

Austen's Literary Alembic: *Sanditon*, Medicine, and the Science of the Novel

Gregory Tate

As Charlotte Heywood, the heroine of Jane Austen's unfinished novel *Sanditon*, promenades along the terrace of the eponymous seaside resort, she meets Sir Edward Denham coming out of the local library. In an effort to impress her, Sir Edward boasts of his credentials as a discerning reader of novels:

“The mere trash of the common circulating library, I hold in the highest contempt. You will never hear me advocating those puerile emanations which detail nothing but discordant principles incapable of amalgamation, or those vapid tissues of ordinary occurrences from which no useful deductions can be drawn.—In vain may we put them into a literary alembic;—we distil nothing which can add to science.—You understand me I am sure?”

“I am not quite certain that I do”, replies Charlotte.¹ Her hesitant response is unsurprising, because Sir Edward's account of his tastes is bafflingly inconsistent. Despite borrowing several novels from the circulating library, he dismisses such novels as trash, contributing nothing to “science”. He uses this word in its traditional sense, meaning general “knowledge or understanding acquired by study”, but his identification of the novel as a “literary alembic”, an instrument of experimentation, also points to a newer definition of science as a methodology, concerned “with a connected body of demonstrated truths or with observed facts systematically classified and more or less comprehended by general laws, and incorporating trustworthy methods” of verification.² Yet although Sir Edward implies that the novel should be capable of reaching conclusions through experimental methods, he

¹ Jane Austen, *Sanditon*, in *Later Manuscripts*, ed. Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 181-82.

² *Oxford English Dictionary*, “science”, definitions 2 and 4b.

contradicts himself by casually dismissing the relevance of “ordinary occurrences”, the observable and repeatable events on which scientific knowledge depends. Sir Edward is an object of ridicule in *Sanditon*: here, Austen’s satire is targeted not at his use of the alembic metaphor but at his failure to grasp its significance for the novel as a form. The language and practices of science are present throughout *Sanditon*, and, perhaps more in this fragment than in Austen’s other novels, everyday occurrences, and the “discordant principles” of the characters involved in them, constitute the raw materials of a kind of literary experimentation.

This essay examines the representation of science in *Sanditon*, and it argues that this text, written during Austen’s months of illness before her death in July 1817, points to a new conception of the novel, one which associates the form with the emerging scientific disciplines of the early nineteenth century through its emphasis on empirical objectivity and professional expertise. These traits are exemplified in the medical profession, which is central to *Sanditon*’s plot. After meeting the financial speculator Mr Parker, Charlotte Heywood travels with him and his family to his home village of Sanditon, which is also his pet project. Trading on the supposed curative properties of sea-bathing and the sea air, Parker plans to turn Sanditon into a destination for tourists and convalescents, but by the time the fragment ends almost the only visitors are his hypochondriac siblings, whose amateur self-diagnoses offer further material for Austen’s satire. The text also critiques the meretricious quackery that exploits hypochondria for profit, and it presents professional medical advice as a safe middle ground between this commercial exploitation and the uninformed subjectivism of the Parker siblings. As Sir Edward’s disquisition on novels suggests, similar issues are at stake in the text’s considerations of the literary marketplace: while acknowledging some of the problems involved in the growing commodification of the novel, *Sanditon* also satirizes the undisciplined reading habits of careless readers such as Sir Edward, and it promotes a view of the novel as an objective and professional articulation of knowledge. *Sanditon* offers

evidence for the close connections between the developing categories of “literature” and “science” in the early nineteenth century, and it suggests that the concept of science played a significant part in Austen’s understanding of the profession of writing in 1817.

Sanditon’s preoccupation with the methodologies of science is conveyed in its narrative stance as well as its in plot. Its protagonist endures no psychological strain and suffers no economic or social hardship, and there is only the smallest hint of the beginning of a courtship narrative. Instead, the text focuses on presenting detailed and precise descriptions of the village of Sanditon and of the interactions between the characters who inhabit it. This may be interpreted as a consequence of *Sanditon*’s textual status as the opening chapters of an unfinished manuscript. Discussing the manuscript of *The Watsons*, abandoned by Austen in 1805, Virginia Woolf observed that its “stiffness and bareness” proved that Austen “was one of those writers who lay their facts out rather baldly in the first version and then go back and back and back and cover them with flesh and atmosphere.”³ A textual analysis of *Sanditon* and its concern with “facts” might yield a similar conclusion, and Kathryn Sutherland has warned readers that “the accidental identity of the *Sanditon* text with its manuscript state” makes it difficult “to distinguish usual physical disorder from those other elements that point to a new expressive energy and stylistic difference.”⁴ A formalist reading of *Sanditon*, however, suggests that the fragment’s structural and “stylistic difference” from Austen’s other novels is not accidental but emblematic of its key concerns.

The formalism that this essay aims to practise addresses what John Richetti describes as “a version of form in fictional narrative that necessarily relates it to the various socio-historical circumstances that surround the emergence of the novel as a genre and that in many

³ Virginia Woolf, “Jane Austen” (1923), in *The Common Reader*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Vintage, 2003), pp. 137-38.

⁴ Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen’s Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 172-73.

cases are its overt subject matter.”⁵ This historicizing approach to form indicates that, in *Sanditon*, subject matter and social circumstances are inseparably connected: just as the text examines an economic model new to Austen’s writing—the capitalist exchanges of land speculation, tourism, and commodity culture rather than the fixed property-based economy of the gentry—so it employs a new narrative stance, focusing not on the subjectivity of a protagonist but on the broad and objective observation of the interactions between a number of characters and between those characters and their environment. *Sanditon*’s form, then, enacts the text’s historical conditions and concerns, specifically the emergence of modern systems of economic exchange and scientific knowledge.

These systems are not, however, simply aligned with each other: Parker’s capitalism is by no means a rational, evidence-based enterprise. When Parker first meets the Heywoods he presents them with “the facts” about himself: “he was of a respectable family, and easy though not large fortune;—no profession”. Other truths about his character are conveyed not through his conscious communication but through his auditors’ interpretation: “where he might be himself in the dark, his conversation was still giving information, to such of the Heywoods as could observe.—By such he was perceived to be an enthusiast;—on the subject of Sanditon, a complete enthusiast” (*Sanditon*, pp. 146-47). This exchange, in which the observational acuity of the Heywoods is contrasted with Parker’s unselfconscious enthusiasm, presents in microcosm the structural concerns of *Sanditon*. Throughout the novel, the empirical observation of “the facts” of character is used to check misguided, even deluded, subjective feeling.⁶ This is arguably a satire of Romanticism: certainly the hypochondria of the Parker siblings represents a conventional form of Romantic subjectivism, promoting an

⁵ John Richetti, “Formalism and Eighteenth-Century English Fiction”, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 24 (2012), 159.

⁶ *Sanditon*’s elaboration of a rationalist critique of “enthusiasm” supports Jon Mee’s contention that this term, which signified a cognitive stance “that was taken to transgress the boundaries of the emergent bourgeois public sphere,” was understood as “less something to be prohibited and excluded than regulated and brought inside the conversation of culture.” Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 3.

epistemology of individual sensation rather than objective judgment. But Mr Parker's enthusiasm is of a different kind: his blind faith in Sanditon, despite the resort's limited success, stems not primarily from an over-reliance on feeling but from a misreading of the world around him. It is significant that he has "no profession": despite his zeal for acting in and on the world, he lacks the objective stance and professional expertise necessary to do so profitably. *Sanditon* presents medicine and the novel as professional forms of knowledge production that can correct the mistakes of enthusiasm.⁷ However, the text's commitment to objectivity means that its opposition between enthusiasm and professionalism is not dogmatic; it acknowledges the ways in which medicine and literature may be implicated in, even as they seek to counter, the dangerous excesses of epistemological and financial speculation.

The text's narrative voice aims to develop an accurate account of Sanditon as a community and of its inhabitants, and this stance broadly aligns Austen's narrator with the novel's heroine. Following a conversation with the grasping Lady Denham, Parker's co-investor in Sanditon, Charlotte "allowed her thoughts to form themselves into such a meditation as this:—'She is thoroughly mean. I had not expected any thing so bad.—Mr. Parker spoke too mildly of her. His judgement is evidently not to be trusted.—His own good nature misleads him. He is too kind hearted to see clearly.—I must judge for myself'" (*Sanditon*, p. 181). To some extent, Charlotte's determination to draw conclusions based on direct experience is a reiteration of a recurring trope in Austen's work: the development of what Hina Nazar has called "cultivated impartiality" in her maturing protagonists.⁸ Yet this passage is distinctive in its clear separation of narrator and character: the text describes Charlotte's psychological process rather than enacting it in or incorporating it with the

⁷ William H. Galperin puts forward a different reading of the same opposition, identifying the Parker siblings as "vital and dynamic characters" who subvert, and so embody a conservative critique of, "the discourses of professionalization and medicine." Galperin, *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 243.

⁸ Hina Nazar, *Enlightened Sentiments: Judgment and Autonomy in the Age of Sensibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 136

narrative voice through free indirect discourse. Although *Sanditon* as a whole endorses Charlotte's preference for careful scrutiny and informed opinion, her perspective is not consistently privileged. Clara Tuite points out that *Sanditon* "dispenses with Austen's carefully cultivated protocols of free-indirect narrative witnessing in favor of a comparatively deracinated and disembodied third-person narrator, and one furthermore that shares the stage with a noisy and unruly cast of caricatures".⁹ The novel's characters, however, are not simply caricatures: when *Sanditon* does employ free indirect discourse, it is as likely to focalize the thoughts of Parker or even Sir Edward as it is those of Charlotte, and other characters, at times, share in the novel's promotion of empirical observation and rational judgment.

Parker, for instance, pre-empts Charlotte's skepticism when he describes his relationship with Lady Denham early in the novel: "Those who tell their own story you know must be listened to with caution.—When you see us in contact, you will judge for yourself" (*Sanditon*, p. 152). Parker's statement is significant for two reasons: first, because it shows that the recognition of the importance of evidence-based interpretation is not limited to any one character; and second, because it suggests that such interpretation must be founded on the observation not of individuals but of characters "in contact" with each other. James Chandler has argued that characterization in Maria Edgeworth's novels can be read as a scientific process, structured on the methodological model "that forms the basis of all experimental knowledge: the capacity to compare observations across a range of similar scenarios or objects, where the registered difference among isolated variables enables a causal analysis that facilitates discovery".¹⁰ A similar argument can be made about *Sanditon*: narrative and characterization depend in this text not just on observation but on a form of active experimentation, which brings characters into contact in order to compare their differing perspectives. Throughout *Sanditon*, this contact is staged through dialogue: direct

⁹ Clara Tuite, "Sanditon: Austen's pre-post Waterloo", *Textual Practice* 26 (2012), 621.

¹⁰ James Chandler, "Edgeworth and the Lunar Enlightenment", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45 (2011), 98.

speech, rather than free indirect discourse, is the formal device that the text uses to enable its readers to analyze the reactions between its various characters. *Sanditon* aims to establish an impartiality of form instead of character: it is the novel itself, rather than a privileged protagonist, that secures unbiased knowledge through observation and experimental comparison.

This formal impartiality can be understood as a kind of objectivity, the epistemological stance defined by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison as “knowledge that bears no trace of the knower”.¹¹ While Daston and Galison argue that objectivity did not fully establish itself as the ideal of scientific practice until the mid-nineteenth century, the concept played an important part in the formation of scientific disciplines in the century’s early decades. The association of science with an objective and systematic methodology was one of the key steps in its separation from other forms of knowledge, but, as *Sanditon* attests, several aspects of scientific method were also central to understandings of the novel. Empirical observation, systematic analysis, and the verification of the trustworthiness of data were preoccupations shared by scientific practice and nineteenth-century realist fiction. John Bender traces the formulation of these shared concerns to the mid-eighteenth century, “when the guarantee of factuality in science increasingly required the presence of its opposite, a manifest yet verisimilar fictionality in the novel.”¹² The imaginative and therefore non-empirical basis of literary texts was classified in opposition to science, even as those texts appropriated the epistemological precision of scientific methods. The key development in the early nineteenth century, as Jon Klancher has shown, was that this methodological connection became institutionalized: in the Romantic period, “science” and “literature” were defined as

¹¹ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone, 2007), p. 17.

¹² John Bender, *Ends of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 38.

cultural categories and as professions through a “mutual co-production” that simultaneously emphasized their similarities and their opposition to each other.¹³

Medicine was at the forefront of the professionalization of science at this time. Although already privileged as one of the established professions, alongside the clergy and the law, it was reshaped in the early nineteenth century into a more recognizably modern professional structure based on standardized training and accreditation, a process exemplified by the 1815 Apothecaries’ Act, which for the first time regulated the licensing of the least socially respectable and least organized arm of the profession.¹⁴ Adherence to scientific method was a key element of nineteenth-century models of medical professionalism, something emphasized in the opening item of the first issue of the *Lancet* (1823). This transcription of a lecture given by the surgeon Sir Astley Cooper to medical students at St Thomas’s Hospital explains that “surgery is usually divided into the Principles and Practice. The first are learned from observations on the living when diseased, by dissection of the dead, and by experiments made on living animals.” The principles of surgery, according to Cooper, are themselves rigorously practical, founded on observation and experimentation. He goes on to assert that “in the surgical science hypothesis should be entirely discarded, and sound theory, derived from actual observations and experience, alone encouraged.”¹⁵ This is a dogmatically Baconian model of “surgical science”, rejecting hypothesis and speculation in favor of empirical accuracy and inductive reasoning. The placing of this lecture as the inaugural piece in the reformed medicine’s flagship journal demonstrates how central the criterion of scientific objectivity was to the profession.

¹³ Jon Klancher, *Transfiguring the Arts and Sciences: Knowledge and Cultural Institutions in the Romantic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 128.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the Apothecaries’ Act, and of its effect on the professional self-definitions of medicine and of writing, see Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 160-81.

¹⁵ Astley Cooper, “Surgical Lectures” (1 October 1823), *Lancet* 1 (1823), 3.

As Michel Foucault has shown, however, there was a tension between scientific objectivity and professional expertise. In *The Birth of the Clinic* Foucault argues that the growing epistemological authority, social status, and political influence of medical professionals “were at the same time the privileges of a pure gaze, prior to all intervention and faithful to the immediate, which it took up without modifying it, and those of a gaze equipped with a whole logical armature, which exorcised from the outset the naivety of an unprepared empiricism.”¹⁶ The empirical purity of medical observation, unambiguously endorsed by Cooper in his lecture, was guaranteed but also compromised by the framework of institutional, methodological, and philosophical norms that constituted professional medicine and shaped the perspectives of individual doctors. Magali S. Larson identifies another, equally important, tension in the development of the medical profession and of nineteenth-century professionalism more generally. While maintaining that “the application of science to industry and to practically every other area of life gradually and constantly changed the cognitive bases of the social division of labor”, Larson notes that the professional and scientific process of “appropriating and standardizing *new* bodies of knowledge” was simultaneously a commercial enterprise involving “the creation of a distinctive ‘commodity’” and a “monopoly of competence.”¹⁷ In *Sanditon*, I suggest, Austen’s representations of medicine point to similar strains in the developing profession of novel-writing. Through its recurring episodes of medical diagnosis and literary interpretation, the text addresses some of the key questions raised by professionalization. Was it possible to construct a body of knowledge that was both objectively accurate and validated by exclusive professional expertise? And how could this epistemological goal be reconciled with the drive to fashion a saleable commodity?

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963), trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1973), p. 107.

¹⁷ Magali S. Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 17; author’s italics.

The professionalization of literature and science, and the general exclusion of women from this process, was an important factor in nineteenth-century assessments of Austen as a writer. Austen herself addressed the gendered assumptions surrounding science, literature, and female authorship in an 1815 letter to James Stanier Clarke, chaplain and librarian to the prince regent. While corresponding about the prince's wish to have one of her books dedicated to him, Austen was forced to deflect persistent suggestions that she should write a novel about a clergyman, a thinly veiled portrait of Clarke:

Such a Man's Conversation must at times be on subjects of Science & Philosophy of which I know nothing—or at least be occasionally abundant in quotations & allusions which a Woman, who like me, knows only her own Mother-tongue & has read very little in that, would be totally without the power of giving.—A Classical Education, or at any rate, a very extensive acquaintance with English Literature, Ancient & Modern, appears to me quite Indispensable for the person who w^d do any justice to your Clergyman—And I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible Vanity, the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress.¹⁸

Austen here disavows any learning, even in “English Literature”, but it is science and philosophy which are presented as being most remote from the novelist's expertise. This separation of science and literature is less significant, however, than their grouping together as branches of knowledge utterly beyond the grasp of the “uninformed Female” author. Austen is making fun of Clarke through her ironic observations of the gulf between the educated clergyman and the authoress, but this account of her work as a model of “unlearned” female authorship was repeated, without irony, in her nephew's *Memoir of Jane Austen*. Looking back on the early decades of the nineteenth century, James Edward Austen-Leigh asserts that “it must be borne in mind how many sources of interest enjoyed by this

¹⁸ *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 319.

generation were then closed, or very scantily opened to ladies. A very small minority of them”, not including, he implies, his aunt, “cared much for literature or science.”¹⁹

Nineteenth-century science, however, cared something for Austen: the *Memoir* notes that the philosopher of science William Whewell was an admirer of her novels (*Memoir*, p. 112), and Peter Knox-Shaw has pointed out “how often”, in nineteenth-century considerations of Austen’s writing, “her work is approached in idiom borrowed from the sciences.”²⁰ An 1821 notice by the theologian, logician, and political economist Richard Whately, for example, argues that Austen’s fictions record

the general, instead of the particular,—the probable, instead of the true; and, by leaving out those accidental irregularities, and exceptions to general rules, which constitute the many improbabilities of real narrative, present us with a clear and *abstracted* view of the general rules themselves; and thus concentrate, as it were, into a small compass, the net result of wide experience.²¹

Whately identifies novel-writing (and, by extension, reading) as a deductive rather than an inductive process of knowledge production. The writer having already synthesized the empirical evidence acquired through “wide experience”, the novel itself sets out a narrative that demonstrates the “rules” or laws of conduct which follow from that evidence, and it presents those laws in a probabilistic and generalized form, shorn of misleading “improbabilities” and “accidental irregularities”. Contradicting Sir Edward Denham, Whately’s view of the novel is based on the conviction that useful deductions can be drawn from ordinary occurrences. But *Sanditon*, a text which was unpublished until 1871 and so unknown to Whately, complicates his account of the form’s abstract and theoretical relation to experience. The irregularities of hypochondria and enthusiasm are central to *Sanditon*’s

¹⁹ James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1871), ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 34.

²⁰ Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 21.

²¹ *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. B. C. Southam (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 93; author’s italics.

narrative, and the work of this novel is more inductive than deductive, focusing on the observation of particularities over the demonstration of general social rules.

The particulars that are best left out of fictional narrative include, for Whately, the details of science: he warns that “any attempt whatever to give scientific information” will “interfere with what, after all, is the immediate and peculiar object of the novelist, as of the poet, *to please*” (*Critical Heritage*, p. 94; author’s italics). This admonition contributes to the Romantic period’s separation of imaginative literature from scientific writing, and it is a view repeated by Austen-Leigh in the 1860s, when such disciplinary demarcations had become more entrenched. He praises Austen’s refusal “to meddle with matters which she did not thoroughly understand. She never touched upon politics, law, or medicine, subjects which some novel writers have ventured on rather too boldly” (*Memoir*, p. 18). *Sanditon*, though, meddles with medicine boldly and extensively, examining both amateur self-diagnosis and the professional use of scientific information, and indicating a decided preference for the latter. The same preference is evident in Austen’s letters during the final months of her life, shortly after she stopped writing *Sanditon*. It determined her decision to move to Winchester to receive treatment for her illness: “as our Alton Apoth[ecar]y did not pretend to be able to cope with it, better advice was called in” (*Letters*, p. 356). Her belief in the efficacy of such advice also informed her approval of the news that her niece Harriet’s headaches were being treated by the prominent surgeon Sir Everard Home: “The Complaint I find is not considered Incurable nowadays, provided the Patient be young enough not to have the Head hardened. The Water in that case may be drawn off by Mercury” (*Letters*, p. 351). Austen here defers to the scientific knowledge of the professional doctor while also appropriating the medical discourse of diagnosis and prognosis for her writing.

In *Sanditon*, this professional discourse is unequivocally rejected by several characters. Mr Parker first meets the Heywoods after injuring his leg in a carriage accident,

while searching for a surgeon to employ at Sanditon. On returning home, he finds a letter from his sister Diana telling him that, in her opinion, he has wasted his time:

“pray: never run into peril again, in looking for an apothecary on our account, for had you the most experienced man in his line settled at Sanditon, it would be no recommendation to us. We have entirely done with the whole medical tribe. We have consulted physician after physician in vain, till we are quite convinced that they can do nothing for us and that we must trust to our own knowledge of our own wretched constitutions for any relief.” (*Sanditon*, p. 163)

Parker’s reading aloud of Diana’s letter constitutes another instance of dialogic speech that sets up a comparison between different characters’ perspectives. Diana’s hostility towards professional medicine, contrasted with her brother’s enthusiasm for it, is perhaps reflected in her failure to distinguish between the different orders of medical practitioner: apothecaries, surgeons, and university-educated physicians. It is most evident, though, in her practice of self-diagnosis and her preference for subjective knowledge over trained expertise, which she shares with her sister Susan and her younger brother Arthur. Mr Parker subsequently describes Arthur as “too sickly for any profession” (*Sanditon*, p. 165), suggesting that Arthur, like Parker himself, has no employment, but also that he and his sisters are too enmeshed in their hypochondria to benefit from professional medical advice. Austen’s satire of the Parkers’ amateur medicine forms part of that strand of her writing which celebrates masculine bourgeois professionalism and which is exemplified, as Tuite points out, in her celebration of the naval profession in *Persuasion*.²² Uninformed or selfish suspicion of professional medicine is a target for satire throughout *Sanditon*. Lady Denham, echoing Diana, advises Mr Parker: “pray, let us have none of the tribe at Sanditon. We go on very well as we are. There is the sea and the Downs and my milch-asses” (*Sanditon*, p. 171). Her

²² Clara Tuite, *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 169.

resistance stems not from a distrust of professional medical expertise but from a fear of commercial rivalry: she worries that the services of a doctor might represent dangerous competition for the supposed curative properties of Sanditon's location and for the medicinal milk that she hopes to sell.

The Parkers and Lady Denham reject professional medicine in favor of diagnostic approaches based either on intuitive self-knowledge or on folk remedies validated by tradition. Charlotte, conversely, is skeptical of self-diagnosis, and she voices her doubts after hearing Mr Parker read Diana's letter: "Your sisters know what they are about, I dare say, but their measures seem to touch on extremes.—I feel that in any illness, *I* should be so anxious for professional advice, so very little venturesome for myself, or any body I loved!—But then, *we* have been so healthy a family, that I can be no judge of what the habit of self-doctoring may do" (*Sanditon*, p. 165; author's italics). *Sanditon*'s commitment to impartial interpretation is conveyed by Charlotte's recognition that she cannot judge with any certainty of the siblings' circumstances, but her opinion is clear: she would rather trust to "professional advice" than to speculative "self-doctoring". The eccentric complaints and violent remedies (blood-letting, teeth-pulling) of the Parkers are extreme both in themselves and because they are not supported by any informed or objective assessment of the case. As Knox-Shaw suggests, Charlotte's disagreement with the siblings primarily hinges not on their Romantic subjectivism but on their disregard for evidence-based knowledge: "the quackery of the Parkers is made to seem backward-looking, and Charlotte's breezy dismissal of it is not so much moral as empirical" (*Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, p. 247). She prefers professional diagnosis over old-fashioned folk remedies because her judgments about medicine are based on relatively new standards of empirical rigor and objective knowledge.

This is evident in her subsequent conversation with Arthur, who describes his "almost incredible" reaction to the consumption of green tea: the drink would "entirely

take away the use of my right side”’. Charlotte, unsurprisingly, is skeptical: ““It sounds rather odd to be sure”’, she says, ““but I dare say it would be proved to be the simplest thing in the world, by those who have studied right sides and green tea scientifically and thoroughly understand all the possibilities of their action on each other”’” (*Sanditon*, p. 199). This ironic rejoinder dismisses Arthur’s subjective account, suggesting instead that personal pathologies can only be understood in the context of wide experience, verifiable evidence, and scientific analysis. Charlotte transfers epistemological authority over the body from the patient to the skilled practitioner, advocating a form of experimental knowledge which involves testing and documenting the reciprocal actions and interactions of different variables. This experimental method is similar in its principles to the comparative approach of *Sanditon*’s narrative, and Charlotte’s skepticism here is not simply medical: her questioning of Arthur’s hypochondria is also a critique of the absurdity of his speech and behavior. April Alliston has argued that the novel form developed as a response to “the empirical unknowability of the interiorized self,” especially the female self: the “private truths” of character proved “inaccessible to empirical observation, thus requiring the calculus of probability that, at the same time, came to define the novel.”²³ Yet while Charlotte’s dialogue with Arthur indicates that medicine and the plausible representation of character are both dependent on probabilistic judgments, it also suggests that those judgments are informed by empirical observation. *Sanditon*’s female protagonist demonstrates the knowability of the male self: using the data of observation, Charlotte analyzes the probability of Arthur’s self-diagnosis and dismisses it as unscientific.

Medicine, then, represents for Charlotte a model of scientific knowledge production that can also be applied to the assessment of other characters’ accounts of themselves. *Sanditon* as a text broadly supports this view, but, in keeping with its commitment to objectivity, its endorsement of medical practice is not uncritical. In an example of *Sanditon*’s

²³ April Alliston, “Female Quixotism and the Novel: Character and Plausibility, Honesty and Fidelity”, *The Eighteenth Century*, 52 (2011), 257.

impartial distribution of free indirect discourse, the narrative voice joins in with Parker's exuberant enumeration of the medical benefits of the village's geography: "The sea air and sea bathing together were nearly infallible, one or the other of them being a match for every disorder, of the stomach, the lungs or the blood; they were anti-spasmodic, anti-pulmonary, anti-sceptic, anti-bilious and anti-rheumatic" (*Sanditon*, p. 148). The spelling of "antiseptic" as "anti-sceptic" nicely demonstrates the way in which the terminology of scientific medicine, rather than acting as a check on enthusiasm, can instead contribute to the mystification of medical discourse and the subversion of rational thinking. Joseph Murtagh has suggested that the non-satirical use of professional jargon in novels only became common in the later nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century and the Romantic period, conversely, the "conservative", satirical deployment of such jargon articulated a widespread skepticism towards professional specialization, "ridiculing discourses that in another context might prove alienating or threatening".²⁴ *Sanditon* enacts a more nuanced stance, which satirizes the potentially ridiculous and estranging terminology of medicine while simultaneously praising the epistemological efficacy of professional practice.

Linguistic extravagance is primarily attributed in *Sanditon* to uninformed amateurs rather than professional practitioners, as is the commercial exploitation of illness. Mrs Griffiths, a visitor who arrives with her sickly pupil Miss Lambe near the end of the fragment, declines to purchase any of Lady Denham's asses' milk: "'Miss Lambe was under the constant care of an experienced physician;—and his prescriptions must be their rule'—and except in favour of some tonic pills, which a cousin of her own had a property in, Mrs. Griffiths did never deviate from the strict medicinal page" (*Sanditon*, p. 203). The juxtaposition of direct speech and third-person narratorial commentary highlights the contrast between the prescriptions of the physician and the profit-driven and probably fraudulent

²⁴ Joseph Murtagh, "George Eliot and the Rise of the Language of Expertise", *Novel* 44 (2011), 91.

quackery of Mrs Griffiths's cousin, about which she remains silent. Yet *Sanditon* also acknowledges professional medicine's dependence on commercial imperatives, particularly the need to establish a market. Larson notes that professional legitimacy depended not only on "the competence and probity of the producers: it involved shaping the need of the consumers" to meet "the conception of service advocated by the regular profession" (*The Rise of Professionalism*, p. 58). One of the mistakes into which Parker is led by his enthusiasm is his belief that Sanditon needs a resident doctor, when in reality there is little demand for professional medical services: "a medical man at hand would very materially promote the rise and prosperity of the place—would in fact tend to bring a prodigious influx" (*Sanditon*, p. 147). His siblings and Lady Denham contradict this view, and even the novel's more rational characters argue that most ailments can be treated with amateur remedies: Charlotte, for example, contradicting her own insistence on the value of professional advice, prescribes "daily, regular exercise" for Arthur's "nervous complaints" (*Sanditon*, p. 196).

Parker, conversely, is resolute in his preference for professional medicine, commenting after his accident that "the injury to my leg is I dare say very trifling, but it is always best in these cases to have a surgeon's opinion without loss of time" (*Sanditon*, pp. 138-39). Yet despite his advocacy of objective assessment in medical matters, Parker himself commits numerous errors of interpretation. He is convinced that a surgeon lives in the Heywoods' village of Willingden, and refuses to be swayed by Mr Heywood's insistence to the contrary. On being told that he is indeed in Willingden he asserts: "Then Sir, I can bring proof of your having a surgeon in the parish—whether you may know it or not" (*Sanditon*, p. 139). However, the newspaper advertisements that constitute his "proof" refer, as Mr Heywood explains after examining them, to another Willingden seven miles away: in a dialogic exchange of views, Mr Heywood offers a skeptical and impartial review of Parker's evidence. Parker's misinterpretation of that evidence contributes to what Tuite identifies as

Sanditon's pervasive concern with "the emphatic unreliability" of its "characterological, somatic and narrative witnesses" ("Austen's pre-post Waterloo", p. 622). The novel suggests that the scientific method exemplified by professional medicine is perhaps the most secure means of countering such unreliability, but Parker's support of this method does not guarantee the accuracy of his own observations. As his mistake about the surgeon indicates, *Sanditon*'s preoccupation with ways of seeing is also a concern with ways of reading. While his siblings, Lady Denham, and Mrs Griffiths misinterpret medical symptoms and so diagnose imaginary ailments and promote untested remedies, Parker misreads the advertisements and sets off in search of a surgeon who is not there.

The link between Parker's uncritical enthusiasm and his careless reading habits is reinforced, during this same conversation with Mr Heywood, by his quotation of the poetry of William Cowper. Deriding the obscurity of *Sanditon*'s rival resort Brinshore, Parker concludes: "Why, in truth Sir, I fancy we may apply to Brinshore, that line of the poet Cowper in his description of the religious cottager, as opposed to Voltaire—"She, never heard of half a mile from home"" (*Sanditon*, p. 145; author's italics). Cowper's 1782 poem "Truth", however, praises the cottager's pious anonymity in contrast to the notoriety of what it presents as Voltaire's atheistic and immoral ideas, and so Parker's quotation of this line in support of his attack on Brinshore represents a basic misreading not dissimilar to his inaccurate interpretation of the newspaper advertisements. Like many instances of literary quotation in Austen's work, Parker's mistake says more about the reader than about the writer; it suggests that the problem of incompetent or indiscriminating readers, which was central to Austen's early novel *Northanger Abbey*, is also a key concern in *Sanditon*.

This particular instance of misreading points to a connection between *Sanditon*'s representations of medicine and its self-conscious interest in the profession of writing. Just as *Sanditon*'s various characters question each other's perspectives through spoken dialogue, so

Cowper's poetic voice is used here to critique Parker's enthusiasm, and the extent of the misinterpretation becomes clear when the line is reread in its original context of the comparison between Voltaire and the peasant:

Oh happy peasant! Oh unhappy bard!
 His the mere tinsel, her's the rich reward;
 He prais'd perhaps for ages yet to come,
 She never heard of half a mile from home;
 He lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
 She safe in the simplicity of hers.

Not many wise, rich, noble, or profound
 In science, win one inch of heav'nly ground:
 And is it not a mortifying thought
 The poor should gain it, and the rich should not?²⁵

Cowper's lines articulate a type of sentimental pre-Romanticism that celebrates tradition, the contemplative and retired life, and the "simplicity" of the poor. In other words, Parker could hardly have chosen a less suitable poem to validate his self-consciously modern passions for self-promotion, laissez-faire economics, and the rationalist knowledge or "science" produced by the medical profession. Despite Austen's admiration for Cowper's poetry, *Sanditon* as a whole does not necessarily endorse his stance over that of Parker. The key issue here, however, is not the relative merit of these competing sets of social norms, but rather Parker's utter failure to grasp the (straightforward enough) meaning of Cowper's lines. When considered in relation to the other examples of literary misinterpretation in the novel (mostly involving Sir Edward Denham), Parker's quotation illuminates *Sanditon*'s concern with the question of how writers should communicate their ideas to their readership. This is a question

²⁵ William Cowper, "Truth" (1782), ll. 331-40, in *The Poems of William Cowper*, ed. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-95), 1:289.

of professionalism; although none of the characters in *Sanditon* are writers, just as no doctors ever appear in the text, it is as preoccupied with examining the professionalization of writing as it is with reflecting on the rise of the medical profession. Pierre Bourdieu argues that an “autonomous field of artistic production” is one “capable of imposing its own norms on both the production and the consumption of its products.”²⁶ *Sanditon*, in its representations of “artistic production” and of medical science, focuses on consumption, on demand rather than supply: by privileging certain kinds of reader and certain kinds of patient over others, the text articulates its support for modern, professionalized forms of literary and medical practice.

Sir Edward is *Sanditon*'s most consistently inept reader. While Parker's mistaken interpretations are based on careless and perfunctory readings, Sir Edward's errors develop from his overemphasis on certain aspects of his preferred books and his disregard of others. His enthusiasm for literature is founded on a selective and biased interpretation of textual evidence. In one of his first conversations with Charlotte, for example, he talks at length about his passion for modern poetry:

“Do you remember,” said he, “Scott's beautiful lines on the sea?—Oh! what a description they convey!—They are never out of my thoughts when I walk here.—That man who can read them unmoved must have the nerves of an assassin!—Heaven defend me from meeting such a man un-armed.”—“What description do you mean?”—said Charlotte. “I remember none at this moment, of the sea, in either of Scott's poems.”—“Do not you indeed?—Nor can I exactly recall the beginning at this moment.” (*Sanditon*, pp. 174-75)

Dialogue is again used here to critique the claims of one character through the observations of another. Charlotte's straightforward questioning of the factual accuracy of Sir Edward's exclamations, and his unconvincing response, shows that he is far more interested in

²⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 3.

promoting his self-conception as a man of feeling than he is in bringing any critical attention or sustained thought to his reading of poems. In the ensuing discussion of poetry, in which Sir Edward announces his devotion to the work of Scott, Burns, Wordsworth, James Montgomery, and Thomas Campbell, he fails to quote more than two lines of any poem.

His approach to reading poetry is shaped by sentimental and Romantic notions of readership which, in promoting affective identification, offer a striking contrast to the processes of empirical observation and analysis privileged in *Sanditon*. Austen's satirizing of him concentrates on his failure to think or speak with any degree of skepticism or critical acuity; Charlotte concludes that he "had not a very clear brain" and "talked a good deal by rote" (*Sanditon*, pp. 176-77). His expression of his admiration for Burns is indeed a rote recycling of the conventions of sensibility: "If ever there was a man who *felt*, it was Burns." He goes on to dismiss any accusations of immorality directed against the poet's life or work, arguing that "it were hyper-criticism, it were pseudo-philosophy to expect from the soul of high toned genius, the grovellings of a common mind" (*Sanditon*, pp. 175-76; author's italics). Sir Edward's championing of poetic feeling, and his refusal to judge it against prevailing moral or social standards, demonstrates his adherence to a model of literature in which value is determined by the sensations of the writer and the reader rather than the representational accuracy or heuristic rigor of the text. As John Wiltshire notes, this points to "a definite thematic link between Sir Edward and the Parkers, between their hypochondria and his own brand of hyperbole", in that both rely on a subjectivist stance that resists the epistemological claims of objectivity.²⁷ *Sanditon*'s satire is directed towards patients and readers who personalize rather than professionalize, whose approaches to medicine and literature are based not on trained skill or scientific impartiality but on subjective feeling.

²⁷ John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 212.

Charlotte's opinion of Burns, despite being the opposite of Sir Edward's, is founded on the same mistaken privileging of the emotions of writer and reader: "I have read several of Burns's poems with great delight," said Charlotte as soon as she had time to speak, "but I am not poetic enough to separate a man's poetry entirely from his character;—and poor Burns's known irregularities greatly interrupt my enjoyment of his lines" (*Sanditon*, pp. 175-76). Like Sir Edward, Charlotte bases her view here not on a close reading of Burns's poetry but on the poet's "character" and her own response to it. The problem is perhaps one of genre: sentimental poetry, in its focus on the lyric expression of personal feeling, arguably invites partial and subjective readings that downplay the writer's professional expertise. In contrast, novelistic writing, as practised by Austen in *Sanditon*, seeks to enact and promote empirical precision and skeptical judgment.

Yet while Sir Edward denigrates novels that focus on the observation and experimental analysis of ordinary occurrences, his reading preferences nonetheless extend to other novelistic genres. When asked by Charlotte to "describe the sort of novels which you *do* approve," he is unsurprisingly happy to oblige her:

"The novels which I approve are such as display human nature with grandeur—such as shew her in the sublimities of intense feeling—such as exhibit the progress of strong passion from the first germ of incipient susceptibility to the utmost energies of reason half-dethroned,—where we see the strong spark of woman's captivations elicit such fire in the soul of man as leads him—(though at the risk of some aberration from the strict line of primitive obligations)—to hazard all, dare all, achieve all, to obtain her." (*Sanditon*, p. 182; author's italics)

His taste, then, is for sentimental novels, such as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, which recount the exploits of rakish seducers. As with his response to Scott and Burns, his preference for these novels is expressed in an exaggerated and formulaic vocabulary of

feeling, and it is shaped by his failure to read impartially or critically. He does not recognize the moral censure that such novels often direct at the seducer, recycling his comments on poetry in insisting that “‘Twere pseudo-philosophy to assert that we do not feel more enraptured by the brilliancy of his career, than by the tranquil and morbid virtues of any opposing character’” (*Sanditon*, p. 182). His enthusiasm for his preferred characters is so unquestioning that it has “formed his character”, and he plans to emulate them by seducing Lady Denham’s young cousin Clara Brereton (*Sanditon*, p. 183). Sir Edward’s mistaken rejection of what he terms “pseudo-philosophy”, his refusal to impose a critical distance between himself and the novels he reads, leads to an overidentification with literary characters, and this error is exacerbated by his failure to interpret his reading accurately in the first place.

These misreadings of poems and novels are the most prominent examples of a more comprehensive habit of misinterpretation that emerges as one of Sir Edward’s defining characteristics. His literary conversations with Charlotte are followed by a third-person narrative commentary which re-emphasizes his excessive admiration for the questionable conduct of “the villain of the story”:

he was always more anxious for its success and mourned over its discomfitures with more tenderness than could ever have been contemplated by the authors.—Though he owed many of his ideas to this sort of reading, it were unjust to say he read nothing else, or that his language were not formed on a more general knowledge of modern literature.—He read all the essays, letters, tours and criticisms of the day—and with the same ill-luck which made him derive only false principles from lessons of morality, and incentives to vice from the history of its overthrow, he gathered only hard words and involved sentences from the style of our most approved writers.

(*Sanditon*, p. 183)

The contrast between Sir Edward's unthinking tenderness and the authors' intentions promotes a model of literary interpretation in which knowledge is derived not from the personal character of the writer or the subjective response of the reader but from the author's professional skill in constructing and communicating the meaning of a text. *Sanditon*'s satire of inept readership is similar to that of *Northanger Abbey*, but it is more prescriptive in its conclusions. As Claudia L. Johnson notes, the mock-gothic register of *Northanger Abbey* "“makes strange” a fictional style in order better to determine what it really accomplishes, and in the process it does not ridicule gothic novels nearly as much as their readers.”²⁸ In *Sanditon*, conversely, there is no need to defamiliarize the style of sentimental novels in order to reveal the flaws in Sir Edward's interpretation of them; he is demonstrably ridiculous, and his intended victim Clara “saw through him” immediately (*Sanditon*, p. 184). Rather than functioning satirically, the style of *Sanditon* prescribes a generic approach and an authorial stance which, the text suggests, can better resist the egregious misreadings to which other genres often succumb. This stance grounds its authority in empirical accuracy and impartial narrative attention, and it asks that the judgment of the reader be subordinated to the observational precision of the skilled author, just as the medical patient submits to the expertise of the doctor. While professional medical practice in the early nineteenth century excluded women, the professional and scientific approach to literature in *Sanditon* is primarily gendered female: in contrast to Parker and Sir Edward, female characters are typically, if not universally, more accurate observers of literary texts and of other characters. This gendering of interpretation suggests that the novel as a form enables female participation in the professionalization of literature and science.

Austen's professionalized genre of the novel is, like medical practice, bound up with the systems of commercial exchange represented by *Sanditon*'s tourist economy. The

²⁸ Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 34.

commodification of the novel, and the text's ambivalent response to it, is evident in the description of the circulating library that supplies Sir Edward's books:

The library of course, afforded every thing; all the useless things in the world that could not be done without, and among so many pretty temptations, and with so much good will for Mr. Parker to encourage expenditure, Charlotte began to feel that she must check herself—or rather she reflected that at two and twenty there could be no excuse for her doing otherwise—and that it would not do for her to be spending all her money the very first evening. She took up a book; it happened to be a volume of *Camilla*. She had not *Camilla's* youth, and had no intention of having her distress,—so, she turned from the drawers of rings and brooches, repressed farther solicitation and paid for what she bought. (*Sanditon*, p. 167)

There is clearly a satirical element to this account: the commodified novel is presented as just one (and not even the most prominent) of the many “useless things” and “pretty temptations” offered by the library. At the same time, however, Austen makes a case here for the utility of the professionalized and female-gendered novel in a market economy, although it is a strikingly instrumentalist case: seeing Frances Burney's novel *Camilla*, Charlotte recalls her reading of it, and the debts and financial distress suffered by its heroine, and promptly resolves to check her own expenditure. This practical concern with financial conduct may also be a rejoinder to criticisms levelled at the kind of novel written by Burney and by Austen. Walter Scott, in his 1816 review of *Emma*, lamented the “calculating prudence” of Austen's empirical and pragmatic fiction, warning modern novelists that they risked “lend[ing] their aid to substitute more mean, more sordid, and more selfish motives of conduct, for the romantic feelings” advocated by their sentimental predecessors (*Critical Heritage*, p. 68). *Sanditon*, conversely, suggests that, as a state of mind and as a novelistic concern,

“calculating prudence” may be preferable to the imprudent enthusiasm of a Parker or a Sir Edward, or of the hypochondria that blindly falls victim to fraudulent quackery.

Charlotte’s visit to the library dramatizes the view, expressed throughout *Sanditon*, that the novel form should promote sound methods of judgment. The manuscript of *Sanditon* shows that Austen first wrote “Charlotte began to feel that she must check herself—or rather began to feel”, before replacing the repetition with “or rather she reflected”.²⁹ This emendation reinforces the text’s commitment to an epistemology of critical thought founded on the examination of evidence. Tony Tanner connects the commodification of the novel in *Sanditon* to Sir Edward’s habits of misreading, arguing that the commercial “library encourages a manner of ‘rote’ reading which loses the meaning of the original text”.³⁰ In Charlotte’s case, though, the circulating library, and the professionalized novel for which it supplies a market, encourages accurate interpretation and skeptical reflection. The aim of the novelist is still, as Whately stated, to please, but it is also to disseminate verifiable knowledge, or science; the professionalization of writing in *Sanditon* incorporates the novel into rationalist systems of knowledge exchange that marginalize Sir Edward’s sentimentalism as outmoded and ridiculous. His approach to literature is rejected by Charlotte, who, after visiting the library, finds herself tempted to imagine Clara as the “heroine” of a gothic fiction, “ill-used” by her relative Lady Denham:

These feelings were not the result of any spirit of romance in Charlotte herself. No, she was a very sober-minded young lady, sufficiently well-read in novels to supply her imagination with amusement, but not at all unreasonably influenced by them; and while she pleased herself the first five minutes with fancying the persecutions which *ought* to be the lot of the interesting Clara, especially in the form of the most barbarous conduct on Lady Denham’s side, she found no reluctance to admit, from

²⁹ A facsimile and transcription of the *Sanditon* manuscript can be viewed at www.janeausten.ac.uk (accessed 31 July 2014).

³⁰ Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 273.

subsequent observation, that they appeared to be on very comfortable terms.

(*Sanditon*, p. 169; author's italics)

Charlotte's practice of reading novels, and of reading the people around her, is one in which the exercise of the imagination is checked by empirical observation. She is *Sanditon*'s most reliable reader, but, even in this account of her clarity of vision, there remains a degree of distance between her perspective and that of the third-person narrative voice describing her thoughts. Later in the fragment, moreover, Charlotte again corrects her stance, concluding after more extensive observation that Lady Denham is indeed "barbarous" and callous. It is *Sanditon* as a text, rather than Charlotte as a character, which offers an exemplary model of how to analyze evidence: by combining experimental comparison and observational accuracy with narrative impartiality, *Sanditon*'s style sets out a methodology of interpretation and reading that is the foundation of a professionalized and scientific form of novelistic practice.