros and the cons of reading novels, and how the novels add to the element of education.

4.1: When to Disapprove of Novels

Despite Austen's defence of the novel, she also sees the dangers that come with reading novels. The entire plot of Catherine being absorbed in her books instead of using her English common sense to find her way through life is very telling in regard to the warnings that

Austen wants to give to her readers. Austen has much to say on what influence novels have on Catherine's ways of thinking, on how she sees the world and how she interacts with whatever is thrown in her way. From a very young age on, Catherine loves to read, "provided that nothing like useful knowledge could be gained from them, provided they were all story and no reflection" (NA 5). Here, Austen applies the popular opinion of people of her time to her own heroine; reflection was deemed an admirable habit, and for Austen it was so as well. After all, the novels she wrote contain a large amount of useful knowledge, and at the point of epiphany the heroine reflects on her behaviour and opinions. In NA, this takes place after all Catherine's dramatic ideas and fantasies have been overthrown by Mr. Tilney, who bluntly tells her that she has been wrong in letting her mind run wild with secrets, and who demands that she "consult[s] [her] own understanding" (212). Catherine realises that "the infatuation had been created, the mischief settled long before her quitting Bath, and it seemed as if the whole thing might be traced to the influence of that sort of reading which she had there [i.e. in Bath] indulged" (NA 214).

However, even though her selective book choices leave Catherine ignorant and susceptible to many wrong ideas, her shame on being so is called "misplaced" (115). Austen calls Catherine's folly "natural" (115), and because Catherine is still young she can be easily rectified and taught how she is supposed to behave. On top of that, her ignorance allows her to become attached to Mr. Tilney, who knows much more about the world (115).

In SA, something much more influential is happening through novels, namely a rather brave decision of Austen regarding one of her characters, namely Sir Edward. Sir Edward is comparing himself to Richardson's Lovelace, a seductive villain from his novel *Clarissa*. Here, Austen's judgement is not aimed at the authors of the novel, or even the novel itself, but how readers process the novel and bend their behaviour accordingly: Sir Edward finds much more emotion in the novel "than could ever have been contemplated by the Authors" (SA

328). According to the explanatory footnotes accompanying SA, “[m]any of Richardson’s contemporaries worried that men would be more compelled by Lovelace’s charms than repelled by his wickedness” (Johnson 379). Apparently, Austen describes exactly what many feared would happen for real, and it makes Sir Edward a “dangerous Man” (SA 328): “if [Clara] could not be won by affection, he must carry her off. He knew his Business” (SA 328).

With the plotline of Sir Edward’s regard for Lovelace, Austen warns her readers that taking novels too seriously can be very dangerous to oneself and to others. The difference in Austen’s judgement of Catherine’s and Sir Edward’s behaviour may lie in their age: Catherine is young and is still supposed to learn, whereas Edward is clearly an adult man of the world; he “read[s] all the Essays, Letters, Tours and Criticisms of the day” (SA 328). Like Catherine’s, his reading is selective: he gains “false Principles from Lessons of Morality”, “Vice from the History of its Overthrow”, and “hard words [...] from the style of our most approved Writers” (all quotes from page 328).

Another difference between the two novels and their judgement of other novels is that NA mostly seems to criticise Gothic novels, which have very little to do with the real world, whereas Austen also warns her readers for the danger of other, more realistic novels. In NA, she is not so strict on the other novels, because Austen lets Tilney read them, and Mrs. Morland likes a novel now and then as well (NA 35).

All in all, Catherine can count herself lucky: her vices and flaws are discovered early on in her education when she is still young and can therefore be improved. Sir Edward, on the contrary, was not corrected in his ways by those supervising his education, and although he likes to pretend that he is a desirable man, the truth is that no one thinks of him favourably.

4.2: When to Approve of Novels

However, Austen also shows her readers that novels are not always a bad influence, and to this end she lets novels play a positive role in her characters' education and personal development. Especially in NA, Austen lets novels take a prominent place in the forming of friendships and even romantic relationships.

Catherine has a high opinion of Mr. Tilney, and consequently asks him, "But you never read novels, I dare say?" (110), to which Mr. Tilney replies that he in fact does: "the person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid" (110), and admits he has read many Gothic novels himself, and that "[his] hair [was] standing on end the whole time" (111). He even appears proud of all the "hundreds and hundreds" (111) of novels he has read, and the subject of novels then forms a lively subject for conversation, and an effective method of bonding between Catherine and Miss Tilney (NA 111-115). However, her knowledge of novels also leaves her at a certain advantage, because it enables Mr. Tilney to teach her more about this aspect of their mutual interests. After all, he "had entered [his] studies at Oxford, while [Catherine was] a little girl working on [her] sampler at home" (112), lending him authority in this field of knowledge as well.

In SA, Sir Edward tries to come across as someone who knows his literature, by quoting famous poets and their poems, but he mixes them up. Charlotte, though, knows more than he does about poems, and is able to correct him. Knowledge of poetry and literature was at the time desired by men. Austen lets a man misquote poetry, and thereby shows her readers exactly how ignorant he is. Charlotte is much more sensible, knowing that Sir Edward is making these mistakes, and she begins to "think of him as downright silly" (SA 323). This is expanded even more a bit further on in the novel, when Sir Edward and Charlotte discuss novels. Sir Edward's opinion of these is so far-fetched and overly sentimental, that Charlotte realises that "[their] taste in novels is not at all the same" (327). Because Charlotte is well-

read, she knows what he is talking about, and therefore she is not easily impressed by Sir Edwards description of what he considers a good novel.

Charlotte is described as “a sober-minded young lady, sufficiently well-read in Novels to supply her Imagination with amusement, but not at all unreasonably influenced by them” (317). Apparently, one’s imagination needs to be fed by fantasies, but there must be a proper balance: reading too many novels will let the imagination run wild, as will too little stimulation. After all, Charlotte likes to imagine and fantasise about Clara’s horrible life, but does not let this cloud her perception of reality (317), which is the exact opposite of what NA’s Catherine Morland does.

Despite Austen’s warning parody of what reading too many novels can cause, she is not blind to novels’ virtues. Novels can help found a friendship, or a romantic relationship, because they form an almost inexhaustible source for conversation as with Catherine and the Tilneys. They can help seeing through someone’s character, as with Charlotte and Sir Edward. Too many novels, however, will not be beneficial as both SA and NA show, as is the case with Catherine’s obsession with Gothic novels, and Sir Edward’s passion for being Lovelace.

Austen’s opinions on novels remain fairly constant during the years. In both her first novel and her last one she shows both sides of reading the novel, telling her readers why reading can be good, but also warning them for the pitfalls that come with reading books. She may be a defender of the novel in itself, but is not blind to either virtue or vice. However, she seems to have become a bit more severe in her opinions on novels: in NA she is supportive of reading novels except for the Gothic novel, but in SA she shows that even more serious novels can be misused.

Conclusion

Between writing *Northanger Abbey*, and it finally being published, many years passed. As Austen herself said in the Advertisement, in the interim, “period, places, manners, books and opinions” have changed. Because Austen herself explicitly mentions this, it suggests a change in opinions about the content of the novel, about opinions of conduct, education, or friendships. If this is the case, such changes would have made it into *Sanditon*, Austen’s last novel. Therefore, do Austen’s opinions on education in *Sanditon* differ from those in *Northanger Abbey*?

After thoroughly comparing *Northanger Abbey* and *Sanditon*, the change that Austen is referring to is not at all as radical and big as she makes her readers believe, at least not when it comes to education and learning. Austen lived in a time where education was often a topic of heated discussion, where many camps stood opposite each other. Although some critics, for instance Hoffman Baruch, like to think that Austen merely wanted to marry her female characters off to handsome men, her novels show that she above all valued good sense and good humour, and an ability to learn alongside her characters more than a bookish education. In her novels, three ways of gaining knowledge stand out: through various relationships, through life, and through novels.

Education partly comes from other people who are willing to become tutors and teachers of the young character. Mothers are very important, in both NA and SA, and a sensible mother can make a vast difference in how the heroine treats disappointments in life. Friends have to be chosen with care, because they too can steer one’s education in a good or a bad direction. In this part, Austen may have realised in between writing NA and SA, that wisdom does not only come with age, and shows this by letting SA’s Clara become a suitable friend for a widowed elder Lady. Moreover, there is the love relationship which is a very

good vehicle for the multiplying of knowledge: a man desires to educate a woman, and preferably vice versa as well although this does not (yet) happen in NA or SA. When such a tutor-pupil bond is formed, an even firmer connection can be made. In SA, it is shown the other way around: if a man is not able to teach a woman anything, he is not a suitable match for her.

Education can also be acquired through living life, which may sound simple but clearly does not have to be. In both NA and SA, some characters have gone through a rough life despite being young, whereas others have never encountered anything harder than an occasional disappointment in love. In both novels, Austen stimulates the readers to keep on their toes, to make sure the readers evaluate what happens to the characters in the novel, and extract a lesson from it like the characters. Miss Tilney (NA) and Miss Clara (SA) are clear examples of this. Life can also ask for a more active role to become wiser and mature. Through training one learns how to behave and what is expected of him or her, although these processes are to be guided by a tutor in order to come to the right conclusion.

Lastly, novels contain more knowledge than Austen's contemporaries liked to admit. Here is where a small change in opinion occurs, and even though it may seem like a small adjustment, it certainly calls for further research about this in her other novels. In NA, Austen is very positive about the novel, as long as it is written realistically and seriously. Her censure is mostly about the Gothic novel, which is too fantastical and whimsical. In SA, however, Austen also seems to have realised that serious novels, specifically Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), can be dangerous when they are read and applied wrongly.

All in all, Austen's opinion on educational matters did not change very much over the years. She still valued good sense, condemned weak and irresponsible characters, and rewarded her characters with a happy ending if they changed their ways. To be supported by people around you was important, and if your family was not as sensible as one might hope

for, Austen encouraged you to find it elsewhere. If anything, Austen seems to have grown slightly more severe on novels in SA, even though she still encourages everyone to read. Of course, reading novels needed to be done sensibly, like everything else.

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