

No “Shiney” Rocks at Sanditon; or, R. W. Chapman’s Generous Courtesy Saves the Day

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Aside from the authoress herself, no one has been more closely associated with the text of Jane Austen’s novels than Robert William Chapman (1881-1960). Although his reputation may have been slightly diminished in recent years, an interesting example of editorial integrity in the publication of the final fragment proves his devotion to the establishment of a correct and faithful reading.

Students of *Sanditon* may have already spotted a curious discrepancy between the transcription published by Mr. Chapman in 1925 and the edition that finally appeared in 1954 in Volume VI of *The Works of Jane Austen*. Among the many signal glories of *Sanditon* as reported in 1925, Mr. Parker points out to a skeptical Mr. Heywood, is that it can boast “Deep Water 10 yards from the Shore—no Mud—no Weeds—no shiney rocks” (15). One can well imagine that Charlotte’s practical father would wonder at the peculiar advantages in having rocks that refuse to glow and sparkle in the brilliant coastal sunlight. In 1954, however, Mr. Parker offers a more convincing argument in favor of his pet seashore village in gloating that it, presumably in contrast to the horrors of the despised Brinshore, threatens the pleasure of bathers with “no slimey rocks” (369).

Clearly between publishing these two versions Mr. Chapman observed that on folio 7r (facsimile, 13) the manuscript distinctly reads “slimey.” By rare good luck, an approximate—or at least a latest—date can be established for this discovery. Inside the copy of the deluxe edition of the 1925 transcription housed at the Library of King’s College, Cambridge, is a typed but signed letter from R. W. Chapman to “The Rev. the Provost, Kings College, Cambridge,” not otherwise identified. Dated 10 November 1930, it accompanied “two copies of the better edition of *Sanditon*,” one to be kept with the manuscript (the current practice) and one for the Provost’s own collection. The gifts were carefully timed, for it was in 1930 that Mary Isabella Lefroy (1860-1939), granddaughter of Anna Lefroy, presented the manuscript to King’s College in memory of her sister Florence Emma (1857-1926) and the latter’s husband Augustus Austen-Leigh (1840-1905), Provost of King’s from 1889 until his death.

In the course of a brief discussion of textual problems and some other matters, Mr. Chapman admits that his transcription may be in need of review and that he has committed one error in particular: “If

anyone has the curiosity to recollate the MS, I shall be interested in their gleanings. I plead guilty to *shiney* for *slimey*, in the description of the beach." Thus we know that at least by this date he knew of the blunder. One looks in vain for an erratum sheet in either the standard or the deluxe edition of the transcription despite several errors, including the obvious metathesis "tho' it saw Furniture" for "tho' it was Furniture" in my copy of the ordinary edition; Second Impression (169; but correct in Mr. Gilson's copy of the ordinary edition; in both Mr. Gilson's copy and mine of the limited edition, the reading is "was"; folio 60r; facsimile, 119).

But R. W. Chapman's letter to the Provost was certainly a step in the right direction of rendering a more accurate state of this difficult manuscript so that Jane Austen's intentions would not be misunderstood. Although his next available opportunity to publish an amended text did not come until many years later, the 1954 edition appeared in time to allow Margaret Drabble to offer her readers the proper "no slimey rocks" (160) and "Another Lady" to employ the correct reading (respelled as "no slimy rocks") in her completion of the novel (6).

The danger, then, lay in the years between the false reading in 1925 and the corrected one of 1954, a long period in which editors, misled by the error, could have passed it along as authoritative. However, by good fortune, the potential damage was averted in 1934 by R. Brimley Johnson's presenting in *Sanditon and Other Miscellanea* the first modern publication of the novel. Since there is no suggestion in his Introduction that he referred to the manuscript in preparing his text—his retention of the erroneous "Sagacity" for "Ingenuity" (52) proves his dependence on the 1925 transcription—he could well have reproduced the error of which Mr. Chapman had been so aware in his correspondence of 1930. But Mr. Johnson correctly quotes Thomas Parker's abhorrence of "slimy rocks" (15), thereby offering a good text twenty years before the Oxford version of 1954. The key to this apparent puzzle is found in the final paragraph of Mr. Johnson's Introduction: "By the generous courtesy of Mr. R. W. Chapman, I have been permitted to reprint *Sanditon*; which was *first* issued by him for the Clarendon Press in 1925" (xiii). Mr. Chapman's generous courtesy presumably extended to offering his colleague the corrected reading, a splendid illustration of his scholarly civility.

Avid readers of Jane Austen's unfinished masterpiece can now be assured that this tempting site for picnicking and swimming has indeed succeeded, unlike its detested rivals, in avoiding the calamity of "slimey rocks," which may or may not be "shiney" (perhaps depending on the rare phenomenon of sun along the southern coast of England).

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