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POSTSCRIPT:

*Sanditon*

*There—now the old House is quite left behind.*
Written between 27 January and 18 March 1817, and abandoned a few months before her death, *Sanditon* goes further in the direction announced by *Persuasion*, convincingly suggesting that Jane Austen’s art had not reached the end of its trajectory when her life came to its premature end. What is new in *Sanditon* is not so much its recognition of radical change (though this is pervasive) as the fictional response that such change elicits. Like *Mansfield Park*, *Sanditon* takes its title from a place endangered by “improvements,” but unlike the former novel, Jane Austen’s “last work,” as far as we can conjecture from its fragmented state, gives little indication that the “improvements” proposed will be successfully resisted. In another important respect *Sanditon* follows the pattern of several previous novels, the heroine being separated from an initial security and made to encounter a world manifestly lacking in moral substance; but Charlotte Heywood’s developing career, as far as we can see, is less likely than that of previous heroines to validate inherited “grounds,” and there is little indication that her marriage to Sidney Parker, if this is indeed to come about, will bring together the sundered moral and social orders of her society.

In *Sanditon* Jane Austen describes for the first time a thoroughly Regency world, hectic, mobile, and in pursuit of novelty. At the center of this world she places Mr. Parker, an “enthusiast” (*MW*, 371) and “projector” (412)—types long suspect to the Augustan mind. While it is probably true that his place in the total work would have been less prominent, Mr. Parker’s importance in the fragment we have is considerable, for he is the last in a long line of false trustees in Jane Austen’s fiction. “Succeeding as eldest son to the Property

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1 The most comprehensive and judicious account of *Sanditon* is B. C. Southam’s, in *Jane Austen’s Literary Manuscripts: A Study of the Novelist’s Development through the Surviving Papers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), to which this postscript is much indebted. E. M. Forster’s review of the Oxford edition of *Sanditon* (1925), collected in *Abinger Harvest* (1936; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), has interesting suggestions about Jane Austen’s new use of topography, but as most recent criticism has recognized, it is otherwise negative and misguided.
which 2 or 3 Generations had been holding & accumulating before him" (371), Mr. Parker considers Sanditon to have the “highest claims;—not only those of Birthplace, Property, and Home,—it was his Mine, his Lottery, his Speculation & His Hobby Horse; his Occupation his Hope & his Futurity” (372). Like Rushworth and Crawford in Mansfield Park—without the gross stupidity of the one or the pre-eminent intelligence of the other—Mr. Parker is an improver. Unlike these figures, however, his improvements are intended not merely to serve personal vanity, or to provide an outlet for misguided creative energy, but to be a profitable “speculation”:

The success of Sanditon as a small, fashionable Bathing Place was the object, for which he seemed to live. A very few years ago, & it had been a quiet Village of no pretensions; but some natural advantages in its position & some accidental circumstances having suggested to himself, & the other principal Land Holder, the probability of it’s [sic] becoming a profitable Speculation, they had engaged in it, & planned & built, & praised & puffed, & raised it to a something of young Renown—and Mr Parker could now think of very little besides. (371)

His principal “Colleague in Speculation” (375) is Lady Denham of Sanditon House, who, we learn, “enters into the improvement of Sanditon with a spirit truly admirable” (376). But they are not alone in desiring improvement and pursuing commercial success. The third landowner of Sanditon, Sir Edward Denham of Denham Park, though “a poor Man for his rank in Society” (377), promises to be a “noble Coadjutor”; he “is running up a tasteful little Cottage Ornee, on a strip of Waste Ground Lady D. has granted him” (377). In Sanditon, clearly, improvements are no longer a fashionable innovation but a way of life. Even in the old part of the town the “Spirit of the day” has been caught (383):

The Village contained little more than Cottages, but... two or three of the best of them were smartened up with a white Curtain & ‘Lodgings to let’—, and farther on, in the little Green Court of an old Farm House, two Females in elegant white were actually to be seen with their books & camp stools—and in turning the corner of the Baker’s shop, the sound of a Harp might be heard through the upper Casement.—Such sights & sounds were highly Blissful to Mr P. (383)

Higher up the hill, the “Modern” begins, with a view of “a Prospect House, a Bellevue Cottage, & a Denham Place” (384). On the Cliff
are further signs of Mr. Parker's project: "one short row of smart-looking Houses, called the Terrace, with a broad walk in front, aspiring to be the Mall of the Place" (384); while on the Beach, "the favourite spot for Beauty & Fashion," the Bathing Machines are visible.

Sanditon is a community in process of total transformation, "not simply the setting for a story, but a phenomenon . . . of contemporary life, the expression of a social ethos whose influence is pervasive, stimulating and dangerous." As we shall see, Jane Austen's attitude toward Mr. Parker and his radical reinterpretation of his landed role is not as severe as one might expect from her treatment in *Persuasion* of Sir Walter Elliot, that "foolish spendthrift baronet," without "principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him" (P, 248). If the folly of his "enthusiasm" is evident, his good qualities are also described: "Mr. P. was evidently an amiable, family-man, fond of Wife, Child, Brothers & Sisters—& generally kind-hearted" (372). Nevertheless there is in *Sanditon* a concern over the changes which are overtaking society, a concern quietly conveyed through descriptions of houses and localities, which become, as in *Mansfield Park*, emblems of historically distinct social conditions.

As we travel with the heroine from her secluded home in Willingden to Sanditon and its various residences, we move through time as well as space, and experience, as it were, the very process of social change. Like Catherine Morland, Charlotte Heywood belongs to a "thoroughly respectable family" (370), whose worthy, if conservative, character is soon evidenced when Mr. Parker's ill-advised search for a surgeon for his health resort brings him precipitantly into the Heywoods' rural retreat. Mr. Heywood "happened to be among his Haymakers at the time" (365), a fact that marks his close relation with his work and workers. His hospitable reception of the Parkers and his belief that bathing places are "Bad things for a Country;—sure to raise the price of Provisions & make the Poor good for nothing" (368) also indicate his conservative social and economic values. But although Jane Austen underwrites Mr. Heywood's outlook to some degree, she is also, in the first two chapters,

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revealing its anachronism. Like the Morland family at Fullerton, the Heywoods live in a kind of prelapsarian setting:

Marrying early & having a very numerous Family, their movements had been long limited to one small circle; & they were older in Habits than in Age.—Excepting two Journeys to London in the year, to receive his Dividends, Mr H. went no farther than his feet or his well-tried old Horse could carry him, and Mrs Heywood's Adventurings were only now & then to visit her Neighbours, in the old Coach which had been new when they married & fresh lined on their eldest son's coming of age 10 years ago. (373)

The limitations, as well as the virtues, of their old-fashioned ways are evident. The Heywoods are "stationary and healthy" (374), and if these adjectives set their existence against the "spirit of restless activity" (412) and the widespread hypochondria which Charlotte will later encounter in Sanditon, they also suggest the stasis of this way of life. Like Catherine Morland, Charlotte must "get out" if she is to develop. Her parents, indeed, are "glad to promote [her] getting out into the World" (374) when the Parkers invite her to Sanditon.

In Charlotte's experiences at Sanditon Jane Austen marks the progress of the moment, again by contrasting houses and settings. The transformation of the town is not immediately discovered, for the first house encountered is the old Parker residence: "a moderate-sized house, well fenced & planted, & rich in the Garden, Orchard & Meadows which are the best embellishments of such a Dwelling" (379). Charlotte's recognition that it "seems to have as many comforts about it as Willingden" (379) marks it as culturally coeval with the Heywood residence (in respect of its well cared for appearance it reminds us of Thornton Lacey in Mansfield Park). Mr. Parker sees that his old house, "the house of [his] Forefathers" (379), is an "honest old Place" (380), but like Rushworth at Sotherton Court he dislikes its low situation—"Our Ancestors, you know always built in a hole" (380)—and he has recently built a new home, with a view of the "noblest expanse of Ocean between the South foreland & the Land's end" (380). To this home he has given the name Trafalgar House, not so topical that he does not wish he had chosen Waterloo—but "Waterloo is in reserve—& if we have encouragement enough this year for a little Crescent to be ventured on... then, we shall be able to call it Waterloo Crescent" (380).
Almost forgotten in his exploitation of British victories for commercial ends is his old house: it has been given over to Hilliers, a tenant.

From the description of the two houses in chapter four, it is clear that Jane Austen has returned in part to the method of *Mansfield Park*. Rather than properly improve his house by giving it “modern dress,” Mr. Parker has effectively abandoned it in the pursuit of novelty. Caught up in his projects and schemes, he has entirely lost sight of his traditional “grounds.” The movement from one house to the other is a movement from one cultural orientation to another, and something of what is involved in the change is conveyed in the resonant conversation Mr. Parker has with his wife as they look at the old house. Mrs. Parker looks back “with something like the fondness of regret” on the old house with its excellent garden, but Mr. Parker points out that they can still get food from the garden “without the constant Eyesore of its formalities; or the yearly nuisance of its decaying vegetation” (380). Then Mrs. Parker remembers how shady in summer the old house was, but her husband counters by pointing with pride to the astonishing “Growth of [his] Plantations” (381), and by arguing that “you can get a Parasol at Whitby’s for little Mary at any time” (381). Jane Austen perhaps intends us to recall Cowper’s lines:

Our fathers knew the value of a screen
From sultry suns; and, in their shaded walks
And long protracted bowers, enjoy’d at noon
The gloom and coolness of declining day.
We bear our shades about us; self-depriv’d
Of other screen, the thin umbrella spread,
And range an Indian waste without a tree.

(*The Task*, I. ll. 255–61)

Certainly, when Mr. Parker himself refers to Cowper, his reference undercuts his intended meaning. Wishing to denigrate Brinshore, a rival bathing place, he says to Mr. Heywood: “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’” (370). But the context of these lines from *Truth* shows, of course, that the Cottager is to be preferred to the “brilliant Frenchman”:
Oh, happy peasant! Oh, unhappy bard!
His the mere tinsel, her's the rich reward;
He praised, 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 her's. (ll. 331–96)

Mrs. Parker has another objection to raise:

“But you know... one loves to look at an old friend, at a place where one has been happy.—The Hilliers did not seem to feel the Storms last Winter at all.—I remember seeing Mrs Hillier after one of those dreadful Nights, when we had been literally rocked in our bed, and she did not seem at all aware of the Wind being anything more than common.” (381)

To which Mr. Parker replies: “Yes, yes—that’s likely enough. We have all the Grandeur of the Storm, with less real danger, because the Wind meeting with nothing to oppose or confine it around our House, simply rages & passes on” (381). Soon after this rebuttal from her husband, Mrs. Parker rests satisfied—glad, perhaps, to be relieved of the need for responsible thought: “There—now the old House is quite left behind” (382).

In this exchange Jane Austen has provided another description of the transvaluation of social and moral attitudes in her society which she so deplored. Mr. Parker has left behind a life (as well as a garden) that was socially formal, yet in tune with the natural rhythms of the country. More important, he has left behind a society that provided protection and support from contingencies, whether natural, like the storm, or social. In flirting with his commercial ventures, he may be inviting “real danger.” It seems probable that had Sanditon been completed the bubble of Mr. Parker’s “speculation” would have burst.3

The fragment, indeed, might well have been entitled Speculation.

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3 A suggestion also made by Southam. Jane Austen has surely foreshadowed the “crash” of Mr. Parker’s schemes in the accident that befalls the Parkers’ carriage in the first chapter (cf. Southam, Literary Manuscripts, p. 116). Another indication of his financial precipitance is evident in the conversation partly quoted here. Although plentifully supplied with vegetables from the gardens of his old house and Sanditon House, Mr. Parker has set up “old Stringer & his son” (381–82) as market gardeners, it being clear that there is insufficient demand for the extra produce.
The word appears at least seven times and always with its modern meaning of "an engagement in any business enterprise or transaction of a venturesome or risky nature, but offering the chance of great or unusual gain" (O.E.D.). In this sense, Adam Smith seems to have been among the first to use the word in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), and the word had a like pejorative meaning for Burke and Cobbett. In a famous passage in the *Reflections*, Burke, referring to society, argues that "the municipal corporations of that universal kingdom are not morally at liberty at their pleasure, and on their speculations of a contingent improvement, wholly to separate and tear asunder the bands of their subordinate community" (R, 117-18; my italics), and Cobbett, whose views on social change were, as Raymond Williams has shown, often surprisingly close to Burke's, is continually critical of the new breed of landed gentry he encounters on his rural rides, particularly those who (like Mr. Parker) look "to the soil only for its rents, viewing it as a mere object of speculation." Speculation' appears on two other occasions in Jane Austen's work—in *The Watsons*, where Mrs. Robert Watson tells those assembled that "Speculation is the only round game now" (MW, 354), and in *Mansfield Park*, during the evening at the Grants' (II, vii) where Henry Crawford excels at this "round game of cards, the chief feature of which is the buying and selling of trump cards" (O.E.D.). On both occasions the word is associated with dubious characters and carries some of its modern, financial meaning. Significantly, in *Mansfield Park* Fanny Price has "never played the game nor seen it played in her life" (MP, 239). In *Sanditon*, by contrast, everyone plays the game (except the Heywoods). And this is the problem, since to no character in the fragment can we assign, as we could in previous novels, an outlook capable of opposing or resisting the prevailing "spirit of restless activity."

A comparison of the heroine's role and development with those of previous heroines is helpful here. In former novels the heroines have, either consistently or ultimately, affirmed in-

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hereditary social principles and, in so doing, validated the proper moral grounds of their fictional societies. Elinor Dashwood and Fanny Price consistently adhere to ideal social behavior, and the novels in which they figure take final shapes that accord with their outlooks. Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, after initially rejecting the forms and restraints of their culture, come ultimately to accept and, in accepting, to vitalize, their worlds. Only in *Persuasion* is there a dissociation of the heroine and her inherited culture; even here, however, Anne Elliot does not so much reject her "estate" as discover its rejection of her. Set against these heroines, Charlotte Heywood appears as a new attitude and response in Jane Austen's fiction, with features that owe much to previous figures, it is true, but with an outlook that is finally unique to herself.

Unlike Catherine Morland, whom in respect of parental situation she resembles, Charlotte is not naive; unlike Marianne Dashwood, her sense is proof against sensibility ("She had not *Camilla*'s Youth, & had no intention of having her Distress" [390]); unlike Elizabeth Bennet, she is not prone to wrong first impressions of character, or if she is, as with her initial assessments of Lady Denham (391) and Sir Edward Denham (394–95), she quickly redresses the balance and, at least in the latter instance, comes to an accurate appraisal of character. With Fanny Price, however much she differs in personality, she does have a functional similarity, often assuming Fanny's position of "quiet auditor of the whole" (*MP*, 136). But, unlike Fanny, there is no sign that she is fundamentally and irrevocably committed to a given form of society. Her relation to the mysterious Clara Brereton reminds us of Emma's to Jane Fairfax, but while Clara, like Jane, remains largely impenetrable to the heroine (and to the reader) throughout the fragment, Charlotte is not tempted, like Emma, to construct imaginative worlds around her secrecy. To put it in another way, the Quixotic conjectures she has are under the control of a self-conscious imagination, soon to be corrected by more rational views. In her first meeting with Clara, Charlotte "could see in her only the most perfect representation of whatever Heroine might be most beautiful & bewitching, in all the numerous vol: they had left behind them on M'rs Whitby's shelves," and she indulges in imagining fictional analogies: "She seemed placed with [Lady Denham] on purpose to be ill-used. Such Poverty & Dependence joined to such Beauty & Merit, seemed to leave no choice in
the business” (391). But we are immediately to learn that “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; & while she pleased herself the first 5 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 subsequent observation, that they appeared to be on very comfortable Terms. (391-92)

Jane Austen seems no longer centrally concerned with the drama of a deluded imagination, the correction of which will bring the heroine to a recognition of her proper social role. Nor does she seem concerned to set Charlotte up as a figure of moral consistency and fundamental principle in accordance with whose outlook the novel will finally align itself. Charlotte’s function in Sanditon is rather that of neutral observer and private commentator—both Lady Denham (393) and Diana Parker (410) catch her watching and judging them. She is the register not only of the quality and character of Regency England but of Jane Austen’s own attitude in the year of her death.

What this attitude is may be further defined through a brief examination of the characters Charlotte encounters and responds to in the unstable and eccentric world of Sanditon. Of first importance in this world is Lady Denham, who has married one husband for his money, another for his title and, having outlived both, is now, at seventy years, fending off the overtures of three distinct sets of relations, while at the same time attempting to maintain through parsimony and increase through speculation her already large fortune. Among the seekers after this fortune is Sir Edward Denham, her nephew, a literary enthusiast who thinks he is “quite in the line of the Lovelaces” (405), and who plans to use his talents in the seduction of Clara Brereton, Lady Denham’s favorite cousin. Sir Edward’s sister Esther, too, is hopeful of curry ing favor with her aunt, aware that the latter expects her to marry for money. Other “originals” encountered by Charlotte are Diana Parker, a tirelessly active character with a “Zeal for being useful” (412) which is one misuse of energy in this society, and her hypochondriacal brother
Arthur, and even more fragile sisters, whose utter inactivity goes to the other, equally reprehensible, extreme. All of these characters are figures of affectation, in Fielding's sense, exhibiting various forms and degrees of vanity and hypocrisy. But while they often remind us of previous characters of affectation in Jane Austen's fiction (Diana Parker's "officiousness" bears some resemblance to Mrs. Norris's love of "direction," for example), cumulatively they have a prominence never before evident in Jane Austen's major works. True, the fragment leaves off at an early point, and Sidney has just arrived, "expecting to be joined there by a friend or two" (425). Even so, I do not think Jane Austen intended to have her eccentrics move into the background as, for example, the Palmers and the Middletons do in Sense and Sensibility. The Denhams and the Parkers define the world of Sanditon in a way that no other set of secondary characters does in Jane Austen, so that if we look for a model for this fragment, Smollett seems, finally, a more appropriate choice than Fielding. Sanditon often reminds us of Humphry Clinker—in its choice of a resort setting, in its concern with disease not only as a device of characterization but as a possible cultural symptom, in its distrust of luxury and of novelty, most of all in its grotesque characterization.

In face of this world of speculation, false literary enthusiasm, and hypochondria, Charlotte's response is, I have suggested, close to her author's. That it is a perceptive, moral, and "healthy" response is clear enough from a number of scenes. After her conversation with Lady Denham in chapter seven, for example, in which the latter makes it clear that she must not think of Sir Edward as a husband since, like his sister, he must "marry somebody of fortune" (401), Charlotte's response combines severe moral censure and a keen awareness of human motivation.

"She is thoroughly mean. I had not expected anything so bad.—Mr. P. spoke too mildly of her. His Judgement is evidently not to be trusted.—His own Goodnature misleads him. . . . He has persuaded her to engage in the same Speculation—& because their object in that Line is the same, he fancies she feels like him in others.—But she is very, very mean.—I can see no Good in her.—Poor Miss Brereton!—And she makes everybody mean about her.—This poor Sir Edward & his Sister,—how far Nature meant them to be respectable I cannot tell,—but they are obliged to be Mean in their Servility to her.—And I am Mean too, in giving her my
attention, with the appearance of coinciding with her.—Thus it is, when Rich People are Sordid.” (402)

While it may be true that she is overreacting here—like Mrs. Jennings in *Sense and Sensibility*, Lady Denham may yet reveal unsuspected virtues—Charlotte’s assessments of character and situation do not exceed “a sense of the probable.” With Sir Edward, moreover, whose attentions to her she soon recognizes to have an ulterior motive (the gaining of Clara’s attention), her discrimination is complete and, in responding to his fantastic overtures, she can be moralistic or cutting, as the occasion demands. When he delivers his absurdly grandiloquent eulogy of Burns (“His Soul was the Altar in which lovely Woman sat enshrined, his Spirit truly breathed the immortal Incence which is her Due” [397]) she replies: “poor Burns’s known Irregularities, greatly interrupt my enjoyment of his Lines” (398); and when Sir Edward responds to this with a polysyllabic defense of the poet and an “extraordinary stile of compliment” to herself, she changes the subject with splendid ease: “I really know nothing of the matter.—This is a charming day. The Wind I fancy must be Southerly” (398). Her response to the Parkers is less open, but no less perceptive. She immediately recognizes the “Unaccountable Officiousness” of Diana’s desire to “be as extensively useful as possible” (410) and is aware of the egoistic impulse behind her frenzied attempts to organize the lives of other people and the business of Sanditon. And she is able, in the amusing scene in the drawing room of one of the Terrace houses, to observe the hypocrisy and indolent self-indulgence underlying Arthur Parker’s hypochondria: “Certainly, Mr. Arthur P.’s enjoyments in Invalidism were very different from his sisters—by no means so spiritualized—A good deal of Earthy Dross hung about him” (418). Earlier, all of the Parkers had come under her critical, if silent, scrutiny, and, in her reported thoughts at the beginning of chapter ten, her ability to define, as well as perceive, the neuroses of the family is made clear:

The Parkers, were no doubt a family of Imagination & quick feelings—and while the eldest Brother found vent for his superfluity of sensation

5 Southam suggests that Jane Austen may have intended later to modify Charlotte’s severe view of Lady Denham, “to give her a more temperate opinion” (*Literary Manuscripts*, p. 112).
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as a Projector, the Sisters were perhaps driven to dissipate theirs in the invention of odd complaints.—The whole of their mental vivacity was evidently not so employed; Part was laid out in a Zeal for being useful.—It should seem that they must either be very busy for the Good of others, or else extremely ill themselves. (412)

In such instances Charlotte's right-minded and morally perceptive responses are evident, but against these one must set other scenes in which she appears as a curiously detached figure, viewing her world with the "calmness of amused curiosity" (384) rather than revealing concern over the social and moral aberrations she witnesses. On her arrival in Sanditon, for example, Charlotte, rather than reflecting upon the great changes she has witnessed, "found amusement enough in standing at her ample Venetian window, & looking over the miscellaneous foreground of unfinished Buildings, waving Linen, & tops of Houses, to the Sea, dancing & sparkling in Sunshine & Freshness" (384). A little later, we learn that "Charlotte was glad to see as much, & as quickly as possible, where all was new" (389). And even as she observes the hypocrisy of Esther Denham, her response is curiously mixed:

The difference in Miss Denham's countenance, the change from Miss Denham sitting in cold Grandeur in Mrs. Parker's Drawing-room to be kept from silence by the efforts of others, to Miss D. at Lady D.'s Elbow, listening & talking with smiling attention or solicitous eagerness, was very striking—and very amusing—or very melancholy, just as Satire or Morality might prevail. (396)

In this description, perhaps, we come closest to the special quality of Jane Austen's response in Sanditon. This is a world, it would seem, so far removed from traditional grounds of moral action that its retrieval through former fictional means is no longer possible, a world in which the heroine, though she remains a fundamentally moral figure, can no longer be an agent of social renewal. To adopt in this society an unswervingly moral stance would be to condemn oneself to a continually melancholic recognition of the disparity between moral ideal and social fact. Rather than this, "satire," or the ability to remain detached, even amused, in the face of ubiquitous vanity, becomes an acceptable response. In the earlier novels, the role of spectator ab extra had been criticized—when it appeared,
for example, in the witty disengagement of Henry Tilney, or the private criticisms of Elizabeth Bennet. In Sanditon, by contrast, an attitude of detachment seems necessary; both heroine and author have to add to their moral perceptions a leaven of ironical disengagement if they are to retain their balance in a radically unstable society. As Charlotte is able to see in Esther's character both what is morally reprehensible and yet ironically amusing, so Jane Austen views Mr. Parker's projects both as a perversion of his true social role and yet as cause for humor. Such a position of ironic detachment is not, however, pace Professor Mudrick, the ultimate liberation of an irony always present but previously under the censorship of conventional pressures. Rather, it is a position into which Jane Austen has been driven by the untoward course her social world has taken.  

from *Pride and Prejudice*, laughter need not be a normative attitude, and, if Sidney’s wit bears any resemblance to the cynical variety embodied in Mr. Bennet (who also took great pleasure in reading stupid letters), his character is in some doubt. Other pieces of information, at any rate, reveal further grounds for suspicion. Like both his brothers and other dubious characters in Jane Austen’s fiction, he has no profession; like Wickham and Crawford he is disturbingly mobile, “here & there & everywhere” (382), participating in, rather than opposing “the spirit of restless activity” that characterizes the new society. Another mark against him, at least if the themes of earlier novels still obtain, is that he is a poor letter-writer: “Not a line from Sidney,” in response to Mr. Parker’s letter announcing the accident (385). Finally, when he arrives at last in Sanditon, he comes, like Churchill to Highbury, unexpectedly and with no assurance of a long stay.

Such indications of his possible irresponsibility notwithstanding, it seems reasonable to predict that Sidney Parker is the hero of the piece, destined for marriage to Charlotte. Perhaps, like Henry Tilney, also lively, discriminating, “with a decided air of Ease & Fashion,” he would have had his attitude of witty disengagement modified in due course. Even if this were to happen, however, it is difficult to see what effect his developing character and marriage to Charlotte would have had on the total meaning of the finished novel. Certainly there seems little possibility of a marriage between this mobile and witty hero and this moral but detached heroine providing a fixed moral center around which—in the manner of earlier novels up to *Persuasion*—other less satisfactory marriages would fall into place.

A brief comparison with Jane Austen’s other substantial fragment, *The Watsons* (1805?) will establish the uniquely uncertain status of *Sanditon*’s plot and thematic trajectory. Not only does *The Watsons* seem “almost to foreshadow its own fulfilment,” in a way that *Sanditon* fails to do, but it also foreshadows a successful resolution in which, through the heroine’s developing career and final marriage, its fictional society would have been properly reconstituted

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\[7\] It is, however, possible that Sidney is the secret lover of Clara Brereton, his relation to her bearing resemblance to Frank Churchill’s to Jane Fairfax in *Emma*. For interesting conjectures about Sidney’s possible role, see Mudrick, *Irony as Defense*, pp. 251–52, and Southam, *Literary Manuscripts*, pp. 119–22.
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on firm moral grounds. The Watsons, I am convinced, was given up for other than artistic reasons, and the fragment we have, though admittedly somewhat "bleak" in its depiction of society, has within it the necessary thematic impulses to allow for the correction of its world.

With a narrative economy that has been justly celebrated, Jane Austen in the early scenes of The Watsons describes a complex and tense social world. To the "winter assembly in the Town of D. in Surry" (MW, 314) come a number of families and figures subtly differentiated in social status: the rich and titled Osbornes from the Castle; the Edwardses, well established in town, with a solid house and a comfortable income, made in trade; their rivals, the Tomlinsons (the husband being the banker of the town); the handsome but irresponsible Tom Musgrave, with £800 to £900 a year; and Emma Watson herself, whose position and relation to her family are both uncertain. Brought up separately from her brothers and sisters with a rich uncle and aunt, Emma has been forced to return to her family by her uncle's death and her aunt's subsequent remarriage. The family to which she returns is itself a fragmented and neurotic structure, reflecting several aspects of the social condition as a whole. Rural, and poor for their station in life (the Watsons, unlike the Edwardses, have no carriage), they are reminiscent of several other families in Jane Austen's fiction. The father, like Mr. Woodhouse in Emma, is a senile valetudinarian, and Emma's three unmarried sisters have similar problems to those of the Bennet sisters in Pride and Prejudice. Emma's two brothers, however, give greater breadth to the social picture. Robert, the elder, has married "the only daughter of the Attorney to whom he had been Clerk, with a fortune of six thousand pounds" (349), and in the company of his wife from Croydon forms a partnership almost as despicable as that of the John Dashwoods in Sense and Sensibility or the Eltons in Emma. Sam, the younger brother, is a surgeon—not


9 Southam speaks of "the almost unrelieved bleakness of the social picture, and the asperity of the satire" (Literary Manuscripts, p. 93) in The Watsons; Miss Lascelles writes that Jane Austen seems here "to be struggling with a peculiar oppression, a stiffness and heaviness that threaten her style" (Jane Austen and Her Art, pp. 99-100). Both critics seem to me to read a very promising fragment too harshly.
yet a respectable profession—and he is in love with Mary Edwards. His suit is not prospering, however, since her parents, if they can cure her of her attraction to army officers, wish her to marry one of the Tomlinson sons.

Emma’s role in this world bears some resemblance to Charlotte’s in Sanditon; like Charlotte, Emma often appears as a neutral observer of the selfishness and hypocrisy of her society. Unlike Charlotte, however, Emma is a significantly moral agent both within her family and in the larger context of her society. Her generous suggestion to Elizabeth that she take her place at the assembly convinces Elizabeth of her good nature (320), and the “tranquil & affectionate intercourse of the two Sisters” (348) that ensues promises some improvement in a family hitherto divided by sisterly rancor and envy. Emma’s most important function as a moral agent, however, occurs at the ball, in a setting which most vividly suggests a society divided, like the family groups and the dancers there, into “sets” and “circles.” Between the Edwardses and the Tomlinsons, who, no doubt by virtue of their importance in the town, occupy the fireplace, a “very stiff meeting” ensues. Separate from these rivals are “three or four Officers . . . passing in & out from the adjoining card-room.” Affable in the corridor of the Inn, “in a morning dress & Boots” (327) is Tom Musgrave, announcing in his lack of enthusiasm for the occasion a presumptive claim to a higher social status, to an acquaintance with the habits and outlook of the “Great People” (323) at the Castle. Last on the scene come the aristocratic Osbornes, stiffly aware of their superiority, enclosed like the other families within the boundary of their “set.” In this tense atmosphere Emma’s action in dancing with young Charles Blake, when he is abandoned by Miss Osborne for a more attractive partner, has an immense effect. It is, of course, an act of charity, stemming from an innate good nature: “Emma did not think, or reflect; she felt & acted” (330). But it is also an exemplary act (like Knightley’s similar gesture when he dances with Harriet in *Emma*) which, in crossing the boundaries between groups, brings social fact and moral ideal together. The act is witnessed by the three important male characters of the novel, Tom Musgrave, Lord Osborne, and Mr. Howard, all of whom will thereafter make overtures to Emma. Tom Musgrave will discover that she is not, like her sisters, immediately susceptible to his charms (she refuses his offer to dance at the ball;
later, to his even greater discomfiture, she refuses his offer of conveyance home. Lord Osborne, after the failure of his intermediary, will himself approach her and, like Darcy at Hunsford, discover that his arrogant manners are not of much avail in face of the heroine’s natural good breeding and firm independence. Moreover, though he is not, like Darcy, finally to win her hand, he is to be educated in his outlook, a development already evident in the exchange he has with Emma at Stanton. The subject in question is whether Emma has the inclination and the means to ride. Emma’s blunt response—“Female Economy will do a great deal my Lord, but it cannot turn a small income into a large one” (346)—silences Lord Osborne:

Her manner had been neither sententious nor sarcastic, but there was a something in it’s [sic] mild seriousness, as well as in the words themselves which made his Lordship think;—and when he addressed her again, it was with a degree of considerate propriety, totally unlike the half-awkward, half-fearless stile of his former remarks.—It was a new thing with him to wish to please a woman; it was the first time that he had ever felt what was due to a woman, in Emma’s situation.—But as he wanted neither Sense nor a good disposition, he did not feel it without effect. (346)

That Mr. Howard’s future courtship will be more successful than the overtures of Musgrave and Lord Osborne, we do not really need family tradition to tell us. Unlike Sidney Parker, he has no suspicious characteristics. All that can possibly be held against him is his failure to modify the pride of Lord Osborne and his family, and by refusing Miss Osborne, as we may assume he will, even this failure will be removed. What we learn about him is uniformly favorable. His modesty and good sense are revealed, for example, when he dances with Emma at the Ball (335), and his reported excellence as a preacher, a quality already discussed in chapter one of this study, is another mark in his favor.

Admittedly, much remained for Jane Austen to do, before her fictional society could be brought through the marriage of Emma and Mr. Howard to a stable and morally reconstituted shape. Emma is left in the fragment shattered by the unkind reflections of her brother and discomposed by the sudden arrival and double ententes of Tom Musgrave. She is relieved, in going to her father’s chamber, to be “as little among them as possible,” to be “at peace
from the dreadful mortifications of unequal Society, & family Discord" (361). Furthermore, if family tradition is right, she has still to suffer the ordeal of her father's death and a subsequent stay with her brother and sister-in-law. That such a depressing prospect lies before her does not in itself, however, make the book "bleak" or explain its unfinished state. A period of social isolation is not uncommon for Austen heroines, and it is unlikely that Emma's stay at Croydon would have been any worse than Fanny's at Portsmouth. With the preparations already made, it would not have been difficult to have Emma return to Dorking, meet Mr. Howard again, and be asked for her hand in marriage.

With this marriage we would have a union of worthy outlooks, akin perhaps to the union of Elinor Dashwood and Edward Ferrars, or of Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram, a union, at any rate, which would have a morally centripetal effect on the fictional world of the completed work. It is possible that other marriages would have followed, between Sam Watson and Miss Edwards, between Musgrave and Margaret Watson (Wickham's marriage to Lydia does just allow for this unlikely event). Certainly there would have been a further chastening of Lord Osborne's pride following Emma's refusal; and, through Emma's ability to act as a continuing moral example, the world of The Watsons would, I think, have been reconstituted on firmer moral grounds, as new relations were opened between castle, town, and country, the Osbornes, Edwardses, and Watsons.

When we return to Sanditon, it is to recognize that no such sanguine predictions are possible for this fragment. Although the arrivals of Sidney, his friends, the West Indian heiress, Miss Lambe, and the two husband-hunting Misses Beaufort promise to complicate the inheritance plot, and perhaps add to the mystery of Clara Brereton, we cannot predict with any certainty the future development of the work. That Mr. Parker's speculation will result in financial disappointment, if not disaster, seems clear enough, but whether Lady Denham's fortune will suffer loss, too, we cannot say. That Arthur Parker will be roused from his lethargy to lay siege to one of the Miss Beauforts seems reasonably certain. That Clara will successfully resist Sir Edward is surely probable, but whether she will engage in further liaisons, and with whom, is not at all clear. The greatest enigma, however, in a story that has "a deliberate and
meaningful enigma in almost every aspect," surrounds the fate of the heroine.¹⁰

The uncertainty which invests the future of Sanditon and its heroine is to be explained, I suggest, by its lack of an ultimate locality, or estate, for Charlotte to inhabit. After Emma Watson leaves her aunt's home and loses her expectations of being an heiress, Jane Austen is still able to reserve for her—as she is for all her heroines until Anne Elliot—the possibility of an ultimate and secure place in society. As the wife of Mr. Howard, clergyman to the Osborne estate, Emma, we may conjecture, would have taken her place, in the finished work, in a stable society properly improved by her own moral character and actions. But for Charlotte Heywood no such stable society beckons. After she leaves her enclosed, idyllic, but already slightly unreal home in Willingden, she enters an unstable world of shifting values, a world in which "every body must now 'move in a Circle',—to the prevalence of which rotatory Motion, is perhaps to be attributed the Giddiness & false steps of many" (422). Old certainties are left behind as surely as Mr. Parker's old residence has been replaced by Trafalgar House. Sanditon is a society so totally transformed that inherited "grounds" can no longer support the individual, nor, conversely, can the individual any longer retrieve society from its errors, renew and invigorate time-tested and ultimately religious principles of being and action.

The fragment's last scene takes on interesting symbolic significance in this connection. It describes a visit to Sanditon House paid by Mrs. Parker and Charlotte. Sanditon House has previously been described as the "last Building of former Days in that line of the Parish"(384). Now its appearance, as the two women approach, seems to suggest it as a possible source of value and order—another Pemberley or Donwell Abbey: "The road to Sanditon H. was a broad, handsome, planted approach, between fields, & conducting at the end of a quarter of a mile through second Gates into the Grounds, which though not extensive had all the Beauty & Respectability which an abundance of very fine Timber could give" (426). But immediately following this description, replete with details which in former novels would have testified to the essential

¹⁰ Southam, Literary Manuscripts, p. 112.
worth of the estate, Jane Austen provides a curiously insidious description of the gates and fence:

These Entrance Gates were so much in a corner of the Grounds or Paddock, so near one of its Boundaries, that an outside fence was at first almost pressing on the road—till an angle here, & a curve there threw them to a better distance. The Fence was a proper Park paling in excellent condition; with clusters of fine Elms, or rows of old Thorns following its line almost everywhere.—Almost must be stipulated—for there were vacant spaces. . . . (426)

Is it too much to see in this asymmetrical and disjointed scene a symbolic representation of a once worthy society twisted into a troubling new shape? Perhaps not, for it is through one of the "vacant spaces" in the estate's "enclosure" that Charlotte "caught a glimpse over the pales of something White & Womanish in the field on the other side;—it was something which immediately brought Miss B. into her head—& stepping to the pales, she saw indeed—& very decidedly, in spite of the Mist; Miss B—seated . . . apparently very composedly—& Sir E. D. by her side" (426). As R. W. Chapman perceived, "all the items of chiaroscuro—the mist, the treacherous fence, the ill-defined flutter of ribbons—add up to an effect which is as clearly deliberate as it is certainly novel."11 If the estate in Jane Austen's last fragment has not yet disintegrated into a handful of dust, its grounds have been partly obscured by mist. The new world is "very striking—and very amusing—or very melancholy, just as Satire or Morality might prevail." But in any case it is a world incapable of being redeemed through individual moral agency, or of being improved through fictional means.
