

THE WATSONS AND SANDITON

By Elizabeth Marshall

At her death, Jane left her many Juvenilia stories, Lady Susan, and 6 published novels. There were also 2 novel fragments left at Jane's death. Let's start with the earliest written, The Watsons.

THE WATSONS

All that we have is a first draft and revisions---just under 17,000 words, or a little less than a quarter the length of her regular novels. From Jane's family, we learn that she likely started working on The Watsons sometime in 1804. This is the only piece of writing we have from her years in Bath and Southampton

So what was going on in Jane's life when she started this project? Well, in 1800, Jane's father, Rev. George Austen, decided to retire, give his Steventon parish to his son, James and move with his wife and daughters to Bath. Jane was very distressed by this decision, much preferring life in a country village to life in the fashionable city of Bath. They left for Bath in 1801, and the period between then and 1809, when she, her sister, mother and good friend Martha Lloyd were settled at Chawton, seems, according to a biographer, John Halperin, to have been "a period of upheaval and unsettlement" in her life.

THE PLOT:

Rev. Watson is a very ill and feeble widower with a meagre income and a family of 4 daughters and 2 sons, living in Staunton, a small village. The sons are mainly settled: Robert is an accounting clerk who has married his boss' daughter, Jane, we suppose mainly because she has 6,000 pounds. She is an early Mrs. Elton: raves about how things are done at Croydon, lords it over the Watson sisters and sets herself up as an oracle of how to behave in society---a truly obnoxious character! Sam is apprenticing to be a surgeon, a lowly occupation at the time, but it should eventually give him a sufficient income to marry, raise a family and lead a modest life. The eldest daughter, Elizabeth, has been forced by circumstances to take over the difficult task of running a household with a very insufficient income. It is often difficult to put a decent meal on the table. She is good-hearted, but without education or refinement. Penelope, the second daughter, is often away from home, aggressively searching for a husband. So is Margaret, the third daughter. Emma, the youngest, and the heroine of our story, has been raised from an early age by a wealthy aunt, her father's sister and knows only the life of the landed gentry. However, the Aunt has just married an Irish officer who is taking control of her money and her property, and has moved her to Ireland. He has sent Emma home, not wishing to have her at his charge.

As the story opens, Elizabeth is driving Emma to the closest town to stay with a wealthier family, the Edwards, who have always befriended the Watsons, so that Emma can attend a ball and, hopefully, start to find a husband. The conversation between Elizabeth and Emma as they drive along gives us the information on the family that I have just given you. And incidentally, the Edwards' daughter, Mary, is interested in Sam, but her father refuses to consider such a match: his daughter will do much better than a poor, lowly surgeon!

The ball scene is, in my opinion, on a par with the best writing in all of Jane Austen novels. Mrs. Edwards, for example, listens at the window to hear her neighbours' coach leaving for the inn: she wants to be there early, but not be the first to arrive! There are only two or three families there when the Edwards' carriage does arrive, but another important character, Tom Musgrave, is waiting in the lobby, not yet dressed for the ball, but sneeringly looking over all the young ladies as they arrive. Mr. Musgrave is a flirt, a fop and a hanger-on to Lord Osborne, the only nobleman in the area. Tom has a very small fortune, but he has made himself indispensable to Lord Osborne who seems to be an ignorant boor who is incapable of making social contact himself. When the Osborne party finally arrives, fashionably late, of course, we see that Lord Osborne, his mother, Lady Osborne, and his sister, Miss Osborne, are accompanied by his former tutor, Rev. Howard, and by Howard's sister, a widowed Mrs. Blake and her 10-year old son, Charles Blake. Charles, by all accounts of the expert critics that I read, is the most delightful child in all of Austen's works. He unaffectedly and enthusiastically tells Emma that Miss Osborne has promised to dance the first 2 dances with him and that he has been working hard to learn the dances in order to do a good job as her partner. But, when the band is ready to begin, Miss Osborne suddenly breezes up to the group to say that an officer has invited her for those first 2 dances and she off she goes with him. Charles is devastated! Jane's description of the scene is pure genius: "Emma didn't think....she acted!" She promptly offers to be Charles' partner if he would like, and of course he does! The eyes of everyone in the room are on them as they take their place for the dance. Charles is a great conversationalist, describing his pony, his toys, his activities and Osborne Hall to Emma and inviting her to come and visit him there. At one point, they meet up in the dance with Miss Osborne, who says, "La, Charles, you have found a partner, and one who is likely a better one than I am", to which Charles enthusiastically replies, "Yes"! It's just a throw-away line, but what genius! Of course, the Osbornes are much amazed by this turn of events, and Rev. Howard and Mrs. Blake are so grateful that they invite Emma to be part of their group for supper and for the rest of the evening. Lord Osborne prevails on Rev. Howard to dance with Emma while he stands behind Howard, chatting to him and checking Emma out----shades of Darcy at his first ball with Elizabeth? Everyone there is greatly impressed by Emma's rise in social status!

The only other scene we have in the fragment takes place 3 days after the ball. Lord Osborne and Tom Musgrave arrive at the Watson home without any prior warning and just as they are

about to set their meagre dinner on the table. It is an uncomfortable scene, with the Watsons ashamed of their poor dwelling, Tom Musgrave swaggering as usual, and Lord Osborne with little to say. When he does venture to strike up a conversation with Emma, he blunders horribly, inviting her to attend his next hunt on horseback, and reacting with astonishment when she declines: of course she does not have a horse or the necessary wardrobe. Emma's response is sharp and silences him completely: **P. 136.**

And that's about all we have of the novel. It is quite clear that its theme will be the tragic situation of poor single women without the prospect of marriage to rescue them. Elizabeth sums it up well: **P. 109.** The novel repeats and repeats that the outlook for the Watson girls is bleak.

So why, then, did Jane never finish this novel? Her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, wrote that it was because the social level of the characters was too low and that Jane had left them no opportunity to rise above their station. On examination, this does not appear to be true: Fanny Price came from poorer conditions than the Watsons live in, and Emma Watson is perhaps being courted by a real lord, the major character with the highest social status in all of the Austen novels. Most critics agree that circumstances in Jane's life prevented her from finishing or ever returning to this novel. Let's look first at her life: On Jane's birthday, December 16, in 1804, her very dear friend, Mrs. Lefroy, died in a fall from a horse. Just 5 weeks later, her father died after a very brief illness. Cassandra then left Bath to help their good friend Martha Lloyd nurse her ill mother, who died a few months later. In their efforts to adjust to their very limited financial resources, Jane, Cassandra and their mother then moved 3 times in Bath, to increasingly modest addresses, and finally to Southampton to join Frank Austen and his wife Mary. They subsequently moved again to their own address there. So we have grief and continual displacement creating what was likely one of the most unstable and unhappy periods in Jane's life: not very conducive to writing a novel. Carol Shields, in her biography of Jane Austen, suggests another very credible factor. "Novelists," she states, "do not write into the void" and explains that it would have been difficult for Jane to invest her energies in a new book when not one of her finished novels had yet been published. She adds to this Jane's disappointments in her hopes to find her own husband and the realization that the situation that she and Cassandra found themselves in was very, very close to that of the Watson sisters. So The Watsons probably represented for Jane a period of her life which she did not wish to remember, even to finish up what would no doubt have been a very good story. Jane apparently did tell Cassandra how she intended the plot to develop: **P. 152.**

Continuations: Several people did try to finish *The Watsons*. The first was her niece Catherine Hubback, daughter of Francis Austen, in 1850, with a novel called "The Younger Sister". Since publishers wanted a 3 volume work, she invented many characters, so I've read, and the

language and plot became gothic, barely distinguishable from "The Mysteries of Udolpho". Catherine's granddaughter, Edith Brown, tried another version, based on "The Younger Sister", but again got bogged down by all the new characters.

In 1958, John Coates rewrote Jane's fragment, changing Emma to Emily, but adding only one main character. I'll give you just the main outline of his story: Robert comes home bringing his sister Margaret who has not found a husband in Croydon. She turns out to be a real shrew: jealous, malicious, totally selfish and interested only in getting what she wants by any means that will work, and what she wants now is to marry Tom Musgrave. A few days later, sister Penelope arrives home without having found a husband either. She and Emily soon become real soul-mates, like Elizabeth and Jane Bennet or Jane and Cassandra Austen.

Emily receives a letter from her aunt, now Mrs. O'Brien, informing her that her new Irish husband has been killed in a brawl on the waterfront. In going through his papers with her lawyer, she has discovered that he planned to get his hands on all her money and property and then abandon her. She asks Emily to return to the home they shared as quickly as possible, which Emily does. The aunt legally makes Emily her heir and settles several thousand pounds on her right away. Here, a new character is introduced: a Mr. Jones, who is a curate and has been Emily's tutor. He is very poor, very kind, very humble and does wonderful work in the parish, but is really quite a dim bulb! Mrs. O'Brien is not happy back at home---there are too many sad memories for her here, and Emily finally suggests that they and Mr. Jones move back to Staunton where her family lives and buy a little Lodge that Lord Osborne is trying to sell. Mrs. O'Brien thinks that this is a wonderful idea and off they go. The work of moving and getting the new home fixed up rejuvenates her and she is very happy to be near her brother and to meet his daughters. And she spends considerable money and effort on improving their lifestyle.

Lord Osborne continues to pay the Watson sisters frequent visits. His awkwardness abates and his behaviour improves immensely. He soon suggests that Emily and Margaret accompany Tom and himself on a walk. The 2 men quickly arrange that the couples go their separate ways and Lord Osborne proposes to Emily. She refuses him on the grounds that she has only seen him a few times and that she also feels uncomfortable about their difference in rank and wealth. To herself she admits that she really prefers Mr. Howard. On arriving home, she discovers that Tom has also proposed to Margaret because he knew about Lord Osborne's intention to propose to Emily and he is determined to be Lord Osborne's brother! He comes to the Watson home the next morning, ostensibly to ask Mr. Watson for Margaret's hand, but by then he has discovered that Emily has refused Lord Osborne. He tries to withdraw his proposal, but Margaret stages a scene, Tom gives in and the engagement goes ahead.

Emily and Penelope decide that Mr. Jones would make a good husband for Elizabeth and manage to convince both of them that it is a good idea. He will take over the parish work from Mr. Watson and will replace him when he retires, although with the return of his sister, Mr. Watson makes a considerable recovery. In visits and balls, Emily sees that Mr. Howard ignores and avoids her, and she decides that he is not interested in her. Finally, in an event that reminds us of Jane and Mr. Bingley, Penelope has a riding accident at Osborne Hall and must stay there for several days to recover. Lord Osborne proposes to her and is accepted. Thanks to the chattiness of young Charles Blake, Emily learns that his uncle, Mr. Howard, has been avoiding her because good old Tom Musgrave has told him that she is going to marry Lord Osborne. Charles immediately rushes home to put his uncle straight. Mr. Howard arrives very shortly to propose to Emily and is accepted. Meanwhile, Mrs. O'Brien has given Sam ten thousand pounds which he uses to buy a partnership in a medical practice in a nearby town. He is now considered to be wealthy and distinguished enough to marry his long-time girl friend, Mary Edwards. So there we are, with all the family settled! It's not a bad novel, and I couldn't find anything in it that I thought was not what Jane might have written into a plot. The language is not as witty as Jane's and there is little humour or satire, but the plot definitely feels like Jane.

Apparently, there is a newer version, written by "Jane Austen and Another Lady", which keeps only Jane's characters and which was well received by critics---I haven't been able to find a copy to read.

So that's about all I can tell you about The Watsons.

Questions? Comments?

SANDITON

There is no mystery at all about the reason that Sanditon remains unfinished: Jane died before she could get it done.

Jane's health had been deteriorating for some time, but on the 24th of January, 1817, Jane wrote to her friend Alethea Bigg: "I have certainly gained strength through the Winter and am not far from being well; & I think I understand my own case now so much better than I did, as to be able by care to keep off any serious return of illness." And in that same month, she began to write Sanditon. But below the last sentence in the novel is written the date March 18, 1817.

In a letter to her niece, Fanny Knight, that she wrote on March 25, Jane admits, "I certainly have not been well for many weeks, & about a week ago I was very poorly." She died on July 18. So she was busy writing novels right up until almost the end of her life. Sanditon is not very much longer than *The Watsons*---about 25,000 words (or just over one-quarter of her regular novels), so she really just had time to describe her main characters and situate them at the seaside in Sussex. This time, she didn't tell anyone how she planned the plot to develop. There is one reference only in her correspondence that reveals that she may have intended to call it "The Brothers", no doubt referring to the three Parker brothers introduced in this fragment.

The Plot: Tom and Mary Parker are travelling in a rented coach along the Sussex coast to find a physician to relocate to their developing seaside resort, Sanditon. The coach overturns on very rutty roads and the farmer and his staff in the field rush to help them. When it appears that Mr. Parker has a badly sprained ankle, the farmer, Mr. Heywood, insists that the Parkers come to his home so that he can call a doctor to examine the sprain. It turns out to be a bad sprain and the Parkers spend a fortnight with the Heywoods. They decide, in return, to take the eldest of the Heywood's' 14 children, Charlotte, who is in her twenties and has no marriage prospects, back to Sanditon with them for a few months to give her a chance to meet a prospective husband. Mr. Parker is partner with Lady Denham, the leading citizen of Sanditon, in a project to turn the sleepy fishing village into a spa, natural health centre and tourist destination. He is deeply involved in land speculation, having moved from his comfortable home to a bigger and better residence in a new subdivision which he plans to develop and sell to tourists. He has named his new home Trafalgar and the new subdivision will be called Waterloo Crescent: although confined to home by her illness, Jane is very much aware of what is going on in the world.

Although I think that Lady Denham is supposed to be partly a villain of the story, I actually quite like her. Yes, she is vulgar, blunt, cruel in her comments to others and poorly educated, but she has spunk! This former Miss Brereton first married Mr. Hollis, a wealthy merchant much older than herself, and thus inherited a large fortune and the principal residence of the village, Sanditon House, when Mr. Hollis died. She then married Lord Denham, a rather financially strapped Lord, but she did get a title out of the marriage. Now that Lord Denham is dead, she is attacked on all sides by relatives hoping to get their hands on her "many thousands a year": her poor Brereton relatives, Mr. Hollis' relatives who think that at least some of his money should have come to them, and her nephew by marriage, the current Lord Denham, and his sister Miss Denham, who think that they should have her money. But this cagey old gal keeps them all at bay and has recently invited an obscure niece, the lovely and elegant Miss Clara Brereton, to come and live with her, and lets all the relatives think that she MAY choose her as her heir---I have to admire her to some extent! Some critics have suggested that Lady Denham is partly modeled on Jane's aunt, Mrs. Leigh Perrot of the "stolen" lace incident. She was

always hinting that she was going to leave Mrs. Austen's children 1,000 pounds each, but in the end, left them nothing.

And now a word about Lord Denham: he is a young man without any money or occupation, just waiting to get his hands on Lady Denham's money. He loves to read Byron and Scott and models himself after the rake, Lovelace, of Richardson's novel *Clarissa Harlow*. Lovelace kidnaps, rapes and holds Clarissa prisoner until she finally kills herself. Lord Denham has decided to devote himself to romantic sensibility and that he must be a seducer! It's clear to Charlotte Heywood that he is already "hitting on" Clara Brereton, and then he immediately takes an interest in Charlotte as well.

Shortly after returning to Sanditon, the Parkers are joined by Mr. Parker's sisters, Susan and Diana, and by his youngest brother, Arthur, who is in his early 20's. All three are raging hypochondriacs, each taking a different herbal tea and a variety of other natural medicines to cure their imaginary illnesses. Arthur's heart is perhaps not really in it: he constantly cheats on the diet his sisters try to make him follow, refuses any exercise and so is quite pudgy. Diana Parker spends her life arranging other people's lives and diagnosing and finding cures for their illnesses, whether they have any or not! She excitedly tells Mr. Parker that she has persuaded two large groups of people to come to Sanditon for their health, by extolling its virtues to friends of friends of friends. It then turns out that all these "friends" are talking about the same 4 people: Miss Lambe, an extremely wealthy young mulatto woman from the West Indies, her two hangers-on, the Miss Beauforts, and their minder, a Mrs. Griffiths. And in due course, these people arrive in Sanditon.

We also, very briefly, meet another Parker brother, Sidney. He lives in London, is active in business and society there, thinks that Susan, Diana and Arthur are hypochondriacs and is very doubtful about the future success of Sanditon as a new seaside resort and spa. Some feel he may be modeled on Jane's brother, Henry.

Every day, Mr. Parker and Lady Denham count how many rooms in the village have been rented by visitors and what new businesses have opened. They spend their time telling anyone who will listen of the advantages of a stay in Sanditon. There are supporters of this idea of development in the village and there are detractors.

And that's about all that Jane had the time to tell us about before having to end her story.

What is Old and What is New in Sanditon: Most critics state that in Sanditon, Jane is returning to the broad satire and even burlesque of her *Juvenilia*. I'm not so sure. The quirks and foibles of Tom Parker and his sisters and of Lady and Lord Denham ARE portrayed in broad and exaggerated comedy, but I don't think that they are any more "burlesque" than Mr. Collins, Aunt Norris, Miss Bates or Mrs. Elton, for example. Granted, in the fragment that we have,

their characters do not have much subtlety, but others, such as Charlotte Heywood, Clara Brereton and Sidney Parker, promise to be the complex and sympathetic characters that we find in the rest of Jane's novels. I do agree that the satire on hypochondria and business speculation is more directly and more harshly portrayed than say the greed of General Tilney and the health complaints of Mr. Woodhouse. What is new in Sanditon is that this satire is not just a passing amusement, as it is in other stories, but that it seems to be a main point or purpose of the novel. It is also suggested that Jane is satirising, and maybe even warning about, the power of the romantic and gothic literature so popular in her time to lead young people into destructive behaviour which could ruin their lives, as it has with Lord Denham. His adoption of seduction as a lifestyle is a far cry from the amusing chatter between Catherine and Isabella on the subject of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in *Northanger Abbey*.

Because the satire in Sanditon centers on the new society emerging in the Regency, which seems to be one of selfish pursuit of economic advantage and a weakening of the strong social relationships previously found in rural communities, Jane has to give us a much more complete picture of the physical aspects of the village and a much deeper "sense of place" than we are used to finding in her other novels. There are detailed descriptions, for example, of the seaside setting of Sanditon, of its residences and of its businesses. And, of course, they are very well done and especially so by an author who has previously given us next to no descriptions of the physical settings of her novels. All in all, I do think that in Sanditon, Jane is moving away from her previous topic of "three to four families in a country village". The subject and scope of the novel and the social issues addressed are all broader here than ever before in her novels.

Continuations: Well, yes, of course! The first was done by Jane's niece, Anna Lefroy in 1830. She made hardly any advances in the story and she can't reproduce her aunt's style. Next is Alice Cobbett in the 1920's. She adds characters, smuggling, rape, a duel and good works, and the work is considered as "somewhat lengthened". She drops the Parkers entirely and Sir Edward eventually becomes the laughing stock of the community.

Then a volume entitled "Sanditon by Jane Austen and Another Lady", with copyright held by a Mary Dobbs, appeared in 1975. It continues the story in the usual Jane Austen format of a tale of marriages, completely ignoring the social aspect and the work of Tom Parker and Lady Denham to make Sanditon into a modern seaside resort. And the "other lady" had to create 3 more characters to manage it. Here's how it goes: First of all, in the course of all the group walks along the seashore, Arthur Parker and Miss Lambe discover that they are both mad about seashells and seaweed----Arthur analyses the seaweed and Miss Lambe collects and sketches seashells. They decide to marry and to settle in Sanditon where there is no lack of either. Then, Sidney Parker invites two young men to visit him at Sanditon. Henry Brudenall and Reginald Catton are apparently old friends of his. He explains that he and Reginald are doing

everything they can to cheer up Henry, who is coping with the fact that his fiancée, who is also his cousin, has decided to marry someone else and they wanted to get him out of London while the wedding festivities are taking place. Charlotte notices that Sidney seems to be trying hard to throw Henry and Clara Brereton together. About the same time, Lady Denham decides that she doesn't like the way Clara manages her duties at Sanditon House and also she does not like all the attention that Clara is receiving from Lord Denham. After another rare meeting with her Brereton relatives, she decides to invite another niece, Elizabeth Brereton, to come to live with her, to see if she could do a better job.

The day before Clara is to go to a nearby village to meet Elizabeth's coach and bring her back to Sanditon House, she asks Charlotte to accompany her, not wanting, she says, to do the long journey by herself. Charlotte agrees----she will be returning home in a few days anyway and this will be a chance for a last visit with Clara. She is surprised to see Sidney Parker's coach, loaded down with luggage, on the road ahead of them. Clara then explains that Henry is her cousin and she is his fiancée. They can no longer tolerate that their marriage has been put on hold because her relatives want her to first inherit Lady Denham's money and share it with them. Henry has found a position with the East India Company and they are eloping to catch a ship to Bengal straight away. That's why she needs Charlotte, to get Elizabeth back to Sanditon.

So after they arrive at the inn where the coach stops and Clara leaves with Henry in Sidney's carriage, Charlotte decides to pass the time waiting for Elizabeth by taking a walk along the road leading out of the village. She is some distance from the village when a gig (open carriage with one horse) with a man in it pulls up and offers to drive her back to the village. It is Lord Denham! What is he doing here? She gets into the gig and is amazed to see him whip his horse into a run, but still heading away from the village. He explains that he had hoped to abduct Clara to force her to marry him, and thus increase his chances of getting some of Lady Denham's money, but he arrived too late. So he has to abduct someone, to be true to his romantic ideals, and his only choice now is Charlotte. He is going to hold her prisoner at a friend's cottage and spouts a lot of romantic poetry, misquoting it and ascribing it to the wrong authors: Charlotte corrects him as they dash along. She is not much afraid because he is just so ridiculous. Gradually, she notices that the horse, tired out from his long journey, is slowing down and she thinks that she could probably jump out of the carriage without hurting herself. Then she realizes that they are on the road to her family's home and she decides to stay in the carriage to see how close she can get to home so she won't have to walk so far. She sees two men walking along the road towards them and recognizes them as farm labourers who work for her father. She jumps out of the gig, greets the men by name, and strolls away with them towards home. Lord Denham, in the only intelligent thing he does in the whole novel, decides that he is not going to take on 2 robust farm workers by himself, and drives away. Charlotte's family is, of course, very surprised to see her arrive home on foot, but, in a scene resembling

Catherine's return to the Morlands, they are very proud of her ability to get there safely in the circumstances.

The next day, one of her little sisters announces that there is a Mr. Parker to see her. She expects to find Tom Parker, but it is Sidney!!! He proposes. She accepts. They live in London after their marriage but visit Sanditon often, to see all the Parkers, including Diana and Susan who have moved there in order to help all the "invalids" arriving for sea treatments,----whether they want this help or not! Lady Denham is very satisfied with Elizabeth's services and Lord Denham and Miss Denham are banished from her company. But poor Sanditon never does become more than a sleepy, seaside village, in spite of Tom Parker's and Lady Denham's best efforts.

I really do think that this ending is not worthy of our Jane, and dropping all the social drama to complete it with melodrama makes it, for me, a much less interesting book than Jane's fragment suggests it is going to be. And once again, the language does not sparkle with humour and satire as Jane's does.

So that is Sanditon as I see it. How I wish that Jane had been able to complete this novel and many more!

Questions? Comments?