Reese Irwin

MA Project Proposal

Supervisor: Dr. Michelle Levy; second reader: Dr. Matt Hussey

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Compiling Sanditon:

Following Jane Austen’s Last, Unfinished Work from Manuscript to Print

2017 marks the bicentenary of Jane Austen’s death, as well as when she began and set down her pen on Sanditon, her last work. The fragment now rests at King’s College, Cambridge, and was digitized in 2010 (Jane Austen’s Fiction Manuscripts website). This master’s project stems from undergraduate research which I began through the use of the digital manuscript facsimile; however, much if not all of the content will be new. The project will take the shape of an open access digital exhibit and scholarly resource, where I will explore the readership and reception history of Sanditon to provisionally argue that the way the work was mediated in print shaped the way readers read and reacted to both the content and the existence of the fragment.

In creating a digital website, I aim for an audience of students at all levels, researchers and professors, and members of the public with interest in Jane Austen; the expectation is that scholars and students will use the site as a resource or tool, and the public will use the digital exhibit to view and enjoy the text. I am always cognizant of the public in my research, and aim to make my scholarship and digital output as accessible as possible, especially considering Jane Austen’s sizable fanbase.

The digital exhibit will be developed using Omeka, an open source content management system for “the display of library, museum, archives, and scholarly collections and exhibitions” (n.p.). Omeka’s plugin “Exhibit Builder” will be useful, as it allows for the creation of pages of digital objects with capabilities for narrative text,
which I will use to showcase how readers encountered the text first in 1871, in the second edition of *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, and again in 1925, as its own book titled *Fragment of a novel*. Together with their digital exhibition, an OCR of the text of the 1871 and 1925 editions will allow for comparative analysis which will help me in creating my critical framework, and other scholars and students using the resource. The exhibit will include a link to the manuscript facsimile website to connect the manuscript to its initial printings, and to create a link between resources on *Sanditon*. As there is a digital humanities component to this project, I will be including a subsection of research on digital humanities methodologies and digital preservation, particularly as they relate to the accessibility of printed texts, and how we read and encounter them in the digital environment.

I will explore the reading and reception history of *Sanditon* and Austen's print novels within the twentieth century and the Victorian period to gain a fuller picture of her readers and fans as she was cemented into a canonical British author. Included in this research will be the editing practices and reception of manuscript works in both time periods, as the family suppressed Austen's incomplete works until her nephew bowed to public pressure in the second edition of the *Memoir*, and R.W. Chapman, while purporting “transparency,” created an edition with an odd mix of editorial strategies. I want to further explore Victorian and twentieth century editing practices in general, in order to more clearly understand Austen-Leigh’s and Chapman’s projects with *Sanditon*. I will use the OCR version of the text to complement my previous work on editorial mediation, by comparing and quantifying the levels to which Austen-Leigh and Chapman faithfully represented the manuscript, and where the heaviest changes or discrepancies occur.
In order to set up the digital exhibit, I will include a section on the content of *Sanditon*, asking questions such as, why is, or is, *Sanditon* different than Austen's other works? What can it offer to Austen studies, and to Romantic literature more generally? How do we read or interpret *Sanditon* today? Finally, I will include a bibliography which will act as a resource, including more sources than I will have used in the project, in keeping with the linking and connecting of scholarship and work on *Sanditon*.

Bibliography


Friedman, Emily C. “Austen Among the Fragments: Understanding the Fate of Sanditon (1817).” *Women's Writing* vol. 20, no. 1, 2013, pp. 115–129.


