Four months before her death, Jane Austen was drafting a work of fiction that amounted to “about 24,000 words, and perhaps one-fifth of a completed novel” (Sutherland). This incomplete manuscript became known as Sanditon. Austen’s family held it from her death in 1817 until 1930, when her great-great-niece presented it to its current residence of King’s College, Cambridge. Between its inception in 1817 and donation in 1930, the manuscript made two entries into print, each very different from the other: Austen’s nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, first mentioned the manuscript in the second edition of A Memoir of Jane Austen (1871) and included excerpts from it, and R.W. Chapman of the Oxford University Press edited and transcribed the manuscript as its own book (titled Fragment of a novel) in 1925, two years after his publication of her six print novels.

Within the last decade, there has been a renewed interest in Jane Austen’s manuscript works (Bree, Sabor, Todd; Sutherland; Levy), in part as a result of the release of new print editions of her manuscript works (Bree, Todd; Bree, Sabor, Todd) and a digital collection of all her extant fiction manuscripts (Sutherland). But less attention has been paid to the ways in which these manuscripts first entered and were represented in print. Sanditon first appeared in print in chapter thirteen of A Memoir of Jane Austen as excerpts totalling about 3400 words, which present characters that Austen-Leigh felt were “ready dressed and prepared for their parts” (par. 31). Austen-Leigh’s version is heavily edited, displaying the family’s anxiety in showing the public Austen’s manuscript works; by contrast, Chapman “print[ed] the author’s manuscript as nearly as possible in the last form it attained;” the body text of his edition is “virtually a facsimile of all that Miss Austen wrote and did not erase” ([3]). Chapman’s decisions are more transparent than Austen-Leigh’s, providing an editorial preface and “notes” as back matter which record alterations; though, through these decisions, Chapman accepts the changes made by Austen, the body text of his edition providing a “reading” text with no editorial intervention apparent – for instance, there are no footnotes within the main text to indicate that the “notes” exist.

My project will analyze Austen-Leigh and Chapman’s editorial treatments of Sanditon, as despite different approaches, both mediate the manuscript for publication. Austen-Leigh’s representation is problematic in several regards: he chooses to show only polished characters, silently omits many lines of text, and also frames these heavily edited excerpts with reference to his aunt’s ill health. Chapman, while claiming to represent the manuscript as transparently as possible, presents a body text that can easily be read, but that does not indicate the work’s status as an incomplete draft. I will explore these degrees of transparency and effacement through my project, which I will construct in the form of a website where I will compare the facsimile photos of the manuscript (hosted online at Jane Austen Fiction Manuscripts) to a complete scan of R.W. Chapman’s book edition of 1925, and to a reproduction of chapter thirteen of A Memoir of Jane Austen. From this analysis, I will demonstrate that a wider awareness of the existence of Sanditon, as well as its early representations in print, is necessary to understanding Austen’s writing habits, and how these habits were flattened, constrained, and obscured in these early iterations.

Simon Fraser University is a fitting site to conduct this research. The SFU library houses Chapman’s first and second impressions of Fragment of a novel, and his 250 print run “deluxe edition” of the same. Dr. Michelle Levy, professor in the English department, has extensive knowledge of Austen’s manuscript and print output, and digital methodologies. SFU is the site of the Digital Humanities Innovation Lab, a resource which aids student digital projects such as my own. I am the ideal candidate to undertake this research, as my undergraduate work focused on women’s writing in the Romantic period, as well as Austen's early and late manuscript output and printed novels. I have also been conducting research for Dr. Levy that has involved analyzing the letters and works of female authors in the Romantic period, and co-writing, with Dr. Levy, a chapter which analyzes the relationships between the publisher Cadell and Davies and their female authors, to be published in the forthcoming book Women’s Literary Networks and Romanticism: “A Tribe of Authoresses.” I have also submitted a proposal to the upcoming “Sanditon: 200 Years” conference, which will be held in 2017.
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