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# "The certain corrective": *Sanditon*, Students and Strategies of Defamiliarization

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In their introduction to the special issue of *Persuasions On-Line* dedicated to "Teaching Austen and her Contemporaries," Bridget Draxler, Misty Krueger, and Susan Allen Ford suggest that, "although high school teachers and university professors the world over include Jane Austen's fiction in their courses, the body of scholarship on teaching Austen is surprisingly small." A year later, Emily Zarka and Devoney Looser identified more than sixty print and online sources related to the teaching of Austen written in the past fifty years, among them four substantial books and the *Persuasions On-Line* special issue itself, but it is certainly true that when it comes to thinking about scholarship on teaching Austen's juvenile and later unfinished works, very little exists. Apart from Juliet McMaster's three splendid articles/chapters on teaching the juvenilia and Michelle Levy's excellent discussion of teaching Austen's digitized manuscripts, which appears in Emily Friedman and Devoney Looser's special issue of *Romantic Circles Pedagogies Commons* on "Teaching Jane Austen," almost nobody has written on the opportunities and challenges of teaching the manuscript works.<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, partly because fewer people write on the manuscript works at all, but also, no doubt, because far fewer university professors choose to include them on their syllabi. And it would be a rare high school teacher indeed who dared to focus on the juvenilia or unfinished works in preference to one or more of Austen's finished novels. Austen's manuscript works—both the juvenilia and the later unfinished manuscripts—are in some ways so

very unlike the published work that both students and their teachers sometimes don't quite know what to make of them. In this article, then, I will be exploring the question "why teach *Sanditon*?" with reference to my own experience of teaching that text.

Critics such as B. C. Southam, J. David Grey, Margaret Anne Doody, Juliet McMaster, Peter Sabor, Janet Todd, Linda Bree, and Olivia Murphy have all, in different ways, done an excellent job of attempting to recuperate the manuscript works, and to show where they fit into Austen's *oeuvre*.<sup>2</sup> Murphy, indeed, has forcefully argued that the early "first productions are of inestimable value in understanding the trajectory of Austen's career, and her lifelong literary preoccupations" ("Queerness" 32), while Todd and Bree suggest that it is only by close analysis of the "handwritten changes, elisions and revisions" of the later manuscript works that we might begin to catch Jane Austen, as Virginia Woolf put it, "in the act of greatness" (Todd and Bree xxxi). Nonetheless, vestiges of the dismissiveness with which these works were first treated by Austen's early family biographers still linger: James Edward Austen-Leigh, for example, described the juvenilia as "of a slight and flimsy texture . . . generally intended to be nonsensical" (40) and radically bowdlerized *Sanditon* when he first presented it to the public in the second edition of the *Memoir*. The pedagogic result is that students often tend to think of all the manuscript works as if they were simply dress rehearsals for the "real thing" rather than, as Todd and Bree rightly call them, "significan[t] in their own right" (xxxii). This tendency may, though, have less to do with the reputation of Austen's manuscripts than with the students' implicit assumptions about the relative value of published and unpublished works.

Throughout this article, I will focus on teaching the manuscript works with a particular emphasis on *Sanditon*, reflecting on my own experience of teaching these works over the past eight years with successive cohorts of students in my own institution, the University of Stirling in Scotland.

## Context

The experience I will be discussing here is that of teaching my advanced optional single author Jane Austen module to successive cohorts of fourth-year undergraduate students ( [see Appendix for the module syllabus](#)) between 2009 and 2017 at a small but research-intensive British university. (At the time of writing the student population is 8,794 undergraduates, 2,686 taught postgraduates [Masters students], and 591 research postgraduates [Ph.D. students].) The module's full title is Theories and Approaches: Jane Austen. The overall purpose of this module is to study the works of Jane Austen and their reception in the English-speaking world, using a number of different theoretical approaches (reader-response, feminist, new-historicist, book-historical, and others). In the module, we think about the reception of Austen's works, from the first readings of the novels by Jane Austen's family members to the film and television adaptations of the present day, and we consider which critical, methodological, and theoretical approaches are most pertinent to this study. Students study the novels' publishing history, explore their reception and readerships, and discuss adaptations into other media. In addition to Jane Austen's six complete novels, we read her juvenile works and unfinished manuscripts, James Edward Austen-Leigh's *Memoir*, and two creative responses to her works: Rudyard Kipling's short story "The Janeites" and Paula Morris's "Premises." We also watch a number of screen adaptations of the works, the biopics *Becoming Jane* (2006) and *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008), and the time-travel series *Lost in Austen* (2008). Each week, the students write a collaborative online reading journal, using the university's virtual

learning environment ("Succeed"), and they write two further coursework assignments over the course of the module, the first being a "standard" critical essay and the second either a critical essay or a creative response.

The students normally come to the Jane Austen module having taken two survey courses, the first in eighteenth-century literature and the second in Romanticism, although it is possible to take the Jane Austen module without having studied on either previous course. In addition, every year there are a number of visiting international students (very often from the USA) who opt to take the course. All students (except visiting students) will, however, have encountered at least one work by Jane Austen during their previous studies, since *Northanger Abbey* is a set text on our compulsory first-year "Introduction to Literary Studies: Genre" module. On that course, they study *Northanger Abbey* within the framework of genre, reading it in the context of a cluster of gothic novels. Those who have taken the Romanticism course will also have read *Sense and Sensibility*, taught on that module within a historicist framework, and most students who take the Austen module have seen at least some of the film or television adaptations of the novels. They therefore come to the Austen module with some previous exposure to Austen's works both within and outside a higher education context and, of course, with their own opinions, ideas, and prejudices about Austen and her works.

The course normally recruits around forty students, and in successive cohorts the gender balance has been overwhelmingly female, with a female-to-male balance of approximately 90% : 10% on average (although it should be noted that English Studies students at Stirling are predominantly female [75% : 25% female-to-male balance] so this finding is not particularly marked). In terms of broader demographic patterns, Stirling students are generally Scottish and mostly from the Central Belt of Scotland (71 % of our undergraduate student body is from Scotland), although the university does recruit some students from the rest of the UK (15% of undergraduates) and some international students (the remaining 14%). The Austen module reflects these numbers fairly accurately, although with a slightly higher proportion of international students than some other optional modules. Typically, the cohort is made up of white, lower-to-middle-class Scottish students, and there is very little diversity in terms of background, ethnicity, culture, or language. Again, this population is not surprising given the make-up of the university as a whole: ethnic minorities make up only 5.7% of the total student population.

In her fascinating article on teaching *Persuasion* to resistant students in the federally registered "Hispanic-Serving Institution" John Jay College in New York, Olivera Jokic suggests that her students' resistance is fundamentally rooted in their opposition to Austen's treatment of class and gender, which they see to be conservative and hence in conflict with their own desire to criticize "the ideologies, social norms, and historical patterns that shape the lives of individuals." My own cohorts of students from Stirling, too, are often resistant to the class dynamics of Austen's novels—in particular *Emma*—and to the conservative marriage-plot endings of the novels. Unlike Jokic's students, however, my own tend to be much more open to seeing the subtle subversions of Austen's depictions of class and gender, and my own belief is that this openness is because they read the manuscript works as well as the completed novels, whereas Jokic's only read *Persuasion*.

Like Jokic's students, though, my own do not see themselves as part of the privileged gentry-class world depicted in Austen's novels—indeed, they are often profoundly alienated from it—and the characters with whom they have most sympathy are the “outsider” characters who have to move between socio-economic groups over the course of the novel: Fanny Price, Emma Watson, Jane Fairfax. This alienation is, I think, both the result of a particular set of socio-cultural conditions, which then operate on a micro level within the classroom, and a response to the ways in which Austen and Austen's works are represented in the broader culture. Over the past ten years, in successive debates over its national identity, Scotland has increasingly defined itself against and in contrast to England, and in particular against precisely the kind of stately-home “Englishness” that the Hollywood film adaptations of Austen's work tend to peddle. Scotland's nationalist debate is also a class debate, and ironically, since Austen heartily championed Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Stuart line in her *History of England*, to most modern-day Scots, Jane Austen stands for precisely the kind of conservative Englishness that they most dislike, the kind D. H. Lawrence called “English in the bad, mean snobbish sense of the word” (333). My Scottish students are not, of course, universally in favor of Scottish independence, nor do they necessarily buy into a *Braveheart* version of history that sees plucky indigenous Scots forced to fight for their freedom against their evil English overlords, but these stereotypes run deep in Scottish culture, particularly in working-class Scottish households. My students encounter Austen's works against this backdrop.

Much of the scholarship on teaching Austen discusses the difficulties of overcoming students' existing preconceptions and prejudices about Austen and her work. Misty Krueger, for example, describes her students' “preconceived ideas of Austen as a pretentious killjoy” while Danielle Spratt suggests that “[t]he stereotype of the escapist Janeite—and, by extension, the perceived disconnect between Austen's novels and the twenty-first-century world—pervades the media and haunts many of our students as they enter our classrooms.” I would add to these the stereotype touched on above, that of “England's Jane.”<sup>3</sup> One excellent reason for teaching the manuscript works is, then, that they immediately disrupt such expectations. Of all Austen's works, the juvenilia and *Sanditon* are the most immediately and obviously satirical and subversive, and the least escapist. And to my Scottish students, at least, *The History of England* demonstrates Austen's sympathies with the Scottish underdog. The manuscript works, therefore, introduce students to a different kind of “Jane Austen” from the one they have been expecting. These works can thus operate to defamiliarize the other, “known” works, helping students to see the published novels in different ways.

In fact, they operate to debunk a series of myths about Austen that the students have often encountered or imbibed without knowing they are doing so: that she is genteel, ladylike, precise, limited, a miniaturist, a romantic (rather than Romantic) novelist. The juvenilia, in particular, show that almost no subject was off-limits to the young Jane Austen, with their delight in excesses of all kinds and their depictions of drunkenness, murder, suicide, theft, and violence, while in *Sanditon* she returns to an intensive focus on the body and on financial speculation, two topics that students often believe Jane Austen knows nothing about. The manuscript works also conclusively dispel the notion, begun by Henry Austen in his “Biographical Notice” and perpetuated by James Edward's *Memoir*, that Austen was an effortless writer, particularly since students can now see the extent of Austen's revisions in the *Sanditon* manuscript and the cancelled chapters of *Persuasion* on the *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts* website. They therefore open up all sorts of discussions that are currently of interest to Austen scholars of both a

book-historical and feminist turn of mind—about the position of the professional woman writer in the Romantic period, the expectations of the literary marketplace in Austen's time, and the role and status of the novel. The manuscript works prepare students very well for the "subversive Austen" critical tradition,<sup>4</sup> making them more receptive to reading critical works in this tradition, such as D. W. Harding's ground-breaking "Regulated Hatred" (1940) or Claudia Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (1988).

The juvenile works remind us that Austen began her career as a parodist, and in so doing they focus the students' attention on literary and historical context—which are the works, genres, people, ideas that the juvenilia parody, and why? They also help to direct our attention to technique, since in the manuscript works we see an author *at work*, learning her craft in the juvenilia and honing it in the later manuscripts. And finally, as Michelle Levy has perceptively argued, attention to the manuscript works *as* manuscripts, made possible by Kathryn Sutherland's digital edition of the fiction manuscripts, which puts facsimile versions alongside a diplomatic edition, allows the students to see how Austen's published works have been "subjected to the normalizing processes of print, in which spelling has been regularized, evidence of revision has been removed, abbreviations expanded, and so on." For all these reasons, therefore, teaching the manuscript works provides a series of exciting opportunities that help students to see Jane Austen and her works with fresh eyes.

On my Jane Austen module, I teach the juvenilia and the later and unfinished manuscripts in two consecutive weeks of the course after the students have read all of the six completed novels and immediately before they encounter the *Memoir*. I deliberately structure the course in this way, violating the otherwise straightforward chronological structure of the module, because it is important to me that the students already have some idea of what "an Austen novel" is when they encounter the juvenilia. Almost without fail, one member of the class will volunteer the information that s/he would not have believed that the juvenilia were by Jane Austen. It is, quite literally, as if students are encountering a new author at this stage in the course, and here we start to do some explicit work of rethinking some of their previous prejudices about Austen.

Of course this shift does not come as a complete surprise—by the seventh week of the semester the students know pretty well that I am a critic and teacher who likes to see the subversive fun in Austen—but it does allow us to start to talk about the ways in which her reputation has been constructed and perpetuated and about the effects this construction has had on their reading of the works. We discuss the basic tenets of reader-response theory, segueing into the intentional and biographical fallacies—and the validity or otherwise of New Critical approaches—and this work leads well into the session on biography that follows the manuscript works, in which we discuss the *Memoir* and the biopics *Becoming Jane* and *Miss Austen Regrets*. It also allows us to revisit Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park*, since the students can now see that part of what that film is doing is recreating Fanny Price in her creator's image through the use of the juvenilia as the stories that Fanny sends back to Susan in Portsmouth. I teach *Sanditon* alongside *The Watsons* and *Lady Susan*, and for the first time this year (2017) I was able to use Whit Stillman's adaptation of *Lady Susan*, misleadingly titled *Love and Friendship*, as the film text for this seminar. Prepared in the previous session on manuscript works, the students come to *Sanditon* expecting

something rather different from the published novels, but they are still surprised to find that this work of her maturity is so biting satirical and exuberant. *The Watsons*, written in a more minor key, feels more familiar to them.

## ***Sanditon***

Critical discussions of *Sanditon* tend to be colored by its status as the last work and hence the question of whether it represents the culmination of Austen's achievements as a novelist or fails to live up to her other works, showing the weaknesses of illness. Although *Sanditon*'s style has its defenders, myself among them, critics from R. Brimley Johnson and E. M. Forster to D. A. Miller have characterized *Sanditon*'s style as a catastrophic failure, citing its "careless and eroding grammar" (Tanner 260), its "effect of weakness" (Forster 149) and "the breakdown, registered on every page of the novel, of Austen Style" (Miller 80). A related critical debate arises regarding *Sanditon*'s difference from, or similarity to, Austen's completed novels. B. C. Southam, for example, saw it as a new departure, and the most Romantic of Austen's works (102–24), and Alistair Duckworth considered it a radical departure from her previous modes of writing (220–22), while Marilyn Butler considered it to be a return to a more eighteenth-century mode of writing (286–89). A number of critics, such as Clara Tuite, John Halperin, Peter Knox-Shaw, Bharat Tandon, and John Wiltshire have made the connection between Austen's state of bodily health and *Sanditon*'s focus on invalidism and invalid bodies. And a final critical debate centers on whether *Sanditon* enacts a clash between tradition and novelty and hence on the moral status of speculation and speculators in the fragment.

Naturally these questions shape our discussions in class also. The great value of *Sanditon* as a teaching text, though, is that it foregrounds and makes explicit so many of the issues that are muted or implicit in Austen's other novels, opening these up for discussion. The presence of the mulatto Miss Lambe, for example, allows us to discuss anew the references to slavery in *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, and thus helps us to think about the great debates of Austen's time that are only glanced at elliptically in her novels—for example, the abolition question, female education, and the rights of man. *Sanditon*'s hilariously up-front critique of invalids and invalidism reminds us of Austen's other invalids, hypochondriacs, and valetudinarians—such as Mrs. Smith, Mary Musgrove, Mr. Woodhouse—and the ways in which illness is so often used strategically in Austen's novels by both characters and their creator. We discuss Louisa Musgrove's fall, Jane Bennet's cold at Netherfield, Marianne Dashwood's near-fatal illness, Kitty Bennet's coughs, and Jane Fairfax's tactical illnesses, and, following John Wiltshire, we think about the ways in which female illness is so often the only way in which a woman can exercise any kind of control or agency. While this emphasis is implicit in the completed novels, Austen tells us directly in *Sanditon* that women's ill-health is often the result of the displacement of mental energy:

It was impossible for Charlotte not to suspect a good deal of fancy in such an extraordinary state of health.—Disorders and recoveries so very much out of the common way, seemed more like the amusement of eager minds in want of employment than of actual afflictions and relief. The Parkers were no doubt a family of imagination and quick feelings—and while the eldest brother found vent for his superfluity of sensation as a projector, the sisters were perhaps driven to dissipate theirs in the invention of odd complaints. (*Later Manuscripts* 192)

My (largely female) students are often most interested in the status of and opportunities for women in Austen's time, and, in the quotation above, *Sanditon* provides a good example of one of Austen's few direct comments on the topic. (They enjoy Anne Elliot's conversation with Captain Harville in the White Hart and Catherine Morland's comments on the lack of women in conventional masculine-authored histories too.)

The foregrounding of Sanditon as a place leads us to think about other settings and locations in Austen's novels and about the metaphorical resonances of space and place that are perhaps most strongly felt in *Mansfield Park* but are also fundamental to *Emma* and *Persuasion*. Sanditon's position as a brand-new resort town helps us to think about why such sites of social mobility and promiscuous social mixing might be troubling to conservative moralists, and we remember Lydia Bennet's elopement from another seaside town, Brighton, Wickham's attempts at seducing Georgiana Darcy at Ramsgate, and Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax's reprehensible secret engagement that takes place in Weymouth. Social mobility more broadly is of course relevant to many of Austen's other novels, and Austen's approval of characters who are prepared to make their own way in life is perhaps most obvious in *Persuasion* but also appears in Elizabeth's famous response to Lady Catherine de Bourgh and in Emma's realization that she has been wrong about characters such as the Coles and Robert Martin (although conversely, of course, Austen does not appear to approve of upwardly mobile schemers such as Lady Susan, Lucy Steele, or Isabella Thorpe). *Sanditon* helps my students to see that Austen is not as socially conservative as they might originally have thought her to be, because *Sanditon*'s focus on the radical and seismic changes England was undergoing in the post-Napoleonic period—made manifest and visible through the contrasts between the old and new villages of Sanditon—also opens up discussion of the many manifestations of social change in Austen's other novels. Again, *Persuasion* provides the best example in Austen's completed novels of the results of early nineteenth-century societal upheavals, since the aristocratic Elliots are both literally and figuratively displaced by the upwardly-mobile Crofts, but we can see hints of the demise of the aristocracy and the rise of those in "trade" from *Pride and Prejudice* onwards. Studying *Sanditon* helps the students to identify such moments in the complete novels.

*Sanditon* returns to things and ideas that had preoccupied Austen since her juvenilia and that are also foregrounded in *Northanger Abbey*, a work that she may well have been revising at the same time as writing *Sanditon*. The first of these is her preoccupation with the construction and representation of a novelistic heroine. In each of Austen's completed novels, she tries something different, experimental, and risky, using the models that she knew, but either pushing them further or ironizing them. *Sense and Sensibility* experiments with the structural possibilities of two contrasting heroines, but where her contemporaries such as Elizabeth Inchbald and Jane West had used the two-heroine structure to provide straightforward didactic comparisons, Austen's seemingly opposed heroines are in fact much more similar than they are different, and *Sense and Sensibility* records not the triumph of sense over sensibility but instead the need for an Aristotelian balance of the two. *Pride and Prejudice* gives its heroine the morally ambiguous quality of "wit," bringing her precariously close to literary shrews like Shakespeare's Beatrice and Kate, and hence takes the risk of creating a heroine whom some readers did indeed think "pert" and "vulgar."<sup>5</sup>

*Mansfield Park* gives us what Lynda A. Hall has called a "reluctant heroine" (195), one who seems more suited to the role of minor character and who directly tells us that she "cannot act" (*MP* 171). Fanny nonetheless finds herself propelled into the center of the action, and is forced to assume the agency she does not wish for. In "creepmouse" Fanny (171), Austen set herself the technical challenge of replacing novelistic excitement and action with steadfast goodness, and creating a heroine who embodied that goodness. In *Emma*, Austen deliberately created a heroine "whom no one but myself will much like" (Austen-Leigh 119), while Anne Elliot is, by the standards of the day, too old for the role of romantic heroine. In all of these cases, Austen seems to have set herself a particular kind of challenge to create a new sort of heroine. Finally, the very notion of the novelistic heroine is directly satirized in *Northanger Abbey*, where its narratorial interjections leave us in no doubt that we are seeing a strongly ironic version of the sentimental or gothic heroine. Catherine Morland, we are told directly, does not fit the bill. Unlike *Sanditon's* Clara Brereton, who is "[e]legantly tall, regularly handsome, with great delicacy of complexion and soft blue eyes, a sweetly modest and yet naturally graceful address" and hence seems to Charlotte "the most perfect representation of whatever heroine might be most beautiful and bewitching, in all the numerous volumes they had left behind them on Mrs. Whilby's shelves" (168–69), Catherine has no pretensions to any of the characteristics of a circulating-library heroine; indeed she represents the antithesis of such beautiful, educated, and vulnerable creatures.

*Sanditon's* cool observer heroine, Charlotte Heywood, oddly disengaged from the action, and not yet, by the end of the twelve existing chapters, fully known to us as readers, can therefore be seen either as the culmination of Austen's radical experiments with the figure of the heroine—another heroine who, like *Emma* or *Fanny*, does not conform to our expectations—or as a failure that Austen might have put right with revision. Like *Northanger Abbey*, *Sanditon* also contains further direct satire on the heroines most familiar to Austen's readers, in the shape of Charlotte's musings on Clara Brereton as a perfect circulating-library novel heroine:

Perhaps it might be partly owing to her having just issued from a circulating library—but she could not separate the idea of a complete heroine from Clara Brereton. Her situation with Lady Denham so very much in favour of it!—She seemed placed with her on purpose to be ill-used.—Such poverty and dependence, joined to such beauty and merit, seemed to leave no choice in the business.  
(169)

On reflection, Charlotte realizes that Clara is not ill-treated by Lady Denham, and she concludes that she is in fact therefore not a circulating-library heroine, although we learn that in Sir Edward Denham's fantasies, Clara *is* the subject of exactly the kind of plot beloved by gothic novelists. At least in Sir Edward's mind, if not in reality, Clara is the proper object of his seduction: "Her situation in every way called for it" (184). The ironic attention to the "business" of the seduction of the heroine, its clichéd inevitability in a novel, shows us what Austen thought of such plots and such heroines, reminding us of yet another text in which she mocks almost every aspect of the contemporary novel: the wonderfully satirical "Plan of a Novel."



In *Sir Edward Denham*, we find another opportunity to discuss a theme that runs through Austen's other novels: that of the Quixote character, led astray by his reading into believing in fantastical alternative realities. (Peter Knox-Shaw sees the "main theme" of *Sanditon* to be "quixotry" [250]). Catherine Morland provides the best-known example of Austen's Quixotes, but *Persuasion*'s Captain Benwick, wallowing in the morbidities of Romantic poetry, and Emma, weaving her "imaginist" fantasies around Harriet Smith (*E* 362), are two others. In addition to Smollett's translation of *Don Quixote* (1755), Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) and Eaton Stannard Barrett's *The Heroine* (1813) are clear influences on Austen's depictions of these Quixote characters. *Sanditon*'s intertextual richness thus promotes discussion of the kinds of heroines, plots, and structural devices favored by Austen's predecessors and helps the students to see her work as being in conversation with her contemporaries, as well as to identify its innovations and inventiveness.

In addition to the thematic and contextual connections that *Sanditon* helps to draw out, its style repays close analysis. As Virginia Woolf put it, Austen's style always "stimulates us to supply what is not there," because the "trifle" Austen provides "expands in the reader's mind": our imagination is therefore set to work to solve the enigmas of her writing style (138). *Sanditon*'s style, with its elision, asyndeton, and parataxis, functions as an example of Austen's enigmatic style writ large, and once students have encountered the terseness of *Sanditon* they see such passages as the strawberry-picking party in *Emma* with new eyes. Tony Tanner thought *Sanditon* dizzying and excessive—hence his judgment that it was mainly a failure—but in the classroom the difficulties of its style are, in fact, helpful. They allow discussion of other places in Austen where the style slips or seems messy, inappropriate, or surprising. A good example is the frequently clotted syntax of Fanny's thoughts in *Mansfield Park*, which allows us to consider the problems of the realistic representation of painful or unthinkable thoughts, just as *Sanditon*'s Sir Edward's labored and jargonistic literary criticism shows up the difficulties of effective parody.

Perhaps most importantly, though, in my classroom, *Sanditon* (appropriately!) allows us to speculate, to ask the questions that the completed novels close off or relegate to ironic asides. Its unfinished nature prompts questions about endings and makes us think about the cancelled chapters of *Persuasion*, the alternative ending of *Mansfield Park* (which firmly posits the Fanny–Henry and Mary–Edmund marriages as entirely reasonable), the clumsy ending of *Lady Susan*, the ironized endings of *Emma* and *Northanger Abbey*, and the tradition of criticism begun by Marvin Mudrick that problematizes *Sense and Sensibility*'s ending, seeing it as a betrayal of Marianne: "Marianne has been betrayed, and not by Willoughby!" (93). *Sanditon* and the other unfinished works allow us to entertain the heretical idea that Austen simply wasn't very good at endings. Or, instead, we sometimes speculate, Austen was uncomfortable with the necessity for a happy ending in a romance novel, and her ironic evasions might be strategic accommodations to the marketplace. Austen's novels are certainly not straightforward wish-fulfilment fantasies, and discussion of her endings allows us to think about her extraordinary achievement in marrying the bleak realism of her depiction of women's life in Georgian England with her heroines' seemingly neat and conventional endings.

Consideration of *Sanditon*'s alternative titles—"The Brothers" and "The Last Work"—returns us to other alternative titles ("First Impressions," "Elinor and Marianne," "Susan") and makes us think about how titles can shift the emphasis of our reading. *Sanditon* also opens up discussion of sequels, prequels, and other

creative responses to Austen's work, since it was one of the first of Austen's works to enjoy such attention (in the shape of her niece's continuation of the text), along with her nephew's attempts to continue "Evelyn" and "Catharine." It allows us to think about the processes of revision and rewriting. The extent of the deletions, insertions, and revision of wholesale passages visible in the manuscript—the inherent *messiness* of the process of writing—often comes as a shock to students, which helps them to see how much was (and is), as Kathryn Sutherland has pointed out, invested in notions of Austen as a polished writer in our collective emphasis on her neatness and the perfection of her style (*Textual Lives* 268–313).

These kinds of insights are made possible because of the availability of a digital version of the *Sanditon* manuscript. We use Kathryn Sutherland's excellent *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscript* website to look at *Sanditon*, the cancelled chapters of *Persuasion*, and, in the previous session, *The History of England*. This strategy serves the two-fold process of allowing us all to see and work on the manuscript texts together in class (though I also set a print version of all the works on this website for ease of comparison) but also of encouraging the students to think carefully about some of the other digital resources they use. Comparisons between a rigorously scholarly resource such as this one and some other digital resources that they sometimes resort to using can be salutary.

### **The Advantages of Teaching *Sanditon***

Returning to my initial question—why teach *Sanditon*?—it must by now be obvious that my belief is that *Sanditon* is a teaching text *par excellence*. And I might even teach *Sanditon* in preference to the completed novels, for all the reasons discussed above. To summarize, my reasoning is both critical and pedagogical. First, recent work in Austen studies has, to my mind, categorically shown the importance of treating Austen as a subversive writer. While I think the "radical Austen" presented in Helena Kelly's recent book, *Jane Austen the Secret Radical* (2016), is somewhat overstated, I am far more unwilling to subscribe to notions of "England's Jane," "heritage Austen," or "dear Aunt Jane." While I recognize the force of Marilyn Butler's arguments for an anti-Jacobin Austen, acknowledging her political conservatism in those very limited terms does not compel us to think of Austen as conservative in other ways. Teaching my students to see Austen's subversive qualities is therefore important to me as an Austen scholar and critic, and *Sanditon*, alongside the juvenile works, makes this task far easier.

Second, my pedagogical belief is that our first job as teachers of literature is to show our students how to approach texts in new ways. If, as Viktor Shklovsky suggests, the purpose of literary art is "to make objects 'unfamiliar'" (20), or, as P. B. Shelley put it in his *Defence of Poetry*, to "strip the veil of familiarity from the world, and lay bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms" (533), then it seems to me that the purpose of teaching literature is doubly so. When students encounter *Sanditon*, its exuberant and unmuted satire, its stylistic messiness, and its tantalizing new departures all help them to revise and reassess their assumptions and prejudices about Austen's work; it defamiliarizes the seemingly known to them.

Third, *Sanditon*'s survival in manuscript allows us to think about the differences between manuscript and print and makes us consider the contemporary publishing market. This consideration opens out the field of book history to students who are unfamiliar with the methods of this mode of scholarship. Fourth,

seeing Austen's revisions to the manuscript makes us consider her as a "process writer," as Arthur Axelrad astutely noted (135; qtd. in Todd and Bree xc), an insight that is, to me, key to understanding her literary development and to understanding the works.

Finally, as Kathryn Sutherland has pointed out, Austen was an inveterate recycler, whose novels "enact a process of expansion and repetition, retracing the old ground and discovering it as new ground" (126). If taught alongside the completed novels, *Sanditon* shows us Austen revising, recycling, and reinventing characters, plots, and ideas that appear throughout the juvenilia and the six novels. Students have a strong tendency to think about novels in isolation, and studying *Sanditon's* fundamental intra- and inter-textuality therefore helps students to think afresh about Austen's other works, and to consider them not just as individual novels but as related productions, works in conversation with each other and their predecessors and contemporaries. It thus helps to open the students' eyes both to Austen's literary debts and to her own astonishing inventiveness.

## APPENDIX

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See [module syllabus](#) from the 2017 academic year.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this essay, I will use the term "manuscript works" to denote all of Austen's works except the six published novels.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, B. C. Southam's *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts: A Study of the Novelist's Development through the Surviving Papers*; all the essays in *Jane Austen's Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, edited by J. David Grey; Margaret Anne Doody's "Jane Austen That Disconcerting 'Child'" and her Introduction to *Catherine and Other Writings*; Juliet McMaster's *Jane Austen, Young Author* and *Jane Austen the Novelist*, in particular chapters 2, 3, and 5; the introductions by Peter Sabor and by Janet Todd and Linda Bree in the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen; and Olivia Murphy's *Jane Austen the Reader: The Artist as Critic* and "The Queerness and the Fun": Reading Jane Austen's *Volume the First*."

<sup>3</sup>The quotation comes from Rudyard Kipling's poem "Jane's Marriage," first published in *Debts and Credits* (1926), but I am taking it here to stand in for what Claudia Johnson describes as Austen's "emerging status as a national icon" and transformation into "a national treasure" over the course of the last century (58, 140). Marina Cano, too, has recently drawn our attention to the propensity to use Austen "to ventriloquise . . . national ideals" in the years immediately after World War II (47). See also Kathryn Sutherland's chapter "The Making of England's Jane" in *Jane Austen's Textual Lives* (1–54).

<sup>4</sup>I take the phrase "subversive Austen" here from a recent special issue of *Textus: English Studies in Italy* 30.3 (2017), edited by Serena Baiesi, Carlotta Farese, and me. In the introduction to that special issue, we discuss the landmarks of this critical tradition.

<sup>5</sup>Lady Jane Davy, for example, remarked on the depiction of "vulgar minds and manners" in *Pride and Prejudice* (Bell 350–51), and even Mary Russell Mitford, who was in fact one of Austen's greatest apologists, deplored "the entire want of taste which could produce so pert, so worldly a heroine as the beloved of such a man as Darcy" (L'Estrange 1: 300).

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