

Episode 94 - The Thing About Anne Steele's Beaux

Zan: [00:00:00] Welcome to The Thing About Austen, a podcast about Jane Austen's world. I'm Zann.

Diane: And I'm Diane. And this episode, we're talking about Anne Steele's Beaux.

We are taking a look at *sense and sensibility* for this episode. The Dashwood ladies are settled in at Barton Cottage. Which means they are socializing quite a bit with the inhabitants of Barton Park. Sir John and Mrs. Jennings would have it no other way. They have no choice. No say in this decision.

Zan: You will visit us regularly.

Diane: You will hang out with us a lot. Shortly after the departure of the visiting Palmers, Sir John and Mrs. Jennings Managed to procure a new set of houseguests through a chance meeting in Exeter, and thus we [00:01:00] are introduced to the Miss Steeles.

Zan: So this is from Anne. And had you a great many smart Beaux there?

She's talking about Norland. I suppose you have not so many in this part of the world. For my part, I think they are a vast addition, always. But why should you think, said Lucy, looking ashamed of her sister, that there are not as many genteel young men in Devonshire as Sussex? Nay, my dear, I'm sure, I don't pretend to say there an't.

I'm sure there's a vast many, smart beau in Exeter. But, you know, how could I tell what smart Beaux there might be about Norland? And I was only afraid the Miss Dashwoods might find it dull at Barton, if they had not so many as they used to have.

Diane: I mean, a valid concern, you know?

Zan: Are there hot men about, I need to know.

This is, this is information Anne Steele is desperate for. Maybe not, you know, very tactful, but, you know, [00:02:00] asking the, asking the important questions out there.

Diane: She's trying to obtain vital information. So the word beau is adopted from the French word for beautiful. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, the word had two meanings when used as a noun.

The first definition is the one we might be a bit more familiar with, which is a lady's suitor or sweetheart. This usage was more prominent in the 19th century. Though it was definitely in use in the 18th century as well.

Zan: The second definition is a bit lesser known. So beau was synonymous with fop or dandy.

The OED defines it as a man who gives particular or excessive attention to dress, mien, and social etiquette. So this usage was more frequent in the 18th century, and it tapered off considerably after the first few decades of the 19th century.

Diane: Beau also had [00:03:00] a few different forms of usage during the Regency era.

For example, British fashionable society was often referred to as the Beaumonde. Ooh. Ooh. Literally translating to the beautiful or fine world. So, You know, no hyperbole or overinflated egos were involved in this name.

Zan: None. None. None. It just, it just is what it is. Right? The Beaumonde.

Diane: We are the best and the hottest around.

Thank you very much.

Zan: So the OED lists the first use of the Beaumonde as coming from Alexander Pope's mock heroic poem, *The Rape of the Lock*, which was published in 1712 and the phrase remained in use throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

Diane: But beau, as a noun, was more commonly applied to individual men, and especially in the 18th century, it was used to describe a dandy.

Perhaps the most notable example of this usage applies to George Brummel, who was [00:04:00] known throughout his adult life as Beau, and was famously known for his fastidious attention to dress. Beau Brummel being another perennial favorite topic on this podcast.

Zan: Yes, he's inescapable, honestly. He just, you know, he had the persona that just demanded attention.

And it was, and a lot of it was attached to this idea of dress and presenting oneself. And yet Brummel was far from the first man in English history to be known by the name Beau. Other prominent examples include Robert Fielding and Richard Nash. Um, another reoccurring person, we've, we've mentioned Beau Nash in our episodes on Bath.

So we know that this is kind of a common applied nickname for, for men of fashion.

Diane: So the difference between these other men and Brummel is that the latter became known as the Beau, like he,

the Beau, the Beau.

Diane: Jeffrey Nigro and William Phillips, in their article, A Revolution in Masculine Style, How [00:05:00] Beau Brummel Changed Jane Austen's World, explained that use of the definite article was, quote, an indication that he was perceived even in his lifetime as the culmination of an older tradition of fops as well as the first in a new line of modern dandies.

Zan: He's kind of, he's kind of this benchmark of, of dandyism, I guess. Yeah. So anyone aspiring to dandyism during the Regency era would have been compared in some way, no matter how favorably or otherwise, to Beau Brummel. And while we have no evidence that Austen ever specifically mentions Brummel in her letters or other writing, she was likely aware of him by name and reputation.

He was just kind of this looming figure over, over this kind of moment, really. Absolutely.

Diane: We know for sure, however, that she had fun playing with the concept of Beau in *Sense and Sensibility*. Variations of the term beau are mentioned 19 times in the novel, the plural beau, [00:06:00] B E A U X, 9 times, and the singular beau, B E A U, 10 times.

That's, that's a lot. That's a lot, yeah.

Zan: So, this is a topic that Anne has a lot to say about. Like, a lot. So, let's get into that a bit more.

Diane: You know, there's just, there's not a lot to think about out in the wilds of Devonshire, you know. You're just.

Zan: Apparently. At least not for Anne. She's got, she's got one track kind of mind here.

Diane: John Lauber, in his article, Jane Austen's Fools, writes that Anne Steele reveals herself wholly in her first speech to Eleanor and Marianne. Her very first concern, and the only topic she really knows how to talk about, are these Beaux.

Zan: Yeah, yeah. And Jill Hates Stevenson in her book, Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions, Subversive Laughter, Embodied History, puts a finer point on it when she describes Anne as A 30 year old [00:07:00] adolescent obsessed with male attention and the word beau.

Really deep cut there, you know? Yeah, yeah. She's not pulling punches on that.

Diane: Ugh, poor Anne Steele. But in this first interaction, we do learn a little bit more about Miss Steele by the way she talks about beau. It's not just the topic itself, it's really how she discusses it, because Austen is quite deliberate in the way she depicts Anne's dialogue.

Not only is she talking about a topic that is a bit crass upon first meeting new people, but she is also revealing a lack of formal education. And to be clear, we're not here for the class smobbery, but at the same time Austen is deliberately using language to signal something about Anne's character to her readers, so We're going to talk about that.

Zan: Yeah, there's definitely a distinct difference between the way that the Steele's talk and the Dashwood's talk, and so Austen's being deliberate there. Linda Hall, in her book, Women and Value, in Jane [00:08:00] Austen's novels, Setting, Speculating, and Superfluity, explains that Anne's vocabulary and grammar, along with the topic she's chosen, reveals her lack of gentility or proper decorum.

Diane: Hall goes on to explain some particular examples. Anne, quote, begins her conversation about beau with the improper contraction and, meaning are not, and continues with another misused contraction. There's a vast many smart beau and exeter, using the singular verb is to describe her many potential suitors.

It should be there are many smart beau. Her grammatical blunders continue as she drops her adverbial endings hoping that her various beau dress smart and behave civil. The more grammatical construction would be that they behave civilly, for example.

Zan: So there's just a bunch of really dense clues built into the way that she's describing this.

And Hall also points out that when Anne uses the phrase, [00:09:00] how does leaf be without them, when she's talking about look, about Beaux, she's using an antiquated construction of the phrase would rather. And that, quote, within Austen's works is the type of language that might be found as the speech of servants or other characters not of genteel circles.

Diane: So from all of these linguistic hints, Austen is signaling that Anne Steele and Lucy, to a degree, are from a slightly different class than the Dashwoods. She's basically saying that they are, they're not quite as genteel.

Zan: So Lucy's language throughout the novel also has some of this background. She does make some of these kinds of errors as well.

But we see her making more of an effort to hide it. Um, we see this when she subtly tries to correct Anne in this opening sequence, where Anne is talking about Beau and Lucy's like, mm, and you know, she later is trying to redirect the conversation. She can, she's, she's embarrassed by Anne in some of these conversations.

And so we see little hints of it in Lucy's linguistics, but she's [00:10:00] much more aware of what it signals when she misuses her language.

Diane: And it's not just the fact that she's using sort of. It's not less proper or genteel language. It's it's a topic itself on top of that.

Zan: Yeah, it's it's a double it's she's compounding it basically whereas whereas Lucy is aware of is at least a little bit more aware of the ways that like if we're

going to talk about this, we have to try and like, you know, come at it with a slant.

Diane: Yeah. Yeah. You need to code things a little bit.

Zan: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Diane: Which again, I appreciate that about Ann Steele. There's just, she's just like, Oh, would you like me to make subtext text? Like, I'm just going to put it all out there, you know?

Zan: It's true.

Diane: So with this initial scene, we are also introduced to Ann's preference for smart beau rather than dirty or nasty beau.

Which obviously we need to unpack that a bit more.

Zan: Yes, yes we do.

Diane: And when Ann says smart here, she is referring to a person's appearance. Transcribed that their clothing is neat and fashionable. It doesn't have anything to [00:11:00] do with intellect or intelligence in this context.

Zan: And so, um, when she says, you know, contrast smart Beaux with dirty or nasty Beaux, we're getting kind of, it's probably clear enough, right, what dirty and nasty are potentially referring to because it's basically talking about hygiene.

But there is an additional cultural context that's attached to this description. It is likely that Austen is making an oblique reference to slang from this period. In the 1811 edition of Francis Grosse's Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, can we just like appreciate that his name is Grosse, um, and his dictionary is about the vulgar tongue?

So good. I appreciate that. Um, and this dictionary obviously being essentially the urban dictionary of its day, but in this edition, he actually, there's a phrase, Beau Nasty, which was defined as quote, A slovenly fop, one finely dressed but dirty.

Diane: So a descriptive example comes from the [00:12:00] 1830 gem of a publication titled, everyone get ready for this, Tavern Anecdotes and Reminiscences of the Origin of Signs, Coffee Houses, and Etc.

Intended as a lounge book for citizens and their country cousins. It's the country cousins that just pop up. Over the top for me. I definitely need a coffee table book version of that, please. For your country cousin. Yes. In one of these charming anecdotes, a beau nasty enters a bar, which definitely sounds like the beginning of a bad joke.

The country cousins and a beau nasty walk into a bar and

Zan: So here's, here's the anecdote. Just then, it happened that before a large fire in the bar, Most monstrous to behold, there stood, with his coat skirts under each arm, a pitiful imitation of what was then denominated buckism, but very deficient, both in cleanliness and costume.

The face [00:13:00] of this sad exquisite was grimy. His neck cloth of the same vile tint, which nevertheless was rolled in various folds about his throat. His hair was matted and turned up under a greasy hat with a narrow brim conceitedly placed on the side of his head. Thus equipped, the filthy fop straddled before the fire, which he completely monopolized.

In silent amazement for the space of half a minute, another man in the room gazed and gazed as a planet struck, examining the egregious coxcomb from top to toe, Then, turning suddenly to his friend, and bursting into an obstreperous horse laugh roared out sarcastically, or rather croaked, Beau nasty by God.

That is an entire mental image.

Diane: It paints quite the picture, doesn't it?

Zan: Uh huh, uh huh, uh huh.

Diane: That is quite the story for the country cousins. Austen does not use the phrase Beau nasty, but [00:14:00] as Haight Stevenson points out, she has Anne Steele reference nasty and dirty Beau. And then essentially gives a definition of a beau Nasty when she describes a Mr.

Rose at Exeter. She describes him as a prodigious smart young man, quite a beau, clerk to Mr. Simpson, you know. And yet if you do but meet him of a

morning, he is not fit to be seen. He's got the right look, but it's not quite all put together exactly the way you might want.

Zan: Well, and I do think that everybody needs to know that while doing research on the beau Nasty.

Um, it came to our attention that there is an 80s American glam rock band named Beau Nasty. And all we're saying is that you need to Google the cover art for their album, Dirty, But Well Dressed. And it is, it's a, it's a visual experience, you know?

Diane: Google image that and then just always have that picture in your mind whenever you're reading Sense and Sensibility and Anne Steele is talking about Beau, you should just be thinking About one of those guys.[00:15:00]

Zan: Yes. I mean, I hope that that is the way that you read it from here on out, basically.

Diane: I mean, it's just fabulous. Because, I mean, if you're going to go glam rock, put the effort into it, you know what I mean?

Zan: Like, get a theme, you know, commit to the bit. And they did. I mean, full points.

Diane: Haven't actually listened to any of their music, so.

Zan: Me neither. We're going purely off of the visuals here.

Diane: Yes. Just FYI. So we still have even more to unpack from this first scene with Anne Steele. She has so much to say on this topic. She's giving us so much material. We get a rather overt nod to the ambiguity in the term beau, directly after she describes Mr.

Rose. Haight Stevenson describes the use of the term beau as a suggestive cryptogram in this next moment.

Zan: So we are going to get a little bit of reader's theater here for you all. Um, and so at this point, Anne says to Eleanor, I suppose your brother was quite a beau, Miss Dashwood, before he married, as he was so [00:16:00] rich.

Diane: Sorry, it's just so funny. I mean, that's the really crass thing. You know what I mean? It's not the, it's not the going on about the beau. It's just the straight up being like, your brother was loaded, right? So he must've been really popular. But at the same time, she's not wrong. If he was very rich, he probably was very popular with the ladies.

Zan: It's true. It's true. But she is just, she's not hiding her interest there.

Diane: She just says the things that everybody's actually thinking in the back of their head. Upon my word, replied Elinor, I cannot tell you, for I do not perfectly comprehend the meaning of the word. But this I can say, that if he ever was a beau, before he married, He has one still, for there is not the smallest alteration in him.

Zan: Oh, dear. No one ever thinks of married men's being beau. They have something else to do.

Diane: Cut to Lucy still quickly

trying

to

change the

subject.

Zan: Yes. I love that when she tries to change the subject, she's like, what lovely [00:17:00] furniture you have in this room.

Diane: Uh, Let's talk about anything else, please.

Zan: Anything else will do.

Diane: Eleanor is pretty direct in this moment, telling Anne she doesn't really know what she means by the word, which is perhaps an acknowledgment of the different definitions, as well as the connotations attached to them, especially because Anne describes John Dashwood as a beau in relation to being single and rich.

So she's like, I'm not really sure what you're asking me. What are you asking

me?

Zan: Okay.

But it is pretty funny, right, when you realize that this is perhaps the equivalent of saying to someone that you've just met, you're like, So, is your brother hot and rich and maybe available? Like

Diane: I love Anne Steele, you know, I just I'm here for it.

Zan: Uh, I know I don't know you, but tell me about your hot brother.

Diane: Oh, it's so funny. And Elinor is, not surprisingly, being, you know, a bit witty here, telling Anne that her brother is, Pretty much the same person, married or [00:18:00] not, which I think especially is almost like, almost like a joke to herself, you know what I mean?

Like, she's like, my brother sucked before he got married. He still sucks. Like, ooh.

Zan: I don't know what you want to hear here.

Diane: If that's what you mean by beau, then yeah, sure. He's a beau. But then Anne makes it even more awkward. Hate Stevenson writes, Ms. Steele exclaims that married men cannot be beau because they have something else to do.

This statement humiliates Lucy, since it introduces the salacious question of what that something else might be. And Lucy, again, is like, I need to change the subject right now.

Zan: Furniture. Have you heard about the furniture? Yeah, I do love that there is that underpinning of like, what else do married men do?

Diane: Which, like, who knows exactly what is intended there, but, you know, the salacious possibilities cannot be overlooked.

Zan: It's just there enough that Lucy's like, next topic, moving on. So [00:19:00] that kind of ends their first encounter, but, you know, obviously the Steeles are staying for a while. So during a subsequent gathering at Barton Park, Sir John reveals to the Miss Steeles that the Mr.

F that they have been teasing Eleanor about is a Mr. Edward Ferris. Which is when Anne Steele reveals that oh, Mr. Ferris, you say, oh yeah, we totally know him.

Diane: Weird, we're very well acquainted with him.

Zan: Lisa's like, I don't know what she's talking about, we maybe met him once, I don't know. Um, but, but you know, Anne, again, she's just, we know him, and so she just said it, you know?

Diane: I love it. A little later in the novel, we get a scene in which Anne shows a shining moment of wit. Anne overhears Lucy and Eleanor's discussion, in which Lucy describes Robert Ferris as a coxcomb and she jumps right in.

Zan: So again, readers theater, you're all welcome. A great coxcomb, repeated Miss Steele, whose ear had caught those words by a sudden pause in [00:20:00] Marianne's music.

Oh, they are talking of their favorite beau, I dare say.

Diane: No, sister, cried Lucy, you are mistaken there. Our favorite beau are not great coxcombs. I can answer for it that Miss Dashwoods is not, said Mrs. Jennings, laughing heartily. For he is one of the modestest, prettiest behaved young men I ever saw. But as for Lucy, she is such a sly little creature, there is no finding out who she likes.

Zan: Oh, cried Miss Steele, looking significantly round at them, I dare say Lucy's Beau is quite as modest and pretty behaved as Miss Dashwood's. This is like the one time she's like, she feels like she's fully grasped the subtext of the conversation. And so she's like, guys, I know what's happening here.

Diane: And of course, this moment of insight would be about Beau, obviously.

She understands that there's a bit of a love triangle going on here between Eleanor and Lucy and Edward, and, uh, she's She decides to bring it up in this moment. Mm hmm. It [00:21:00] manages to completely slide under Mrs. Jennings radar, which, uh, is really unfortunate for Mrs. Jennings because this is exactly the type of juicy tidbit she would love to latch on to.

Yes. But obviously, Eleanor is immediately embarrassed, blushes, and Lucy doesn't even try to change the subject. Like, she is mad.

Zan: Mm hmm.

Diane: And she's described as biting her lip and looking angrily at her sister. Yeah. Like, she's just like, we are going to be having words about this later.

Zan: Yes. Well, cause, cause this is all while Eleanor and Lucy are having all their like really barbed subtle commentary about what's going on.

And then Anne just like blunt as a hammer comes in and is like, hey. And yeah, so Anne is ruining this kind of subtle barbing that Lucy is trying to do. So yeah, Lucy is not, not impressed. And Eleanor is like, I'm not bothered. Or she's trying to pretend like she's not bothered, but everybody knows. I'm totally fine.

Yeah. Yeah. So this is, I mean, it's, it's quite, it's quite a moment, right? And this is, it's interesting that this is kind of a moment where Anne understands the [00:22:00] subtext. It's kind of significant that that's what's happening in a scene, that she's that attuned to things, because later in the novel, she is not, right?

Jenny Writing points out in her article, *The Other Siblings in Sense and Sensibility*, that quote, Anne in particular is devoid of sense. Her prattle about Beau, desire to be teased about the Doctor, Anne's blunder in revealing Lucy's secret all show her to be vapid and vacuous. Which again, might be a little bit harsh, but she is the one who, like, totally spills the beans about Lucy and Edward's relationship in a way that's disastrous for pretty much everybody.

Diane: I mean, come on, she is, she is doing the hard work of being a plot device. You know what I mean? Yes. Like, somebody has to do it.

Zan: Yes. She's there to move things along, okay?

Diane: To be fair to Anne, all of that being said, she is living in a society where her entire worth and value is tied up in whether she marries and also who [00:23:00] she marries.

So, you sort of understand from that context, right? The fixation. Yeah. With just Beau and she, she's essentially fixated with, I don't know, like *Indeed.com*. You know what I mean? Like for her, this is like, she's basically looking for like job listings. Yes.

Zan: Yeah. It's the only way that she's going to, you know, find security for herself.

So, so it's, it, it is easy to be dismissive of it, but at the same time the, the context matters for sure.

Diane: So the idea of Dr. Davies being interested in her is probably pretty enticing, you know, like. Yeah. Even if it is just like a story she's, she's telling. Telling in her head, you know, she's almost 30, and Austen describes her as being very plain.

That, on top of her not having a fortune, puts her in a very precarious position. Yeah, yeah. So, you know, like, let Anne Steele have her fantasies.

Zan: Absolutely.

Diane: If thinking about the doctor being interested in her makes her happy, that's fine. Great.

Zan: Right. She wants to be teased about the doctor. Yes. Like that's something that makes her happy.

So, you know.

Diane: [00:24:00] Again, if your value as a woman is the man who's attached to you, the idea that Dr. Davies might be interested in her, part of why she wants to be teased about it is that it gives her a little bit of consequence, you know, like it makes her important. It makes her matter in the way that single spinster, Anne Steele, does.

It matters not at all to society, like society does not care about that Ann Steele, but society maybe cares a little bit about Ann Steele, who has Dr. Davies potentially interested in her.

Zan: Yeah. And that's, and that's when she and Mrs. Jennings have their most like overt interactions in the text. Like, like is when the dialogue is actually revolving around those things.

Mrs. Jennings is like, Oh, tell me more, you know, she's, she's willing to play that.

Diane: But also like, that is something that again, Mrs. Jennings also knows that that's, that's kind of part of Mrs. Jennings apparatus in the story too, is to be the one who's interested in helping make those matches because it is such an important and significant part of being a young woman in this period.

But I do think what's kind of interesting also, when you talk about [00:25:00] this kind of, you obsession with Beau, the way that the Anne Steele talks about them. The only other times that Beau show up within Austen's novels is an interesting thing. I think there's something revealing about the way that she uses the term Beau, because the only other two times it shows up in Austen's novels is once in *Pride and Prejudice*, and it's Miss Bingley who uses it.

And once, in *Emma*, and it's Mrs. Elton who uses it. So, I think we're kind of noticing a trend about who uses the term Beau in Austen. And it's not about the protagonists. It's usually the characters that we're allowed to give side eye, basically.

And aside from the novels, there are other references to Beau.

But the one that we feel like we have to mention comes from one of Austen's teenage writings, *Kitty or the Bower*. Edward Stanley is essentially inviting himself to the ball and convincing Kitty to dance with him. Kitty tells him he would be most welcome by the family giving the ball, and Edward [00:26:00] responds, Hang them.

Who cares for that? They cannot turn me out of the house. But I am afraid I shall cut a sad figure among all your Devonshire beaux in this dusty traveling apparel. So Devonshire is apparently just rife with beaux.

Zan: They're just everywhere. You know, and Anne would be interested to know that that's where all the beaux are, you know, because that's, that's kind of, that's, I mean, it brings us back to the beginning of the episode, essentially, where she's like, okay, got to get the lay of the land.

Where are the beaux?

Diane: Yeah. And they are all in Devonshire. Well, if you have any thoughts on Anne Steele's beaux. We want to hear them. Or, you know, if any of you ever went to a Beau Nasty concert and have photos, send them our way. You can find us on Instagram at [thethingaboutaustin](https://www.instagram.com/thethingaboutaustin) and on Twitter at [AustenUnderscore](https://twitter.com/AustenUnderscore) things.

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Zan: Stay tuned for next episode when we'll be talking about Mary's Concerto with Dr. Lidia Chang.

Diane: Thanks for listening. Bye.