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Moral Education in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*.

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Introduction

Jane Austen wrote her novels over two hundred years ago. Today many people, especially women, are still affected by them and her characters. She has become famous through her romantic novels where she writes about young women during the late 18th century who spend their days drinking tea and socializing in order to find a man, marry him and live happily ever after. Even though Austen writes romance and her novels remind the reader of fairy tales, she also focuses on presenting important passages and events that occur in these young women’s lives.

Many of the novels Austen has written have features of a so-called Bildungsroman; a novel about education which refers to a character’s growth and self-development. The structure of a Bildungsroman often includes the main character, the protagonist, going on a long journey or quest in search of the meaning of life. In this essay I will analyse the heroine’s education in Austen’s two novels *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* and how Austen educates the reader with these novels.

The purpose of this essay is to show that the heroines in *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* under a long period of time receive moral education through different people and events during their lives. However, it is not only the characters that are educated, my opinion is that the reader is educated as well. Both the reader and the heroines are taught that happiness can only be achieved by good education and high moral standards. I will use some of the features of a Bildungsroman, such as journey, self-development, obstacles and maturity and by examining these features in the novels, I will support my thesis.
A Journey
Like in the Bildungsroman, there are journeys made in Austen’s novels. The character’s actual journey in a Bildungsroman begins at an early age. It is a long process of maturity and involves arduous and exciting events which develop the protagonist’s life experience. In *Northanger Abbey*, the heroine’s journey is a search for meaningful existence within the society of Bath and in *Mansfield Park* it is a search for a home.

In Austen’s novels it is always young girls who are the heroines: girls of average conditions of life who know nothing of tragedies and passion in the world. In his book *Jane Austen: A French Appreciation*, Léonie Villard describes the young women in Austen’s novels as ignorant, kind, upright and sensible middle class “little sisters” (59). According to Suzanne Hader, a Bildungsroman often contains some form of loss at an early age which impels the heroine away from home and family to start her journey (1996). In *Northanger Abbey* the heroine, Catherine, has a family and living parents but they are seldom present. Catherine’s loss is rather that she lacks the social life other young women have. Her journey starts when she receives an invitation from her neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Allen, to join them for a visit to Bath. David. D. Devlin argues that the journey in Austen’s novels is a journey about moral education; a process where the heroine learns to see herself clearly and improves her conduct in order to become a better person (1-2). Catherine’s invitation to Bath is her chance to grow and encounter society and the real world. In *Mansfield Park*, the heroine Fanny’s journey starts when she is sent to live with her rich uncle and aunt, Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram at their estate. Fanny’s parents are too poor to take care of her and her eight siblings and therefore they send her away to Mansfield Park. Both Catherine and Fanny, like the other young women in Austen’s novels, are characters who are supposed to find a man, fall in love and eventually get married. In *Mansfield Park* Fanny grows up with her four cousins but is treated differently; she is inferior to them because she is poor and uneducated. When Fanny first arrives at Mansfield she is isolated from the other children. She is shy, does not play with them and feels uncomfortable in her new home, but she is also different because she is not so vivacious and witty as her cousins. The only person who cares for Fanny and treats her nicely is her cousin Edmund. He is the kindest one of the four siblings, and the only one who spends time with Fanny, and he becomes her hero since he saves her from loneliness. Edmund offers her real friendship and he and Fanny become best friends. From the day when Fanny and Edmund become friends she starts to feel more comfortable: “She felt that she had a friend, and the kindness of her cousin Edmund gave her better spirits with everybody else.
The place became less strange, and the people less formidable” (Mansfield Park 14). Fanny falls in love with Edmund from the beginning but she never tells him about her feelings. When they get older, and after a series of incidents and confusions, they both realise their feelings for each other and they get married.

The journey is supposed to help the young heroine in Austen’s novels to grow and become an adult, but this can only happen if she goes out into the dangerous world alone. Fanny is sent away on her journey alone as a child and Catherine visits Bath alone when she is young. Devlin says that when the reader first meets Fanny at the beginning of the novel, she is just a poor adopted child and an outsider, but by the end of the novel she has grown, moved to the centre of the story and is needed by everyone at Mansfield. He also says that Fanny rises from being insignificant to important (30). Marilyn Butler argues that going out into the dangerous social world alone makes the heroine, like Ann Radcliffe’s heroine in the Gothic genre, “isolated and surrounded by strangers, enemies or equivocal friends” (xxvii). Austen uses this element of the Gothic genre in Northanger Abbey to help the reader see the dangers in the social world.

**Self-development**

Austen’s novels are truly about education, however, not the kind of education associated with school but about moral education. Devlin claims that writing about morals is a way for Austen to teach and remind the reader that seeing the world as it is, is important in order to become happy. To know facts and to have knowledge about the world prevents one from being mentally blind and unhappy (2-17). In both Northanger Abbey and Mansfield Park the heroine changes from a young girl into a mature woman who learns to think further and see the world clearly. The women are taught to see the world from the mentor’s perspective. In Mansfield Park Edmund Bertram teaches Fanny and becomes her mentor. His friendship never fails her and his love makes it possible for Fanny to grow mentally. In Northanger Abbey Catherine makes new acquaintances and meets Henry Tilney, who becomes her mentor. Catherine is described as a stranger to the world, but not as a complete stranger; she has some moral education that is enough to allow a certain level of social intercourse. The purpose of her visit to Bath is to be trained to encounter a society which is all about going to parties and finding a suitor. Mrs. Allen, who is supposed to teach Catherine, lacks in morals and manners herself and ends up only studying other people’s looks and clothes instead of teaching Catherine about morals:
There goes a strange-looking woman! What an odd gown she has got on! How old fashioned it is! Look at the back!”  

Austen describes Mrs. Allen as lazy and she is not the ideal woman in the novel. Mrs. Allen is lazy because she does not pay any attention to Catherine; she does not seem to care much about what Catherine does or decides: “Then I will. Shall I go, Mrs. Allen? Do just as you please, my dear”, replied Mrs. Allen, with the most placid indifference. 

In Mansfield Park there is another lazy character, one who Austen also describes as a person who does not care about educating her daughters: Lady Bertram. 

To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. 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. (Mansfield Park 16) 

In Mansfield Park the heroine is not the only one who is educated, but the other characters are educated as well. When Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park she is mocked for her lack of education and her uncle and aunt, Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris, always say she is far from clever. But as Tony Tanner points out, Austen’s heroines have to be educated by someone; they always have a tutor. Fanny is the one who educates the others and she ends up teaching the people at Mansfield. She teaches about good manners since she is more intelligent than the other characters (Tanner 24). Vivien Jones argues that Fanny is the one who brings the moral feeling to Mansfield. Austen shows that the people at Mansfield Park have failed to live up to their moral responsibilities and they are described as people with moral failings. Fanny is the only one at Mansfield Park whose actions are morally right and truthful, even though she never received a formal education (Jones 99). Fanny is not like the Bertram sisters and in one scene Mrs. Norris claims that Fanny is not and will not be as handsome as her Bertram cousins (Mansfield Park 5). Mrs. Norris, who intimidates and bullies Fanny, treats her niece as a servant and is always harassing her. Fanny is truly not a Bertram and this can be seen at the end of the novel when Sir Thomas himself acknowledges what is wrong with his daughters. Here, Sir Thomas becomes aware of errors in the education of his daughters. Ian Littlewood describes the Bertram sisters as young women who have “acquired grace of manner but not of character” (viii). In this important passage Sir Thomas realizes he has made errors in his own conduct as a parent and that he now has to suffer for it (Mansfield Park 370). He also shows great signs of self-development at the end of the novel.
when he claims that “Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted” (Mansfield Park 379). According to Robert Irvine, Sir Thomas realizes in the end that Mrs. Norris is to blame for the miseducation of his daughters and for treating Fanny badly (64).

Fanny and Mary Crawford, a character who becomes Fanny’s competitor, are both in love with Edmund but are otherwise very dissimilar. Joel C. Weinsheimer describes Mary as a “witty, sarcastic and humorous” character who lacks everything that Fanny has (186). Even though Fanny is poor, uneducated and not as attractive as Mary, she possesses the moral feeling which Mary is missing. Fanny has always lived in her cousin’s shadow, but she is the one who manages to catch Edmund’s heart just because of the moral feeling she has. At the end of the novel, Edmund grows and changes when he realizes his love for Fanny and that he has loved her from the beginning. He learns to see the importance of being intelligent and truthful more clearly. Littlewood says that “the Crawfords are intended to be attractive, Fanny and Edmund are intended to lack sparkle”, and also argues that it is the whole point with the novel: to choose virtue means choosing the less attractive option (viii).

Austen presents through various characters what false education can lead to by having characters such as Mary and Henry Crawford in Mansfield Park, and Isabella and John Thorpe in Northanger Abbey. These characters are the result of bad education, lack of good manners and intelligence, and therefore they do not receive the proper moral education and develop as moral beings. Even if Isabella does not have moral knowledge she has social knowledge; she has social skills and knows how to flirt with men but she does not take anything seriously. For this reason her personality does not change; she does not change from a bad person to a good person. Mary Crawford on the other hand, does not accept a marriage that will make her the wife of a clergyman. She is not capable of loving anybody and therefore she does not change either. Mary has, like Isabella, never known true love. Conversely, this receptibility through proper groundwork is precisely the reason why Fanny grows and becomes mature; she is capable of loving people. Like Fanny, Catherine changes and grows. When Catherine arrives at Bath she is not fully educated and does not have full knowledge about life. Her life is all about Gothic romance stories and she lives in a world of fantasy. She is described as a young girl who “never could learn or understand anything before she was taught” (Northanger Abbey 3). She is also a girl with an affectionate heart who has much to learn about life.

Austen portrays Catherine as the female character in Ann Radcliffe’s Gothic novel, The Mysteries of Udolpho, where femininity is vulnerable. Catherine is supposed to be vulnerable
and Henry is supposed to be the hero who is going to save her. Devlin describes Henry as fully developed both morally and socially and argues that he guides her into the real world (29). He does not need to change since he already is mature; that is, he cannot change from a good person to a bad one. Henry tries to teach Catherine to reject fiction as it is preventing her from seeing facts and he wants her to stop inventing stories. Butler claims that when Catherine goes to the abbey, she also “takes the reader with her into the setting and plot of a Radcliffean novel of terror, mystery and self-induced illusion” (xxvii). Henry helps Catherine see the world in a different way, he can distinguish between fantasy and reality and he enables her to see people for who they really are, for example Isabella and her brother John.

John Thorpe is the very opposite of Henry Tilney. Henry is a gentleman, he is kind and charming and most of all he is honest. John however is not truthful; he curses, lies and his manners do not please Catherine, which is evident when he meets his sisters:

> On his two younger sisters he then bestowed an equal portion of his fraternal tenderness, for he asked each of them how they did, and observed that they both looked very ugly. *(Northanger Abbey 31)*

John is not the ideal husband in Austen’s novel. The narrator clearly shows that Catherine is not supposed to like him or fall in love with him since he does not have good manners. Tanner says that education for Austen is more about behaving properly and having “truly good manners rather than any range of skills or information” (24). During her visit to Bath Catherine learns to be aware of herself and of others. She grows and this is only possible because she loves Henry.

The heroine’s growth in self-confidence is an important and constant theme in *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*. At the end of the novel Fanny has grown and the reader sees her as an adult and the real heir to Mansfield Park. Jones argues that the person who has been mainly responsible for Fanny’s self-development and education is Edmund (105). In one passage of the novel Edmund tells Fanny that he is impressed by her meditation on the effects of nature and she tells him: “You taught me to think and feel on the subject, cousin” *(Mansfield Park 92)*. Edmund is the man she looks up to as an authoritative figure and Irvine claims that the relationship Fanny has with Edmund is another example “of a heroine’s relation to a lover-mentor, a man whom she can love because he is better and more knowledgeable than she is” (67), which is the same type of relationship Catherine has with Henry Tilney.
It is not only Catherine and Fanny that are educated but also the reader; the reader can benefit and learn from the events in the novel. Novels have an impact on readers’ behaviour and Austen wants to engage and educate the reader morally as well. Villard points out that if the reader tries to understand and look closer on the events that happen to the heroines, he or she will find out that for Austen any education “which does not concentrate on developing the common sense and love of truth and right-thinking which every normal being ought to possess” is worthless (69). As a reader it is possible to predict with some certainty how the character is likely to behave in a given situation, even though the reader does not get to know everything about the situation. The reader also does not get to know much about other characters and events apart from what the heroine already knows since these novels are localized through the protagonist. According to Johan Odmark, following the heroine gives the reader the opportunity to re-evaluate what he or she has already learned and to speculate about future events which the heroine will confront (61). Every action and event has different consequences which must be followed by alternatives and the reader gets the opportunity to speculate about. Each decision the heroine makes has consequences that both the heroine and the reader learn from. When Catherine accepts the invitation to Bath, her choice has consequences. The journey gives her the opportunity to meet the hero and she falls in love. But she also meets obstacles and every event and action has different consequences which are supposed to affect the reader so that he or she can discover the difference between attractive appearance and real value. Even Fanny’s move to Mansfield Park has consequences; she becomes isolated, inferior and is treated differently by her cousins. She falls in love and meets obstacles as well, which prevents her from being with Edmund. Jones argues that the heart-rending presentation about Fanny’s isolation is supposed to affect the reader and sympathise with Fanny. Since the reader is able to share her experience and see things more clearly than she does, the reader can also understand the causes of her isolation (90). Odmark also claims that Austen has advantage of the reader because she knows the extent of the reader’s familiarity with the characters and she knows what the reader’s expectations and responses are likely to be in a given situation (42).

**Antagonists and Obstacles**

Austen’s novels often contain conflicts between the heroine and society. As the heroines in the two novels are sent out into the dangerous world alone, they meet their mentor but they also meet antagonists who become obstacles in their pursuit of happiness. In my opinion, the
The antagonist in these novels is described as someone who is standing in the way and preventing the heroine from doing something she desires. The antagonist in a Bildungsroman creates obstacles that the protagonist must overcome, and in Austen’s novels there are several antagonists. John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* is one of them. He is dishonest and tries to prevent Catherine from seeing the Tilneys since he is in love with her. Austen describes his manners as improper and he uses a rude language when he curses. He also lies to Catherine about the Tilneys having left their house and tries to convince her that she is unwanted by them (*Northanger Abbey* 60). Catherine learns, from John and Isabella Thorpe, how not to behave in society. Isabella is also an obstacle to Catherine’s happiness. She tries to encourage Catherine into a relationship with Mr. Thorpe and thereby ruin Catherine’s chances to be with Henry. Isabella has to make sure her brother is happy, she cannot be happy if her brother is unhappy because then the whole family would be unhappy as well. Isabella is a young woman who likes gossip and she flirts with other men, such as Captain Tilney. She is also unfaithful to her fiancé, James, because she flirts with Captain Tilney while she is still engaged: “A little harmless flirtation or so will occur, and one is often drawn on to give more encouragement than one wishes to stand by” she tells Catherine (*Northanger Abbey* 103).

Like the Thorpes there are also antagonists in *Mansfield Park*, but it is not until Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park that she learns of villainy and scandals. There she meets the siblings Henry and Mary Crawford who become obstacles to Fanny’s pursuit of happiness. Henry and his sister Mary arrive at the village and make acquaintances with the cousins at Mansfield, but as soon as they arrive they disrupt the calm world of Mansfield resulting in a series of scandals at the mansion. During the same time Sir Thomas leaves to visit Sotherton and the young people at Mansfield Park show their true selves since Sir Thomas is no longer there to control and direct his children’s behaviour. The Crawfords can be seen as antagonists in the novel because they behave improperly and their actions are considered arrogant and false. Fanny learns to see how people outside Mansfield Park can behave and she is educated by the two bad siblings. Like Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*, she learns how one should not behave in society. Mary is always standing in the way for Fanny’s happiness and preventing Fanny from being with Edmund. It is not until Mary arrives that Fanny realizes she has to compete with Mary to win Edmund’s heart. Edmund finds Mary Crawford a beautiful and charming woman and Fanny is jealous of Mary’s influence over Edmund. She believes Mary might have enchanted Edmund and fooled him into falling in love with her. After a while, Edmund
realizes that Mary lacks many things that Fanny has. Mary has very fashionable manners but a lack of firm principles, and she is not like Fanny:

Miss Crawford was very unlike her. She had none of Fanny’s delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling; she saw Nature, inanimate Nature, with little observation; her attention was all for men and women, her talents for the light and lively. (Mansfield Park 65)

Henry Crawford is described as attractive, handsome and rich as well, but he is also rude and selfish. Knowing that Maria Bertram is already engaged to the rich Mr. Rushworth Henry flirts and plays with her affections and makes her fall in love with him. He also flirts with Julia, the other sister, but she does not get the same attention as Maria does. Henry becomes an obstacle to Mr. Rushworth as Maria believes that Henry is in love with her and starts treating her fiancé coldly. Fanny witnesses these situations between Henry and the sisters and she believes he behaves improperly and that he has no manners. He also becomes an obstacle to Fanny when he decides to amuse himself with making Fanny fall in love with him. Fanny rejects Henry since she loves Edmund, and does not like Henry’s principles (Mansfield Park 254). She hopes that he will leave Mansfield: “If Mr. Crawford would but go away! – That was what she most earnestly desired” (Mansfield Park 248). When Fanny rejects Henry, her uncle becomes upset with her as he believes that Fanny does not appreciate Henry as a husband. Sir Thomas starts to believe that she is ungrateful and sends her to her poor family in Portsmouth, hoping that she will suffer from lack of comforts and realize how useful it is to have a good income and thereby marry Henry instead of rejecting him. Through these actions, Sir Thomas becomes an antagonist since he is an obstacle to Fanny’s happiness as well. He sends her away and accuses her of being spoiled and not being able to appreciate people who want to do good deeds for her. He claims she should be thankful instead. Austen lets the characters experience a series of conflicts and confusions and they learn to become aware of the dangerous world they are living in. At the end of the novel Edmund changes and realizes that he belongs in Fanny’s world where everything is morally right: “Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire” (Mansfield Park 378).

The contrast between Isabella Thorpe and Catherine in Northanger Abbey can be seen in terms of the true and the false heroine. The difference between Catherine and Isabella is that Isabella wants to marry for money, even if she is constantly repeating that she does not care about money. Her behaviour is described as improper when she ends the relationship
with her fiancé, James, for a richer man. Catherine is gullible and believes Isabella is in love
with James, and therefore she is bewildered by Isabella’s flirtation with Captain Tilney:

It seemed to her that Captain Tilney was falling in love with Isabella, and
Isabella unconsciously encouraging him; unconsciously it must be, for
Isabella’s attachment to James was as certain and well acknowledged
as her engagement. (*Northanger Abbey* 106)

Isabella is described as untruthful, selfish and incapable of loving anybody except herself.
David Blair says that Austen has portrayed Isabella as a snake who lies and acts falsely, but
that it is just a way for the author to allow the reader to see that Isabella is a product of her
society (x). Devlin argues that Catherine has been taught to always be honest and not tell any
lies, and especially not to increase one’s importance; in other words, she cannot lie like
Isabella can but she can only speak the truth (43). According to Jones, Catherine’s
straightforwardness is a sign of honesty whereas Isabella’s exaggeration is a sign of
unreliability (12).

As a contrast to Isabella and her selfishness there is Mr. Tilney’s sister, Ms. Tilney,
who Catherine also learns from. Ms. Tilney is always honest and, like Catherine, she does not
want to marry for money but of love. She shows Catherine how to be a true friend, and this
helps Catherine to see the difference between a true friend and a false friend. Ms. Tilney’s
friendship is very important to Catherine since she is Henry’s sister and the only way for
Catherine to meet Henry, and to make an acquaintance with him, is by becoming friends with
his sister. This is also important to Isabella; in order to meet Catherine’s brother James, she
has to become friends with Catherine.

General Tilney is also an antagonist who becomes an obstacle in Catherine’s
pursuit of happiness. He banishes Catherine and rejects her only because of her lack of
fortune, and his reasoning is horrible when he uses his daughter, Ms. Tilney, to get rid of
Catherine in the middle of the night. General Tilney is hostile because he does not know the
whole truth about Catherine who he believes to be very poor. He is an obstacle to his
children’s happiness as well because he only wants his children to marry for money, and
therefore rejects Catherine. General Tilney married his wife because of her fortune and not
out of love. Compared to his son Henry, General Tilney is not capable of loving anybody and
therefore he has no moral feeling. Isabella, John Thorpe and General Tilney are antagonists
who are constantly standing in the way for Catherine’s happiness, but they are characters who
Catherine also learns from; she learns how one should not behave in society.
Catherine is educated by the false characters, as she learns that their manners are unethical. Austen clearly shows different behaviours; characters with good manners and those with bad ones. Jones points out that manners is an important word in Austen’s novels, and how it can be seen as the opposite to money and economic criteria which the characters in Austen’s novels always are judged by (39). With characters such as Henry Tilney, Catherine, Edmund and Fanny, Austen educates the reader and shows the better self: an honest, consistent and orderly character who behaves well. He or she has good manners, speaks grammatically correctly and in orderly fashion. Henry Tilney speaks orderly and behaves charmingly. The antagonists in the novel do not behave this way. John Thorpe, whose conversation is mostly about horses, does not charm Catherine when he curses and lies to her. According to Odmark, Austen uses manners to mirror the character’s morals (10). It can be seen in the novel that characters with good manners are the result of good education and morals. Jones also says that the way the characters speak is usually a good indication of how they are to be judged (13).

Austen’s novels are often centred on the heroine, but it is important to distinguish between the author, the narrator and the characters. The narrator in both Mansfield Park and Northanger Abbey is a third person omniscient narrator with a prominent role. In both novels the story is told through the perspective of the heroine. Since the heroine has no one whom she can talk to about things that concern her, the omniscient narrator becomes necessary because he gives the reader inside views and analyses the heroine’s thoughts and feelings (Odmark 14). The story cannot be told from a villain’s point of view as it then would not be a truthful version; the reader would not receive a true education. But there are also episodes that are not told because the narrator does not seem to know about them. For example, in Northanger Abbey Catherine knows Mr. Tilney’s mother is dead but she, and the reader, does not know why the mother died; she just has her own ideas: “Could it be possible? Could Henry’s father?” (Northanger Abbey 136). It is unclear if this secret is hidden from the reader on purpose or if the narrator does not know about it.

As mentioned earlier, travelling is a part of the education in Austen’s novels and it is during the journey to other places that the heroine meets different people, makes new acquaintances and grows. The invitation to Bath makes it possible for Catherine to meet the mentor and the antagonists, and the invitation to Northanger Abbey makes her experience unpleasantness when she is thrown out. In Mansfield Park Fanny meets Edmund when she moves to her cousins and Austen shows through Fanny how to behave morally. Fanny’s
personality does not change; she remains kind and sensitive even when her cousins, uncle and aunts treat her badly. Butler claims that Austen’s heroines in *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* grow up and change as they enter an adult world containing predators (xxvii). Fanny’s uncle and aunt, Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram, also change and begin to appreciate Fanny more in the end. What the heroine receives during her journey is moral education where she grows and develops as a person. She learns to see the world clearly and everything she experiences has an impact on her behaviour. It is a way for the author to help the reader to become aware of the real world and the dangers in the social world. In Austen’s novels it is often in the end that the characters learn to see clearly, after a long and arduous journey.

**Maturity**

The goal in a Bildungsroman is maturity and the character achieves it gradually and with difficulty during the journey. Austen’s novels always focus on love and happiness as the goal and it is important that the heroine marries well. Both *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* are fairy tales with happy endings. The young heroines are sent away from home and they experience a journey with complications. During their journey they meet villains but are saved by a hero who they eventually marry, and thereby Austen gives the story a happy ending. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine falls in love with Henry and she marries him in the end, but even before the marriage Henry becomes Catherine’s mentor and educates her. The mentor in Austen’s novels is not called a mentor but it is the relationship he has with the young heroine which makes him become her mentor. Odomark argues that in Austen’s novels one character has superior knowledge but this is not the same as him being socially superior (43). In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry has more experience and knowledge than the young heroine and the other characters. The mentor in both *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* is kind and sensitive, he has good morals, manners and education. He can also distinguish between reality and fantasy and through this, he becomes the perfect man. Henry in *Northanger Abbey* is brought to the centre of the novel because of the moral education he already has. He teaches Catherine and therefore he becomes her mentor. He succeeds in educating Catherine only because of what he is: educated, handsome, kind, charming and because of his love for her. But he is also heroic as he saves the heroine from loneliness and helps her to overcome the obstacles. Devlin argues that in Austen’s novels “moral education is possible only where there is love, a real personal regard for one person by another” (32).
In order to overcome the obstacles, the heroine has to have knowledge about the real world and not trust everything or everyone. Catherine reads Gothic romances, and her addiction to fiction novels leads her astray and influences her so that she becomes blind to the real world. She reads *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and this novel is damaging her; she interprets reality through the categories of the Gothic novel, and she lives in a world of her own—a world of fantasy where the abbey is an old castle and a characteristic setting for murder:

> The very curtains of her bed seemed at one moment in motion, and at another the lock of her door was agitated, as if by the attempt of somebody to enter. Hollow murmurs seemed to creep along the gallery, and more than once her blood was chilled by the sound of distant moans. (*Northanger Abbey* 124)

It is only Catherine’s imagination that makes her believe General Tilney killed his wife. When Henry finds out about her suspicion and imagination, he reminds her that it is perhaps not a good idea to read too much: “Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?” (*Northanger Abbey* 144). Catherine’s imagination about a horrific murder at the abbey has made her draw her own conclusion which upsets Henry, therefore he tries to teach her how to see the real world. He, who is a clergyman, tells her that in the real world they are Christians and educated, they have manners and sense enough not to do such things as murder: “Does our education prepare us for such atrocities?” (*Northanger Abbey* 144).

There are periods of uncertainty for the reader, and the visit to the abbey becomes a case of mystery, both for the reader and the character, since there are events that Catherine is not familiar with and cannot explain. The story thus becomes a case of mystery because of the unknown. The reader follows the events mainly through Catherine’s eyes because she is present all the time. Like the Radcliffean novel, there are perspectives of uncertainty in *Northanger Abbey* because of the heroine’s lack of experience and knowledge. According to Jones, Henry is the realistic one who brings Catherine down back to earth and reality (3). It is not only Catherine who is brought back to reality but also the reader who learns that the imagination might be misleading. Henry is a successful teacher and wants to teach Catherine because he is in love with her. In the above-mentioned scene, where Henry is teaching her how reality works and that she should not trust everything she reads, Catherine learns to see the world more clearly. Henry also helps Catherine to change and see others for who they really are, like the Thorpes. Henry’s love leads her from blindness to insight. When she realizes she has been wrong about General Tilney killing his wife, she becomes ashamed of
herself and sheds her illusions. She learns that the world of fiction, which she has in her mind, is not the real world. Odmark also says that the heroine in Austen’s novels “undergoes an educational process which leads her to perceive her own error in the light of an objective reality” (43). Love and marriage becomes a relationship of moral education between the woman and her husband; he becomes the mentor who teaches her about the real world and she is his well taught pupil and wife.

In *Mansfield Park* Austen shows another charming heroic figure, Edmund Bertram; a kind and sensitive person who becomes Fanny’s mentor. Edmund is warm and has a human contact that is very different from that which his sisters and Sir Thomas show to Fanny. Fanny is described as humble, intelligent, shy and sensitive. She has a good sense of morals and obeys her uncle and aunt. Her world is nothing like her cousins, she helps take care of the household and she is an indispensable part of it. Edmund teaches Fanny to read and to play games. He is also the only one who plays with her when they are young and even when they grow up he teaches her horse riding. Edmund is the perfect man with superior knowledge who Fanny falls in love with. In contrast to Edmund, there is Henry Crawford, a man who fools girls and amuses himself with letting the girls fall in love with him by flirting with them. He is described as dishonest, rude and selfish with bad manners. Austen portrays Henry as the non-ideal husband and it is his bad manners that make Fanny reject him. Fanny loves Edmund and finds his manners morally right since he does not flirt with other women like Henry does.

Mary Crawford has affections for Edmund and wants to marry him, but she does not want to marry him when he refuses to give up becoming a clergyman. She is vain and selfish because she wants Edmund to give up his dreams while she mainly wants to marry for money. She does not want to marry a man with a small income and therefore she wants him to change his occupation. According to Jones, Mary is much more interested in social status than in individuals, and she is impressed by the thought of Tom Bertram becoming Sir Thomas in the future, moreover Mary disagrees with Edmund’s view that the clergy have an important status and influence on society (92).

Fanny, however, loves everything about Edmund and does not ask of him to change. She accepts everything about him because she is deeply in love with him. Austen also shows the reader another selfish character: Mrs. Norris, Lady Bertram’s sister. She does not have any feelings for her husband and only married him for the money. Sir Thomas tries to force a similar marriage on Fanny when he tells her that Henry has asked for her hand: “Refuse Mr.

Fanny always obeys Sir Thomas except in the above mentioned scene, she does not submit to him. When Fanny uses these words she shows what is morally right; she simply cannot marry someone she does not love. Fanny is described as independent and truthful. Her behaviour is nothing like the Bertram sisters’ and therefore Sir Thomas is angry with her because Fanny’s rejection threatens his whole world.

At the end of both novels, the heroines marry the men they love. In each case these happen to be men whose incomes are quite large enough to ensure that they will be able to live comfortably for the rest of their lives. Incomes are constantly discussed in all of Austen’s novels and the author always lets the reader know how wealthy a character is. By mentioning a certain amount of money or the signs of them, such as the house, the furnishing or the number of servants, the author lets the reader know how rich the character is. Those characters who have good moral education and manners are the ones who marry of love. Austen shows the reader that moral education is not only about marrying for the right reason but also about the quality of a person’s personality. Even though Edmund is handsome and charming, Mary Crawford wants a large income more than she wants him (*Mansfield Park* 75). Only those characters that are badly educated and who do not know true love- like Mary, General Tilney and Isabella Thorpe- want to marry for money. They are the ones who fail to live in happiness because money and incomes are more important to them than love and happiness.

In both *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*, marriage becomes a question of social and economic status. *Mansfield Park* begins with a description of who Lady Bertram and her sisters have married and their incomes. Mary Crawford, like Mrs. Norris and Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*, wants to marry well and marriage for them is described by Devlin as “a take- in; if one is going to be taken in it might as well be on the most favourable financial terms” (33). According to Jones, the reader is supposed to be affected and argue that marriage should be a moral contact between individuals, rather than a financial takeover (36). At the beginning of the novel, Mrs. Norris says to Sir Thomas to give Fanny “an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without farther expense to anybody” (*Mansfield Park* 5). Edward Copeland argues that in this scene Mrs. Norris’s statement is all about the money but it does not turn out to be as she predicts. Instead, Fanny happily marries a clergyman with a small income and lives a happy
life. Copeland also points out that “income, the economic paradigm with which Austen seeks to measure the social and moral dilemma of Mansfield Park, fails to clarify” (Copeland, McMaster 141). Edmund is charmed by the rich Mary Crawford but he learns, after a series of scandals, to see that Mary is not the right one for him and therefore he chooses Fanny in the end. The other girls at Mansfield Park become entangled in flirtations and different intrigues, but Fanny is the only one who remains true. When Edmund’s brother Tom puts on a play, Fanny is the only one who refuses to take part in it knowing her uncle would not approve of it. She finds the play itself as improper for young single people to put on and therefore she chooses only to observe the others.

Throughout the two novels the question of moral education is always portrayed. The Thorpes, the Crawfords, the Bertram sisters, Lady Bertram and Sir Thomas are characters described as victims of bad education. Austen’s novels always end in marriage and it is a way for the author to give the novel a logical conclusion and a happy ending where the heroine has finally become mature. Odmark claims that “the proposal which marks the climax of each of these novels indicates that all of the obstacles standing in the way of marriage have been overcome” (122). The proposal becomes the turning point in the novel where the heroine finally learns to see the world clearly and Austen shows that it is when the heroine marries the hero that she has improved her conduct and become mature. The path to a happy marriage in these novels is a series of complications and adventures, which result in the development and growth of the young heroine.
Conclusion

When people read Jane Austen’s novels they are not only reading romantic love stories but also stories about the real world. Austen focuses on educating the reader through the heroine’s experiences and teaching about morals. She shows that there is a certain way to behave in society; it is important to have good manners, intelligence and to be truthful. The heroines in *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* grow and receive an education that has nothing to do with school but it is an education of how to behave in real life and how to see the real world. On their journey they experience a series of confusions and obstacles which makes them reflect and find out how to overcome the difficulties. The heroines have mentors who help them to overcome these obstacles and, at the end of the novels, the heroines have grown and learned more about life. They become mature married women with good moral education. It seems like Austen had such a didactic purpose in mind when she wrote her novels, like she wanted to engage and educate the reader. She teaches about morals by having different characters in her novels with different personalities. It is a way for Austen to let the reader become aware of untrustworthy people in the world. As readers we are supposed to be affected by these characters and their actions.

Finally, Austen shows that honesty and consistency are the results of good education as well. The heroine always becomes happier in the end, after she has received a good moral education. She becomes mature and is aware of dangers in the world. Austen shows the reader that in order to become happy one has to be able to love as well. The heroines fall in love, and this is the only reason they change and grow- they learn what true love is. Greediness and selfishness are qualities which the false characters possess and therefore they fail to live in happiness. The heroines are taught very well by their mentors but also by the antagonists; Austen shows those with good manners and those with bad manners. Characters with bad manners are often the result of false and bad education which makes them blind and unhappy. As the heroine grows, she receives a strong and consistent education that helps her to develop and become mature. At the same time, the reader acquires the same education as the heroine- a moral education.
Works cited

Primary source

Secondary source


