The Making of Jane Austen

Devoney Looser

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

Textbook Austens

From McGuffey's Readers to *National Lampoon*

CliffsNotes, SparkNotes, and Googling for knowledge shortcuts, rather than reading the textbook, may seem a sadly modern student practice—"sadly," at least, to teachers. It's true that some aspects of it form a *modern* practice. In other ways, however, these sources sound new notes in a very old key. The late nineteenth century had its own pamphlets and books designed to help students take and pass that era's interminable tests. Because exams might determine a young person's future, the stakes were high. One way we can tell that Jane Austen had arrived in late nineteenth-century school curricula is that she began to be featured in study guides for the resourceful Victorian cribber.

H. A. (Austin) Dobson's *The Civil Service Handbook of English Literature* (1874), describes itself in its very subtitle as "for the use of candidates for examinations, public schools, and students generally." Dobson acknowledges that most of his information is recycled from previous sources and that several competing titles have appeared in the previous three years. His contents are limited to a discussion of principal English authors, the leading characteristics of their productions, and the prominent events of their lives. In his introduction, he articulates what he and his readers already knew: these books were necessary because students' "time and opportunities were restricted."[1] Dobson was offering them time-saving and expanded opportunities, giving them material to answer successfully the questions that would be posed. In his half page devoted to "Miss Austen," Dobson describes her as a "quiet and placid clergyman's daughter," using the funny line that her "life of retirement" was only once broken by four years of "mild dissipation" in Bath. Dobson uses G. H. Lewes's words of praise of Austen, along with Sir Walter Scott's, to buttress her inclusion among the major greats, but he also

names her as a novelist (or, once, a "lady novelist") whose works "have not even yet been surpassed" "on her own ground" (184).

Little commentary exists on Austen's place in nineteenth-century English curricula and textbooks. Dobson's *Civil Service Handbook of English Literature* is unusual in that it's mentioned briefly by Austen critic B. C. Southam. He notes that Dobson's textbook was many times reprinted and that its account of Austen as "the quiet and placid clergyman's daughter" would have been seen by "students by the ten-thousand," which "must have assisted in the transmission of this touching fantasy."[2] We might add something else, too, after letting that idea and that enormous number sink in. Late nineteenth-century students by the tens of thousands would also have seen the assessment that Austen had "not even yet been surpassed." Making these conclusions all the more powerful is the fact that textbook authors frequently echoed the work of their predecessors. In a "new" college textbook published more than fifty years later in 1925, Benjamin Brawley recycles every one of Dobson's key words in his own Jane Austen entry.[3]

The few lines on Austen that made it into the early textbooks were immensely important. What details would be emphasized? How would tens of thousands be led to think about, to label, Austen's fiction? Descriptions like "quiet and placid" were, for a time, fighting words. "Not even yet been surpassed" was a judgment of greatness and achievement but also an indictment of the present age for fiction. What would the textbooks tell students about how to understand Austen's scale, scope, and place in the (small and/or large? literary and/or political?) world? Whether writ large or small, Austen's position in these textbooks communicated things—often conflicting things—about literary value, educational aspirations, or sex and society. The word and phrase "novelist" versus "lady novelist" mattered and still does.

We've overestimated the extent to which Austen's established critics served to create her legacy in schools and elsewhere. Critics mattered. But the textbook authors, the teachers using the materials, and the students reading them were imprinting their own versions of Austen, too. This chapter looks at the history of using Jane Austen's writings in textbooks and schools, an arena in which she has tended to be presented at her most conservative, although we haven't previously set out to document much of it. (The story of Austen *adaptations* in education is far more complicated, given the school dramatizations described in chapter 4 and the work with Austen and film described at the end of this chapter.) As a closer examination of Austen in English curricula and textbooks of the late nineteenth century

and after shows, they often shared rhetorical features with the men's club Janeite set. Teaching materials depreciated Austen's small life and her fiction's limited scope, while touting her artistry and citing her most visible Great Male fans. School editions had a profound impact on the emergence of scholarly ones. Once we uncover this, we can see some of what the drama-in-education boosters and the suffragists were up against. That stage and street activist work was antithetical to the safe, small Austen who was most often presented in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature textbooks.

The "lessons" taught by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century print excerpts and abridgments of Austen's writings tended to reinforce existing social structures, especially in terms of class, culture, and "taste." They made those choices rather than highlighting her satire, hints toward social change, or examination of gender roles in courtship or marriage. When questions of social power were taken up in these teaching materials, it was most often to suggest that Austen's work reinforced individual self-determination and warned against vulgarity or greed. Of course, this was a view that could be embraced by progressive reformers, as well as conservative traditionalists. Inculcating "taste" in the working classes through literary reading could be advanced as a mechanism for social change. But few of the textbooks describe their educational aims quite that directly. What they are more easily read for is their omissions. Because the early teaching of English literature also stressed elocution, Austen's humor was occasionally featured, but it was usually her gentle humor (as with Thomson's illustrations), rather than her most satirical or biting humor. *Emma* proved a far more popular text to excerpt in early textbooks, with early abridgments favoring *Pride and Prejudice* above all others.

It remains challenging to trace the teaching of Austen over time.[4] In part, it's because the materials to do so fly further under the radar than is the norm. Many illustrated editions of Austen's novels have become collectible objects, but early teaching editions of her novels (usually unillustrated) tend to be among the least prized or consulted. We could, however, learn a great deal about the teaching of Austen in a historical frame by studying the library holdings, gift and school inscriptions, and marginalia located in these teaching editions, whether for Austen or other authors, were we able to compile it. It's clear, as we saw in the discussion on illustration, that Austen's novels were often used as prizes for school competitions. Many classroom copies also include students' penciled endpaper notes, often trying to keep the names of characters straight or taking notes on themes. Few have attempted

to collect this sort of information from extant individual copies of Austen's novels, although the Reading Experience Database and Book Traces crowdsourced web projects would be models for doing so and could allow further patterns of classroom use to be identified.[5]

Despite an incredibly rich (and impossibly large and diffuse) amount of data, we know comparatively little about Austen's entrance into schools and colleges.[6] That's true whether we're talking about studies of recommended curricula, institutional practices, pioneering pedagogues, or teaching texts. Various kinds of documentary and anecdotal evidence survive, including the school affiliations of many early editors of Austen teaching editions, who presumably sometimes also taught Austen themselves. At the least, we know their editions were implicitly or explicitly recommending that *others* do so. What we can establish with certainty is that there was talk of including Jane Austen's books in a system of mass public instruction far earlier than most of us would assume. As early as 1838, an American author turned educational philosopher, Enoch Cobb Wines (1806–79), was recommending Austen's books—in a long list of others—as appropriate reading in a course of "popular education." There may turn out to be others before him, but he seems a remarkably early voice advocating for student reading of Austen's fiction, as teachers began to incorporate instruction in literature in English.

Records survive to help us understand what Enoch Wines valued in Austen. Wines, a Congregationalist, aimed at inculcating morality, good citizenship, and religious belief in the young. He saw education as a social good for its potential to lessen criminality, and he would later become involved in penal reform.[7] In his published writings on education, Wines proposed new standards for everything from teacher salaries to the architecture of school rooms. In his appendix of literary reading suggestions, he lists four novels by Jane Austen (twice misspelled as Jane Austin) among the two hundred works of fiction he counsels teachers to teach and students to read. (*Emma* and *Sense and Sensibility* don't make the list.)[8] We don't know how often Wines's reading suggestions were adopted, but his list offers evidence of an earlier start to *recommending* Austen to teachers and pupils than we might expect to find, given her relatively more modest popularity and name recognition from the 1830s to the 1860s.

It's recently become clear that we've overstated the extent to which the years prior to the publication of the first Austen memoir in 1870 were a "dark ages" for Austen's readership. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that, even in the mid-nineteenth century, there were those who imagined a future in which

Austen's novels would be used to educate. In his *Novels and Novelists from Elizabeth to Victoria* (1858), John Cordy Jeaffreson (1831–1901), the novelist, *Athenaeum* journalist, and manuscript scholar, describes how a student (especially a male one) might learn from Austen's work. Jeaffreson begins by noting that Austen's novels are "now but little read, and even when read gain few sincere admirers, notwithstanding that it is now the fashion indiscriminately to praise them."[9] It's hard to know how to parse that series of contradictions. But his own praise, apparently, is sincere and informed. It's certainly prognosticating. Austen's novels, he declares, "are however amongst the best specimens of one department of the fictitious art in literature, and will, we doubt not, be much studied five hundred years hence." Educating studious readers is not only something that Austen's novels will do in the future, according to Jeaffreson. They also have what he sees as an educational function in the present. He suggests that men can learn how to manipulate women by reading Austen, because she reveals what women desire in the "manly character." By learning from Austen, Jeaffreson concludes, "we are instructed how to flatter, feign, and win" women (2:84). Whether he's serious or joking almost doesn't matter. He's certainly teaching Austen against what would become the moralizing grain.

More serious Austen-inclusive educational materials emerged as well. Her fiction began to feature especially in literary encyclopedias or manuals, once a dominant format in English instruction. An account of the ways in which Austen appears in survey manuals from 1896 to 1915, a moment when Austen had already gained a place in emerging literary studies, may be found in the work of Lawrence Mazzeno.[10] Her place in them was advocated for by association, as we've seen previously. She was great because she was appreciated by other greats. The names that came up most often were Scott's and Macaulay's. (Scott was mentioned for his positive review of *Emma* in 1816, as well as for his laudatory comments in his posthumously published life writing. Macaulay was referenced for comparing Austen to Shakespeare in 1843.) Baptist minister and educator Joseph Angus's *Handbook of English Literature* (1865) includes Austen in its section on middle-class life. Her importance in this class of novels, too, was based on those who approved of her: "Scott and Whately and Macaulay agree in giving her the highest praise."[11]

Despite early suggestions from Wines and Angus, and Jeaffreson's claims for the value of Austen's novels as educational (however perverse), there was a slower path to wider acceptance for Austen in schools. Indeed, it would prove slow for all of English literature and for novels in particular. It was

the case for novels by women most especially. The rise to prominence of Austen's fiction in formal school settings resulted from her novels being caught up in larger educational shifts. The novel and Austen both became part of the emerging category of classroom-appropriate English literature, at almost precisely the same moment that opportunities in the education of girls of many backgrounds began to expand.

The reputation of Austen's novels was enhanced by changes in education. The publication of Austen-Leigh's memoir in 1870 "coincided with the passing in the same year by the British Parliament of the Education Act," as William Baker has noted. As he writes, "This made mandatory the statewide foundation of elementary schools, insisted on universal literacy and the use of literary teaching as a national heritage, and the fostering of the awareness of national pride. A consequence was the opening of a wider reading public for Jane Austen."[12] Others have noticed similar changes. In a fine chapter titled "The Stigma of Popularity," H. J. Jackson notes that "successive Elementary Education Acts between 1870 and 1893 ensured universal education for children in Britain; the act of 1880 made schooling compulsory to the age of twelve . . . Austen's [novels] were judged suitable for children, and editors, abridgers and publishers were quick to capitalize on the new market."[13]

Questions arose about how teachers ought to teach Austen—how she would be positioned in literary history and in lectures, as well as how learning about her would be assessed. Essays for teachers were published in educational periodicals for just such a purpose. "A Novel Course for Teachers: Jane Austen" appeared in the Atlanta-based *Southern Educational Journal* in 1898. The piece, signed E.S.H., is made up of talking points for teachers to use in their classrooms. E.S.H. is concerned about the extent to which Austen is becoming almost *too* popular, musing, "What does this mean—that we are beginning to have a Jane Austen cult? How the idea would have amused the innocent subject of it all!"[14] The London-based *Journal on Education* published a 1902 essay with a similar end in view—to inform teachers so that they might lecture on Austen in class. The authors, M. and C. Lee, are critical of Austen's less firmly didactic approach and note her lesser popularity with young readers.[15] In 1897, writer-professor Arlo Bates (1850–1918) argues that Jane Austen is among the dozen novelists "which it is taken for granted that every person of education has read." A male reader without such experience, Bates concludes, "will find it difficult to hold the respect of cultivated men."[16]

But Austen was then gaining in popularity with younger readers of both sexes from a wider range of class backgrounds—at least if the growing

number of school editions and abridgments of her novels are a reliable indication. The Christmas gift book phenomenon, described in part 1, also played a role in the circulation of Austen's fiction among the young. The first single Austen volume specifically prepared and packaged for school use appears to have been edited by an American, Josephine Woodbury Heermans (later Greenwood) (1859–1928). Heermans's edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, published in the Macmillan Pocket Classics series in 1908, sold enormously well over the years.[17] It identifies itself as edited for use in elementary and secondary schools, and Heermans's preface suggests she was a careful, knowledgeable scholar. She refers to the three editions of *Pride and Prejudice* published during Austen's lifetime, indicating that her own edition draws on the 1817 text. (This fact alone pokes holes in the assertion that famed Austen editor R. W. Chapman was the first to pay a scholar's meticulous attention to Austen and textual editing.) Heermans shows enough familiarity with the primary Austen materials, and care for the correctness of her text, that she mentions quotations from Austen's letters and describes misprints made in the early editions.

Heermans's introduction, too, is accomplished. She gathers brief quotes about Austen's positive reception ("appreciations") (xx). She provides a list of bibliographical and critical references and suggestions for study (xxi). Her edition includes copious annotations, adding up to serious textual treatment. Why has this edition not been given its due as a precursor to the 1923 Standard Edition of Austen edited by R. W. Chapman? One wonders whether the fact that one edition was published by an Oxford man and the other by a Missouri female schoolteacher may have something to do with it. That said, not everything in Heermans's edition was pitched to please scholars more than students. Heermans's suggestions for study are hardly weighty, offering insight into the ways in which Austenian knowledge was assessed in the early twentieth century.

In the Heermans edition, reading the novel allows for the mastery of literary terms and techniques through close reading analysis. The study questions ask, for instance, "How many chapters comprise the 'beginning' of *Pride and Prejudice*?" They direct students to "analyze the plot into single actions." They ask for a reader to "give instances of balanced sentences" and query, "What is the artistic value of the last chapter?" (Heermans xxvi). Yet Heermans's endnotes are learned and helpful, including explanations of card games, like vingt-et-un, or modes of transportation, such as a hack chaise. Sometimes the notes also include difficult interpretive questions,

prompting students to have opinions, such as the note for "happiness in marriage" being a matter of chance. It asks students, "What is your opinion of Charlotte's argument?" concluding that "Charlotte's own future is interesting in light of the opinion expressed in this chapter" (327). Heermans chooses judiciously what deserves further explanation and provides students with sound information.

Heermans was herself a beneficiary of increasing nineteenth-century opportunities for women's education. She held a master's degree from Columbia University and served for many years as the principal of the Whittier School in Kansas City. The Austen edition was not her first book, as she had published *Stories from the Hebrew* (1903). A Christian Scientist, Heermans's approach to literature was highly spiritual.[18] She saw it as the fifth window onto the soul, concluding that a "graded system of education without literature is as the body without spirit" (Heermans 207). Her reputation in educational circles was high, with one positive review of the Austen edition claiming, "She is one of the best teachers of elementary grades in the country and a skilful [*sic*] author."[19] Heermans was a teacher of teachers, as well as of students, and she was said to have "shown that pupils need not wait until they are in high school to learn something of books and authors" or to learn "the good from the bad in literature."[20]

Some of the concerns in early Austen education discussions were practical. Educators approached Austen wondering how much reading their pupils could reasonably be assigned and at what grade level her fiction would be best introduced. Excerpts were pitched as a good compromise between solely descriptive manuals and lengthy complete works. Excerpts had benefits because they could get the author's own words into the hands of readers, rather than only summaries and assessments of them. Few educators saw excerpts as anything other than a concession, although plenty of booksellers and editors saw it as an opportunity. Everyone was looking for the sweet spot between too little exposure to an author's work and too overwhelming a reading assignment for students.

We can see this in *The Austen-Gaskell Book: Scenes from the Works of Jane Austen and Mrs. Gaskell* (1926). Designed for "older children," the book provides almost one hundred pages of excerpts from three Austen novels: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Mansfield Park*, along with its portion of Gaskell and illustrations for the fiction of throughout.[21] (It makes sense that the novel with the older heroine, *Persuasion*, and the heroine it was difficult to love, *Emma*, would be excluded, but the absence of *Sense and*

Sensibility must have been about perception of role-model suitability for the young.) The book's editor, the teacher and children's book author J. (Joseph) Compton (1891–1960), explains what's behind his method by acknowledging the obvious "objections to the books of snippets" and the drawbacks of abridged and simplified editions of entire novels (v–vi). Longer, connected extracts, he suggests, are the right solution. They alone are suitable for teaching eleven- through fifteen-year-olds the difference between good and bad literature and likely "to lead children to wish to read the complete work" (v, vii).

Laying the groundwork for a lifetime of reading and rereading was Compton's goal, telling the young that Austen and Gaskell "will be your friends for life if you will have them for your friends" (xiv). His was not the first volume of representative Austen extracts from multiple novels designed for initiates to Austen's fiction, but the *Austen-Gaskell Book* was more clearly geared to younger readers than previous editions had been. Lady Margaret Sackville's *Jane Austen* (1912), "a series of extracts from the six novels," had been pitched to those readers not previously exposed to Austen but aimed at, as the series ad put it, the "general reader and the busy man," suggesting an intended adult audience.[22] *English Prose, Chosen and Arranged by W[illiam] Peacock* (1921) also published eleven Austen extracts from four of her novels in its volume 3, with the project's selections "intended for readers of all classes and of all ages," for general readers, students, young and old.[23]

Excerpts were used not just for silent reading but also for elocution lessons. As Donald E. Stahl describes it, in late nineteenth-century English courses, "instruction most often consisted of studying a textbook composed of many short selections which were read aloud."[24] This practice is, in fact, what led to their nickname as "readers." By some estimates, readers sold from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century into the millions of copies in the United States, putting them on a par with sales of the Bible. In Great Britain, the "most successful popularization of English literature for the mass market ever embarked upon" was Cassell's Library of English Literature (1875).[25] It eventually reached five illustrated volumes, under the editorship of Henry Morley (1822–94), professor of English literature at University College, London.

Morley, an apothecary and a journalist, was a supporter of child labor laws and women's higher education. "It is as a populariser of literature that he did his countrymen the highest service," concludes the *Dictionary of*

National Biography.[26] Morley included a selection from Jane Austen in Cassell's Library of English Literature as early as 1876, in his volume covering longer works in verse and prose. He included "a passage or two from her novel of Emma," as the best way to illustrate Austen's "manner," introducing it with, "The central thought of Jane Austen's 'Emma' is that each of us has his own life to live; we cannot make ourselves dictators of the lives of others." For Morley, the message of *Emma* appears to have been "leave well enough alone." Morley describes the entirety of the plot in a long paragraph and includes three passages: the "poor Miss Taylor" section, the introduction of Harriet Smith, and Mr. Knightley's conversation about Emma with Mrs. Weston. *Emma* is dispensed with in just a few hundred words.[27]

For a time, excerpts in prose readers seemed to have focused particularly on *Emma*. The best selling of the American readers were McGuffey's Readers, so named after William Holmes McGuffey (1800–73). McGuffey's Readers began as tools for elementary schools. When the series branched into high school instruction, Austen came to be featured. The excerpt in *McGuffey's High School Reader* (1889), in its Eclectic Educational Series, was also from *Emma*, a five-page selection in which Mrs. Elton and Emma have their long conversation about married women and music, at the end of which Emma declares Mrs. Elton insufferable.[28] *McGuffey's* titles it "A Parvenu English Woman," describing it as "an excellent picture of the presumption a certain class of people make on short acquaintance" (135).

The scenes selected from Austen's writings for dramatization were more likely to emphasize women's independence, but the *McGuffey's* scene from *Emma* emphasizes admirable class discrimination and stratification. *McGuffey's* recommends the value of staying in one's place or, if one gains wealth, of not acting the vulgar parvenu. The thousands of American high school readers who came to this scene without having read Austen's *Emma* would not come armed with the knowledge that Emma Woodhouse's snobbery is chastised later in the novel. The student is asked to identify with Emma's discrimination, learning how to be "classy," rather than learning how not to be class-presumptuous. The impact of McGuffey's in America cannot be overestimated. It's believed that 120 million copies of his readers sold between 1836 and 1920, reaching readers of all classes and regions.[29] Some of those millions were spoon-fed an Austen who endorses the existing social order.

This was a common enough textbook move, although the scenes varied and sometimes overlapped with those selected for dramatization. Where

they differentiated themselves was in their prefatory matter. Editor George Saintsbury also turned to *Emma* for his selection in his *Specimens of English Prose Style from Malory to Macaulay* (1886), another early textbook. In what he describes as "The Strawberry Party," Mr. Knightley's tamps down the presumptuous suggestions of Mrs. Elton in that famous scene. Saintsbury's introduction to the excerpt describes those he sees as Austen's right readers. Her style, he says, is "not striking to the vulgar."[30] The same sentiment is touted in the prominent and commercially successful *English Prose Selections* (1893–96), edited by Sir Henry Craik (1846–1927). Craik declares Austen to be appreciated by those who "have acquired something of literary judgement," not the "average reader of fiction," enjoining students to approach her with patience.[31] Craik includes two Mr. Collins scenes from *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* on the Cole's party, and the defense of novels from *Northanger Abbey*. Craik addresses not the cultivated amateur but the cultivated.

In Britain, Craik's volumes were among the most powerful of their kind. As one recent critic puts it, "It was merely the admired top of an enormous iceberg whose foundations rested in the literary extracts of the elementary school readers which sold in the millions."[32] Craik's introduction declares that Austen holds "the most secure place in our roll of female novelists," a statement that, in the 1890s, might have seemed wishful thinking but that, by the 1910s, would have encountered few skeptics (54). Craik was a Scot, educational reformer, and politician, as well as a literary man who served as a Conservative member of Parliament for the universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen. His six-volume set became a standard. By the first decade of the twentieth century, there had been a flood of beauties, specimens, and extracts from nineteenth-century prose, many designed for use in schools. Austen was made a standard selection.

Despite the ubiquity of readers as English textbooks (and despite Austen's own criticisms of what Leah Price calls the "pedagogical anthology" in books like *Elegant Extracts*), there was a movement against excerpts and abridgments promoting the value of whole works.[33] A middle ground between the two was the abridged novel, which began to gain steam. Between 1890 and 1970, more than a dozen abridgments of *Pride and Prejudice* alone were published.[34] The most notorious among them are those that remove Austen's signature first line—a heresy for critics and an odd decision from a pedagogical standpoint.[35] One notable abridgment was in The Masterpiece Library's Penny Novels series, published by the *Review of Reviews* and its editor William T. Stead (1849–1912). These titles were promoted for use in

schools. Stead was in favor of compulsory primary and secondary school education and universal male and female suffrage, and his publishing ventures align with those goals.[36] Stead's 90 Penny Novels included two titles by Austen: *Pride and Prejudice* (1896) and *Sense and Sensibility* (1897). The former was reduced to eight chapters and the latter to twenty-eight "very brief" chapters.[37] These titles were also advertised as "The Cheapest Library in the World," at a pound, sold in "a neat bookcase with folding-doors."[38] Stead might be seen as a one-man educational marching band and Austen as one of his many instruments.

The reach of his library was impressive. Stead claims to have sold enormous numbers of his Penny Novels and Penny Poets: "I have at present issued about 5,276,000 of the Poets and about 9,000,000 of the novels, making a total of 14,000,000 in all."[39] He notes that some novels of intrinsic worth did not sell as well as "those which only by a stretch of courtesy could be regarded as Masterpieces," but that "no person can now complain that the treasures of our literature are denied to them owing to inability to pay." As he concludes, there are now very few books "not accessible to any one who can command the price of a cigarette." For Stead, this is not just sales but educational proselytizing. He proposes to send bulk copies parcel free to regions "where people read nothing, or next to nothing," and to "clubs, schools, and local centres of reading unions" "where no newsagent or bookseller exists" (390).

Seeing Austen read in such contexts, we can better understand how her novels built a massive readership among those seeking an education. By Stead's own (unquestionably self-interested) calculations, each text in his Masterpiece Library series sold an average of one hundred thousand copies. Illustrated novels by Hugh Thomson were a hit with a certain class of readers, but the abridged Penny Novels furthered Austen's reach to places and people that a full-length, gilt-covered edition never could have. Working-class readers may have been getting Austen Lite, or Partial Austen, but there was also exposure to her, especially as Stead attempted to sell to far-flung locations and schools.

What appears to have been the first shortened version of *Pride and Prejudice* marketed specifically for schools came from a tonier publisher: Cambridge University Press. It appeared in their English Literature for Schools series in 1910, abridged and edited by Mrs. Frederick (Henrietta O'Brien) Boas (1863–1953). She straightforwardly explained why she undertook her task, describing it in direct contrast to literary excerpts or selections. Its

benefit was that it was still short enough to be in a form suitable for school reading. As she wrote, "It is in this form only about half of its original size, and the chapters have been necessarily re-divided."[40] Boas made a practice of abridging works for schools, having undertaken Gaskell's *Cranford* and Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*. Boas wrote original works of her own, too, and later edited a complete Austen novel, *Northanger Abbey*.[41] About one of Boas's other original works, a reviewer concludes, "Mrs. Boas knows how to win attention and excite interest."[42]

Most reviewers were less than enthusiastic about her *Pride and Prejudice* abridged. The *Saturday Review* found it an abomination, in an unsigned review by R. A. Austen-Leigh (1872–1961), an Austen descendant we saw in part 2 on dramatization (Gilson, *Bibliography* 290). R. A. Austen-Leigh describes being appalled by Boas herself, as well as by the abridgment: "What are we to say of this book? What can we think of a lady who hopes to present 'Pride and Prejudice' in a form suitable for school-reading . . . by the omission of short passages, the curtailment of conversations, and the shortening of descriptions? Boys and girls at school have little use for Austen at any time, and it is hardly likely that they will find her any more attractive when most of the best passages in her novels have been excised."[43] Austen-Leigh is right that there are some egregious errors in Boas's abridgment, described in excruciating detail in his review, but he was wrong about her edition being an unappealing text for schools. Boas's edition was advertised as part of "a new series of reading books for the upper and middle forms of secondary schools," "particularly suitable for rapid reading"; it still was for sale two decades later.[44] By then other abridgments had joined it, such as Stead's the same year (as we saw, 1910), H. A. Treble's in 1917 (advertised as "abridged for schools") and David Salmon's in 1924 (Gilson, *Bibliography* 290, 293, 300). Boas herself created a second Austen abridgement, *Sense and Sensibility*, in 1926 (301).

For a time in the early twentieth century, the bulk of the new Austen editions were designed for students and schools. It may be difficult to see the big picture from these brief descriptions. But to tell it by the numbers, between the years 1908 (the year that Heermans published her bestselling Macmillan pocket school edition) and 1931 (when Elizabeth D'Oyley published an edition of Austen's connected extracts), there were fifty-seven new editions of Austen's novels, according to Gilson (*Bibliography*, 285–306). Of these, fourteen specifically identified themselves as delivered in abridged, excerpted, or student-marketed formats. That adds up to one-quarter of all new Austen editions published, a remarkable dominance for a just-created type. A third

of those abridged titles were completed by editors identifiable as female. This is a smaller number of females than we saw with Austen dramatizations in part 2, but it's a significant number nonetheless.

In the dozen years leading up to the publication of R. W. Chapman's famed scholarly edition, the first so-called standard edition of Austen in 1923, these numbers are similar. More than a quarter of the new Austen editions published in the 1910s were specifically packaged or described as for school use. This gives further meaning to the information Kathryn Sutherland has provided from Chapman's papers about his having considered a "school edition (abortive) of *Emma* (written on a troop train)" (qtd. in Sutherland 32). As Sutherland shows, Chapman's editorial work on Austen was inspired by that of his Austen scholar-editor wife, Katharine M. Metcalfe, who after marriage became his Austen editor-collaborator, and on whose work "his" later Austen edition was based. Few have realized that Chapman's (or rather, the Chapmans') scholarly, standard edition was born out of the first moment—and out of the first sustained era—of textual dominance for Austen school editions. It was also a time when women (including the woman who would become his wife) first made up a substantial minority of Austen editors. Yet today Chapman's is the only Austen edition from this era that we talk about, as if it and he emerged out of thin air. Chapman's Austen would come to eclipse, and outlast, all textual work that came before it. The degree to which his/their scholarly standard edition of Austen was influenced (negatively and positively) by school editions is clearly more extensive than we've previously understood.

As Austen's fiction was repurposed into new media—especially drama, radio, and film—those new media were also reconfigured as pedagogical opportunities. We saw in part 2 how schools and community theaters mounted Austen dramatizations. Teaching Austen through radio and film also became common. Most tellingly, MGM's *Pride and Prejudice* (1940) was classed early on as an "educational motion picture," a designation that got it included in catalogs circulated to schools, community groups, libraries, and museums. Essays like "Using Films for Teaching" (1946) mention *Pride and Prejudice* specifically as "creditable material," among films that "fit admirably into the curriculum of public schools and literally bring the world into the classroom."[45] MGM understood this market well. It produced a forty-one-minute "condensed version" of its film to market for educational sale and rental, starting in 1949.[46]

MGM mounted an even more ambitious rerelease of *Pride and Prejudice* in 1962, setting out to capture a new generation of young readers and filmgoers, as well as to recapture their parents' nostalgia for the films and books of their youth. The rerelease was marketed to community cinemas and schools. MGM partnered with *Scholastic Magazine* in what it ambitiously called its World Heritage Film and Book Program. *Pride and Prejudice* was among the eight film-book pairings sold to communities as providing the opportunity to see the dramatization (on film) of some of literature's greatest works. As one commentator has recognized, this was "big business," with theaters in 230 cities in the United States booking the series. Such bookings involved showing one film per month over eight months. It went well. As that commentator notes, "The success of this 'Read-the-book, See-the-picture' project has already decided the sponsors to repeat it" in 1963–64.[47]

Little has been written about this film-classroom Austen venture. One recent blogger notes about the film side of the equation that MGM "went after the school kids"; busloads of them would be taken to the cinema to see black and white movies, like *Pride and Prejudice*, that had been playing free on TV for years. This was a cash cow for MGM. There was even a National Advisory Committee of Educators that served to endorse the project. The blogger notes, "It was an unholy alliance between schools and movie houses."[48] Not all educators were skeptical of the unholy alliance. Some, such as Marion Sheridan, chair of that National Advisory Committee, and an early champion of using film in the English curriculum, saw it as a way to help students further appreciate literature.[49] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Austen's place in schools had been cemented through fashionable educational exercises in elocution and dramatization, abridgments and excerpts, as well as the reading of her texts in their entirety in school editions and other formats. By the mid-twentieth century, Austen's fiction was being sold to students through the *Pride and Prejudice* on screen, with the hope that whetting their appetites for the story and fame of the author in the cinema would lead to their reading the novel in its entirety.

This movement may also help us read a famous essay on teaching Austen through a different lens. In "Why We Read Jane Austen," literary critic and professor Lionel Trilling (1905–75) reports on his recent experience running an Austen course at Columbia University. (Trilling's essay was published in 1976 in the *Times Literary Supplement*, having originated as a version of a lecture he did not get a chance to deliver before he died.) Trilling had

envisioned his course as enrolling a maximum of 20 to 30 students. He was amazed and distressed when 150 of them showed up the first day. Because he wanted to stick to the original enrollment, he conducted interviews to determine which students would be allowed in. These experiences led Trilling to consider Austen's reputation, especially among the young and as a result of "the contemporary demand for female figures," in the wake of the second wave of the women's movement.[50]

His experiences with Austen also led him to despair, as he received appeals and expressions of bitterness from some of the more than one hundred students that he rejected for enrollment in the course. As he writes, "There was something [students] wanted, not from me, as was soon apparent, but from Jane Austen, something that was making for them an intensity in their application for the course such as I had no preparation for in all my teaching career." Teaching Austen, Trilling finds, is sui generis. Why, Trilling asks, did this course mean so much, did Austen mean so much? One of the reasons he considers is that students flocked to Austen to "in some way transcend our sad contemporary existence" (250). It would seem that for Trilling all of Austen's college-age readers had become Winston Churchill, seeking out Austen's fiction as escapism.

But this may just be another moment in which a member of the literati provides us with a high-culture reason for Austen's renewed fashionability that doesn't explain quite enough. Popular reasons might be explored just as well. Trilling was facing a generation of students who had been bused to local cinemas and had been raised on school film showings and TV reruns of *Pride and Prejudice* (1940). This was a generation of students whose parents may have seen *Pride and Prejudice* on stage or, during its first release, who were sold cigarettes with advertisements featuring Jane Austen quotations. Perhaps even more worthy of our consideration, however, is the fact that Jane Austen had made it to the October 1971 Back-to-School Issue of *National Lampoon Magazine*. Its circulation was then in the ballpark of a quarter to half a million predominantly college-aged readers.[51] That October issue included a one-page, black-and-white mock Jane Austen advertisement, encouraging students to take college courses in English literature.

The *National Lampoon* mock ad features a 1950s-looking perky blonde in a gingham dress and white heels, who is gesticulating in front of her filled shopping cart. (A box of Wheaties cereal peeks out of the grocery bag.) She points to the white box that's being held by a bow-tied and white-aproned grocery boy. The box, in dark script, reads, "Jane Austen." Surely this is

meant to remind readers of Dolly Madison, then a well-known American snack food company, named after a real person, the early nineteenth-century president James Madison's wife, Dolley Madison (1768–1849). The real Dolley Madison was known for her social graces; the cupcake company sold its prepackaged baked goods in flimsy boxes. The *National Lampoon* mock ad's headline reads, "Jane Austen. Isn't that the kind of cupcake they used to sell at the A&P?"

Below the photo of the woman and boy, the joke continues, "Sorry, cupcake, but Jane's nobody's food. She's the English novelist who wrote *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and many other classics satirizing provincial life. If

Figure 11.1. Jane Austen / English literature poster, School of Hard Sell series, *National Lampoon Magazine*, October 1971, 19.

you had taken English Literature, you'd know who Jane was. And Emily. And Geoffrey. And Oliver and Rudyard. And even Percy." The punch line next to this admonishing minilecture is, "English Literature. A course to remember." *National Lampoon* not only ran this as a mock advertisement; it also sold the design in a poster-size version, presumably available to decorate a bedroom or a dorm room, or even, for a teacher with a sense of humor, an office or a classroom.[52]

The ad is part of a series in the issue called The School of Hard Sell, by George W. S. (William Swift) Trow (1943–2006) and Michael O'Donoghue (1940–94). A recent writer describes the two men as the National Lampoon's "house blue bloods" (Stein 157). Trow was a *Harvard Lampoon* editor who joined *National Lampoon* and would go on to a career with the *New Yorker*. O'Donoghue, after a stint as writer and editor of *National Lampoon*, became the first head writer of the television sketch-comedy show, *Saturday Night Live*. Their School of Hard Sell series was said to be an attempt to combat "college students signing up in droves" for courses such as "*Sioux Studies, Basic Tantric Buddhism, Understanding Laing,* [and] *A Brief History of the Geodesic Dome*." Trow and O'Donoghue ask, "But what of the traditional subjects such as *Latin, Geography, Mathematics, Sciences, History,* and *English*? Nobody cares about them anymore. To combat flagging interest, it may become necessary to do something more than just list these courses in the college catalogue. It may become necessary to advertise . . . School of Hard Sell."[53] A series of advertisements was created for philosophy, classics, geography, English literature, and calculus. The ads are both satirical and serious, simultaneously making fun of the trendy, ephemeral desires of college students and colleges and the crass manipulations of advertisers.

Jane Austen was no doubt chosen for this purpose because of her "satirizing provincial life," as Trow and O'Donoghue put it. In that she shared an element in common with *National Lampoon*. That magazine had made satirical youth culture popular again. Jane Austen was, literally, in this case, its poster author for satire. The ad works by insulting the reader as the "cupcake" who doesn't know Jane Austen. The point—and there does also seem to be a serious point being made—is that Jane Austen is not a cupcake. The mock ad suggests that once you take a course in English literature, you are neither in the place of the plastic-looking housewife nor the naïve grocery boy. You are not a cupcake, and Jane Austen's not the frosting. She's not dessert. She's a classic. She's the main course. She allows you to join those in the know, those who know better.

In *National Lampoon* in 1971—and there was little that was more cool among students then than *National Lampoon*—Jane Austen and her novels are made to stand rhetorically in league with other humor writers. The mock ad suggests, between the lines, "If you, college student, do not take a Jane Austen course, instead electing to take the Brief History of the Geodesic Dome, then you may be as ignorant and old-fashioned as someone who shops or works at the A&P. You are stuck in the naive 1950s." In this mock ad, "Jane's nobody's food," and if you read her, you're nobody's fool. Humor writer-illustrators of the early 1970s set out to make Jane Austen, the Satirist, hip again. It's their popular work, too, not just the musings of educational elites and old-guard culture makers like Trilling, that led us to the Jane Austens who are still schooling us today.

This page intentionally left blank