

The Watsons as Pretext

JOSEPH WIESENFARTH

Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 600 North Park Street,
Madison, WI 53706

*“When the pain is over, the remembrance of it often becomes a pleasure.
One does not love a place the less for having suffered in it. . . .”*

Anne Elliot, *Persuasion* (193)

Hans Robert Jauss distinguishes three stages in our appreciation of a text: understanding, interpretation, and application (39). I cannot recall my initial perceptual understanding of *The Watsons* when I first read it because that was so long ago. But in my recent rereading I was struck by three things: first, its dialogic form; second, its gradual unfolding of character; and, third, its use of the dance as a central event. Insofar as Mikhail Bakhtin has made us all more aware of the many voices of various interests that are pervasive in a novel, I was struck in reading *The Watsons* by the dialogue between Elizabeth and Emma Watson as they drove to “the first winter assembly in the Town of D. in Surry” (1). Elizabeth represents the point of view of a family whose fortunes, both financially and amorously, are in a bad way. Emma has just been physically assimilated into this family but has not been assimilated to its ways of feeling and acting. Having been brought up in wealth by her aunt and uncle Turner, she has a turn of mind that is consistently referred to as “refined.” Emma’s refined mind measures Elizabeth’s history of their brothers and sisters and of the connections and prospects of these siblings as well as her own. We learn about rivalries, flirtations, marriages, and attachments; about landed aristocrats like the Osbornes, rich young men like Tom Musgrave, and gentrified people like the Edwardses; about the legal, medical, clerical, and military professions. In the space of a three-mile carriage drive we learn that the world of *The Watsons* is a world with many special interests attached to particular voices. In short, we learn that the world of *The Watsons* is a world in dialogue.

When we overhear Elizabeth and Emma talking, we witness a dramatic exposition of character and action. We are not first given a description of Elizabeth and Emma after which they are set in action to illustrate the description. In *The Watsons* action is character and character action. By way of the process of conversation, Elizabeth comes to the conclusion that her aunt brought Emma up “to be very refined” (10). That their aunt so brought Emma up is only gradually revealed to Elizabeth by Emma’s actions as the sisters go down the road together. So too is the reason that Emma is no longer with her Aunt Turner gradually revealed. After being a widow for two years her aunt married a military man and moved to Ireland, but Emma did not go because Captain O’Brien did not want her with them. This is revealed in a conversation between Emma and Mr. Edwards; another conversation between Emma and her brother Robert leads to further information and perspectives on the marriage. There is no

summary statement of how Emma's aunt was widowed and remarried. We piece together the whole situation only over a series of conversations. This thoroughly modern way of telling a story is a mode of characterization: for Emma's every involvement with the events of her aunt's marriage and separation from her reveal to us the extent to which Emma is indeed "very refined."

The central event in the fragment that is *The Watsons* is the dance at which Emma takes young Charles Blake as her partner and becomes, in turn, the partner of Mr. Howard, whom we know Jane Austen intended her to marry. This scene is striking in itself and striking because it recalls the Meryton ball in *Pride and Prejudice* and the Crown Inn ball in *Emma*. *The Watsons* provides another instance of a pattern in which a ball is anticipated, takes place, and then becomes the topic of conversation for a long time afterwards. When we recollect the narrator's punning remark in chapter 3 of *Pride and Prejudice* that "to be fond of dancing was a certain step toward falling in love" (57), we know why, consciously or unconsciously, we would take special note of the dance when first reading *The Watsons*.

Any one or all of our perceptions of a novel move us toward asking ourselves how the events that have captured our notice serve our interpretation of the novel. We can take a step toward answering that question by asking another question: Hans-Georg Gadamer says that "To understand means to understand something as an answer" (Jauss 142); Bakhtin says, "I call meaning the answers to the questions" (Todorov 54); and "meaning," says Todorov, "is nothing but the answer to a question" (54). For me the question that *The Watsons* asks is this: What does it mean to be "very refined"?

When Emma remarks that she would not take a chair late at night to look in on a dance, Elizabeth responds, "There, I said you were very refined;—& that's an instance of it" (14). When Emma refuses to allow Tom Musgrave to take her back to Stanton, Elizabeth tells her sister that "it won't do to be too nice" (68). And when Emma responds by giving a rather low opinion of Musgrave, Elizabeth says that her sister is "like nobody else in the World" (71). This last sentence gets at what it means to be very refined: it means to be different. Emma is different from all of her sisters because she has been brought up by her aunt in comfort whereas they have been brought up at home in relative poverty. She is different from Margaret and Penelope because she runs away from Tom Musgrave, whom they have run after. She is different from Elizabeth because she "would rather teach at a school . . . than marry a Man I did not like"; whereas, Elizabeth "would rather do anything than be a teacher at a school" (10). This last difference leads to the following exchange between the sisters:

[Elizabeth] "I suppose my aunt brought you up to be rather refined."
 [Emma] "Indeed I do not know.—My conduct must tell you how I have been brought up. I am no judge of it myself. I cannot compare my Aunt's method with any other persons, because I know no other." [Elizabeth]—
 "But I can see in a great many things that you are very refined. I have

observed it ever since you came home, & I am afraid it will not be for your happiness. Penelope will laugh at you very much." (10-11).

Emma's and Elizabeth's remarks invoke two elements that I find essential to a novel of manners. Elizabeth's fear that Emma will not be happy because of her refined manners expresses what Northrop Frye has called a "myth of concern." Emma's unwillingness to judge her own conduct requires us to judge it for ourselves: the question of whether Emma is too refined is a *case* which we as readers must judge *for ourselves*. The myth of concern and the case—along with the presence of complementary lovers and the predominant importance of the cardinal virtues—are indispensable elements of the novel of manners. What Elizabeth articulates in her conversation with Emma is that Emma, by being very refined, has placed herself in a position that is beyond any recognizably safe conduct in society itself. Elizabeth's Emma is too singularly herself by reason of her own refined standards to be able to live in society and be happy there. Somehow, for Elizabeth, Emma has exceeded the boundary of acceptable eccentricity when she does not recognize what Elizabeth says and all others but Emma subscribe to: "I should not like marrying a disagreeable Man any more than yourself,—but I do not think there *are* many very disagreeable Men;—I think I could like any good humoured Man with a comfortable Income."

Whether Emma has in fact exceeded the limits and authority of society by being too refined is the case that requires a hearing in this novel. The *case* is a literary form that evolves from law and theology; it emphasizes the mind's ability to propose solutions to difficult problems and solve them so as to allow life to continue within an orderly society. The case by self-definition admits more than one possible solution. There would be no case if there was one clear solution. Elizabeth thinks that Emma is very refined—indeed, too nice; Emma does not know whether she is or not. The novel presents both sides of the question. It asks us finally to decide the case for ourselves by examining the evidence presented to us. Emma's case requires us to determine whether it was prudent for her aunt and uncle to take her from her family and bring her up as their own child. It asks us to determine whether there was any justice in Mrs. Turner's marrying a second time, depriving Emma of an income, and sending her penniless back to her own family. Prudence and justice are two of the cardinal virtues—fortitude and temperance are the other two—and they remind us that the novel of manners is frequently concerned with these virtues. The outcome of the action in this novel is that Emma marries Mr. Howard, a gentlemanlike clergyman. Presumably, had Jane Austen finished the novel, we would have found him to be more than just "not disagreeable." He would have taken his place at Emma's side as an agreeable husband whose character would complement her own, for these are the kinds of husbands Jane Austen's heroines always do take. Whereas, then, it could be argued that Mrs. Turner was imprudent in her treatment of Emma (that is Emma's own judgment: "My Aunt . . . erred" [95]) and whereas disenfranchising Emma from Mr. Turner's wealth

could be argued to be an injustice (that is Robert Watson's conclusion), and whereas in the light of this imprudence and this injustice it could be argued that Emma's adoption was altogether a mistake, Jane Austen suggests by the way the novel was meant to end that no clearcut case can be made against Emma Watson's being very refined. She has had discrimination enough to avoid the blandishments of Tom Musgrave and thereby the miseries her sisters suffered at his hands and she has had nicety of taste enough to see that while Lord Osborne was not disagreeable he was also not agreeable enough for her to marry. That is the case that I make out for Emma's refinement and nicety in the novel. Others, of course, have seen the whole thing differently and have come to different conclusions. Marvin Mudrick simply sees the whole business as stiff moralism subverting artistic vision (153), which suggests that Jane Austen's putting the case at all and asking us to bother our heads about it was a mistake in the first place. But for me *The Watsons* is a subtle inquiry into the nature of refinement that asks us to determine for ourselves how well Emma is served by what Jane Austen calls in chapter 5 of *Persuasion* an "elegant and cultivated mind" (67).

Now if the second phase of the hermeneutical process is interpretation, the third is application. Application has to do with our getting a perspective on the text by attention to its own time and genesis. The question that my interpretation of *The Watsons* as a novel about refinement leads me to is this: Why did Jane Austen never finish it? The generally accepted answer to this question is what Southam calls "the pressure of circumstances." "The death of her father," says Margaret Drabble, "and the prospect of an impoverished all-female household with her mother and Cassandra, may well have been the blow that silenced her. When she felt like writing again, the melancholy associations of the manuscript were too much for her, and she put it aside" (16). John Halperin concurs: "*The Watsons*," he says, "was written in a desperate mood and abandoned in a mood even more desperate. It articulates as perhaps nothing else can the frustration, despair, and loneliness of Jane Austen's barren middle years" (141). "Jane Austen seems to be struggling with a peculiar oppression" in *The Watsons*, says Mary Lascelles, "a stiffness and heaviness that threaten her style" (99-100). Given this series of unhappy circumstances, I don't find it remarkable that Jane Austen didn't finish *The Watsons*, I find it remarkable that she started it at all. And since I can certainly make no further progress in this lugubrious direction, I want to take another one in educing an entirely different set of reasons from those given above.

By the time she was writing *The Watsons*, presumably in 1804-05 (though a date as late as 1807-08 has been suggested [Southam 64, n. 2]), Jane Austen had two novels in draft: an early version of *Sense and Sensibility*, which had been rewritten in 1797 from *Elinor and Marianne*, and *First Impressions*, which would be rewritten as *Pride and Prejudice*. In addition, she had already rewritten *Susan*, which after further tinkering in 1816, would be published posthumously as *Northanger Abbey*. Since Jane Austen eventually finished these three novels to her satisfaction, why

didn't she finish *The Watsons*? Given the early state of *Sense and Sensibility* and of *Pride and Prejudice*, I don't see it as a significant argument that the difficult Bath days in which *The Watsons* was conceived prevented Jane Austen from ever finishing it. Jane Austen didn't finish anything but *Susan* in those days, and that was revised later too. On the basis of what we know about Jane Austen's working out finished texts from early drafts, I see no reason why we should not consider *The Watsons* an early draft in the same class as *Elinor & Marianne* and *First Impressions*. If a healthier and happier state of mind at Chawton produced *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, why shouldn't it also have produced *The Watsons*? When we think of the physical and emotional strain that Jane Austen was under when finishing *Persuasion* in the spring and summer of 1816 and of the mortal illness that attended her writing of *Sanditon* until she was physically incapable of continuing—when we think of these things, I simply find the argument that the association of the manuscript with the days she was pressured by necessity uncharacteristic of what we know about Jane Austen's temperament and working habits. And if *The Watsons* carried too many associations with the bad old days at Bath, Jane Austen would certainly not have taken that city as a setting for *Persuasion*.

Is it then that Jane Austen didn't finish *The Watsons* because that fragment became *Emma*, a proposition that Q. D. Leavis has vigorously argued (14-21) and Brian Southam has vigorously refuted? (145-48). Perhaps the question is too loaded and implies that we must be either a Leavisite or a Southamite if we are to find salvation in *The Watsons*. I personally find that problematical because I don't find either of them convincing. Whereas Leavis claims everything, Southam denies everything. And he denies most vehemently what she claims most modestly: that Emma Watson became Emma Woodhouse. If Emma Watson became anyone, she became Jane Fairfax, as R. W. Chapman suggested some forty years ago (51). Both were raised outside their families; one is described as "very refined" and the other as "very elegant"; each faces the grim possibility of becoming a teacher, which each feels is a fate worse than death but not worse than a marriage to a trifle; one puts Tom Musgrave in his place, the other Frank Churchill; both are patronized by vulgar, ostentatious women in the persons of Mrs. Robert Watson and Mrs. Elton; and Ireland figures in the stories of each. I don't find it necessary, with Mrs. Leavis, to identify Mrs. Robert Watson as the prototype of Mrs. Elton. Jane Austen had already done a clone for Mrs. Robert Watson in Mrs. John Dashwood just as she'd done something of the low-minded, money-grubbing, insensitive brother that Robert is to Emma Watson in John Dashwood (Mudrick 144; Gooneratne 41), who treats his sisters abominably.

What I am beginning to argue here is that *The Watsons* does not have to be thought of as being a wasted effort if we do not find every character and event somehow transformed in *Emma*. The alternative to this view is that Jane Austen never finished *The Watsons* because after writing the final drafts of *Sense and Sensibility* and of *Pride and Prejudice* she did not have to. Furthermore, I think that the heroine of *The Watsons*, Emma Watson

herself, was transformed into Jane Fairfax and that then the only remaining unused item of significance which was left from the fragment was the case in *The Watsons*—the case of the sister who is too nice in her ways to succeed in the common, everyday world that Jane Austen's fiction depicts. And that very case was itself worked out in *Persuasion*.

If Mr. and Mrs. Robert Watson found some degree of realization in Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood, there was no need for Jane Austen to write a finished version of *The Watsons* to do their type again. Jane Austen had to know that she could never do such a couple better than she had done them in the second chapter of *Sense and Sensibility*. If we want to object that John Dashwood is stupider than Robert Watson, we may be correct. But then we must remember that the other side of the argument is that Robert Watson did marry his awful wife, and that is certainly the case of someone taking a "disagreeable" partner for the sake of the money involved. In Jane Austen's world that does not bespeak any intelligence at all. Also, both Watson and Dashwood, live by calculation. With them the bottom line determines their decisions to act or not to act. "On the other hand," as Margaret Drabble points out, "all of [Jane Austen's] main characters marry for love, and while some of them are lucky enough to love where money is, there is no suggestion that they seek it" (21).

If it was certainly not worth Jane Austen's doing the Robert Watsons again once she'd done the John Dashwoods, then it was equally not worth her doing the dance in *The Watsons* again once she'd done the dance in *Pride and Prejudice*. The dance takes place in chapter 3 of *Pride and Prejudice*, but it is anticipated in chapter 2 and talked about in chapters 4, 5, and 6. In short, the dance is treated in *Pride and Prejudice* precisely the way it is treated in *The Watsons*. Since we don't at all know whether *First Impressions* contained this sequence, we are free to speculate that in rewriting it into *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen may well have drawn on what she had in her manuscript fragment, *The Watsons*. Be that as it may, once *Pride and Prejudice* was finished, we can see that Jane Austen would have had a hard time writing a dance sequence into a revised *Watsons* that could equal in brilliance her use of it in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Not only does the pair of Darcy and Bingley seem to me to obviate the need of rewriting a novel with a Lord Osborne and a Tom Musgrave, but Lord Osborne's standoffishness is also brilliantly pre-empted by Darcy's refusal to dance with Elizabeth: "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me* . . ." The attitude that prompts the remark and the remark itself makes Darcy the talk of chapters 4, 5, and 6. But most of all this insult makes Elizabeth hostile to Darcy because it mortifies her. So that when she refuses his proposal at Hunsford, she tells him she's not "tempted" to accept it. When we recall again the sentence that postulates that people who dance together are in a fair way toward falling in love, we see the significance of this pointed repetition of the word *tempt*: he's not tempted to dance with her; she's not tempted to marry him. Why isn't she tempted? Because his proposal of marriage like his refusal to dance with her was "ungentlemanlike." Elizabeth tells Darcy that she would have been at more pains to refuse his proposal politely had he made it politely:

“had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner.” These words actually reform Darcy’s attitude and manners, as he admits to Elizabeth after his second proposal is accepted late in the novel:

“‘had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner.’ Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me;—though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice.” (*PP*, p. 367)

If Elizabeth has done Darcy’s letter justice, Darcy has done her reproof justice too. Two words, then, *tempt* and *gentleman-like* connect Darcy’s refusal to dance and Elizabeth’s refusal to marry and their eventual agreement to marry. *Tempt* appears in chapters 3 and 34 (II:11) and *gentleman-like* in chapters 34 and 58 (III:12). Both are of course associated with the Meryton dance where Darcy was ungentleman-like enough to say, loudly enough to be overheard by her, that he was not tempted to dance with Elizabeth. Jane Austen would have had a difficult time indeed making more of a dance in a rewritten *Watsons* than she did in *Pride and Prejudice*. The charming Charles Blake episode of *The Watsons* of course finds no place in *Pride and Prejudice*. It is sad to lose it altogether, but Jane Austen would hardly write a novel for the sake of one scene alone. Moreover, I am inclined to see with Q. D. Leavis the spirit of the Emma Watson-Charles Blake scene preserved in *Emma* when Mr. Knightley rescues Harriet Smith by dancing with her at the Crown Inn after she has been cut by Mr. Elton.

What I am suggesting, then, is that a good deal of what we have in the fragment of *The Watsons* was simply pre-empted by the brilliant presentation of the John Dashwoods in *Sense and Sensibility* and the brilliant deployment of the dance in *Pride and Prejudice*. I am further suggesting that if everything from *The Watsons* was not pre-empted by these novels, enough was to prevent Jane Austen from ever finishing it. And I am finally suggesting that characters and events from *The Watsons* that were not pre-empted by these first two published novels found their way into later ones. But not only are characters and events from *The Watsons* given a finished form elsewhere, so too is the case in *The Watsons*.

Like Emma Watson, Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* is a woman of refined sensibility. The narrator speaks of “the nice tone of her mind” and tells us that Anne, in contrast to the Musgrove sisters, “would not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments” (67). Both Emma Watson and Anne Elliot have elder sisters named Elizabeth, each of whom has lost a suitor: the Watson sister, Purvis; the Elliot sister, her cousin William. The difference between the two Elizabeths is that Emma’s sister is candid and generous, and Anne’s sister is not. But the generous and candid side of Elizabeth Watson had already been rendered in Jane Bennet, which once again suggests that completing *The Watsons* would have made Jane Austen repeat herself. And both Emma and Anne also have another sister, each of whom is constantly complaining; so Margaret Watson finds her realization in Anne’s sister Mary, Mrs. Charles Musgrove. The refinement of Emma Watson and Anne Elliot is set in sharp contrast with their siblings.

Also like Emma Watson, who was reared by an aunt of means, Anne Elliot is much indebted to Lady Russell, who took Anne as a daughter after Lady Elliot died. And just as Emma has a nicer judgment and sensibility than her Aunt Turner, Anne has a nicer judgment and sensibility than Lady Russell. Both girls are separated from these beloved older women: Emma by her aunt's marriage and Anne by her father's renting of Kellynch Hall. On their own, each depends on her own nice mind and refined sensibility to preserve her sense of herself. Just as Emma would have eventually won Mr. Howard, Anne eventually wins Captain Wentworth. And they do this simply by being themselves. Anne pretty much speaks for Emma and herself when she "leave[s] things to take their course," saying of Wentworth and herself, "We are not boy and girl, to be captiously irritable, misled by every moment's inadvertence, and wantonly playing with our own happiness" (*P*, 226). From what we know of Emma Watson's dislike of the shenanigans of Tom Musgrave and Lord Osborne, she could easily have said the same of Mr. Howard and herself.

I have entitled my paper "*The Watsons as Pretext*" because I wanted to use the word *pretext* in a variety of ways. One way of using it is to define *pretext* in the traditional way as a reason to speak about something other than what is expected. My speaking about *The Watsons* is a pretext for my speaking about the economy of Jane Austen's art. We are more likely to recognize that economy in individual novels. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, after Darcy hands Elizabeth the letter that explains his conduct in relation to Wickham and to Jane and Bingley, we see Elizabeth go through a series of changes that corrects her judgment and remarkably improves her opinion of Darcy. This goes on from chapters 35 to 43. In chapter 43 Darcy appears again and is a changed man, but we don't see him change. Jane Austen, as we remember her telling Cassandra in a letter (29 January 1813), doesn't write "for such dull elves / As have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves" (*Letters*, 132). So she expects us to notice the economy of her treatment of Darcy's and Elizabeth's changes in attitude toward each other by dramatizing in Elizabeth how moment by moment and day by day such a change takes place and by expecting us to realize that the same thing has happened to Darcy because he is Elizabeth's equally intelligent counterpart. What happens center-stage to one happens offstage to the other. If, as I said before, Elizabeth does Darcy's letter justice, as he demands, he does her reproof of his ungentleman-like conduct justice too. Jane Austen is not going to bore her readers by putting Darcy through a change similar to Elizabeth's. She startles her reader by presenting Darcy after he has changed and allows the reader to realize that 'Yes, of course, Darcy has done exactly the same thing as Elizabeth.' Otherwise we could hardly consider her novel to be either "lop'd and crop't" or "light and bright and sparkling." But her economy of treatment shows it to be both.

The same principle applies to Jane Austen's canon as to one of her novels. If there is an economy of process in her novels, there an economy of process in her canon too. Jane Austen studiously tries to avoid repeating herself. As Q. D. Leavis wrote, "... there is a thriftiness characteristic of

our author" (18). This I suggest is why *The Watsons* remained a fragment. And it brings me to my fancier use of the word *pretext*, which when hyphenated becomes *pre-text*: *The Watsons* is a pre-text—a text that comes before other texts. *The Watsons* comes before the final rewritings of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Once written, these novels pre-empt characters and scenes used in the fragment. With these things pre-empted, it would be redundant to use them again in a completed version of the novel. What is left in *The Watsons* then becomes a pre-text for the creation of Jane Fairfax and for the transformation of the dance in *Emma* and for using the case of too-nice-a-mind and too-refined-a-sensibility in *Persuasion*. Almost everything that we have in *The Watsons* as a fragment, then, makes its appearance in Jane Austen's canon in some finished fashion.

If *The Watsons* is looked at in this way, the argument from prolonged effect of distress of circumstances that has long held sway must make room for what I think is at least an equally persuasive argument from a principle of artistic economy. If a novelist writes a good portion of a novel and knows how she wants it to end, the reason for not finishing it need not be some block induced by trying emotional conditions. If indeed the death of her father was the last of a series of incidents that prevented Jane Austen from going on with *The Watsons* immediately—an we really do not know whether this was the case—it doesn't seem to me likely that it would have prevented her from finishing the novel eventually. If a writer who is in early middle age and seriously ill has every reason to stop writing altogether and yet continues to write, I'd argue that the same writer when younger and healthier is not likely to have been overcome by the trying conditions that surrounded her. When, furthermore, characters and problems and events that appear in a fragment that critics have argued was never finished because the circumstances surrounding its composition were too disturbing to call up again—when those very characters and problems and events or at least others very like them appear in later novels, I suggest that the logic of the argument for a carryover from pressure of circumstances is tenuous at best. This, however, is not the final point that I wish to make in this section of my paper dealing with what Jauss has called "application" in the reading of a literary work. Insofar as so much emphasis has been placed upon the pressure-of-circumstances theory in accounting for *The Watsons* remaining a fragment, I want to suggest that this theory is self-reflexive. In a word, the biographical fact and textual instance are complementary: one substantiates the other. Southam, who argues that Jane Austen's "imaginative powers may have been numbed by private sorrows" (64), speaks of "the almost unrelieved bleakness of the social picture" in *The Watsons*. He calls our attention to its "failing in generosity" and its "loss of creative power" (63). He goes on to conclude that "the pressure of circumstances... made it difficult to continue the story, which was, anyway, proceeding unsatisfactorily" (64-65). Halperin, who argues that Jane Austen's "life finally became too unpleasant to go on with the tale" (140), speaks of it as "one of her most somber performances" (140). He says that *The Watsons* "articulates as perhaps nothing else can the frustration, despair, and loneliness of Jane

Austen's barren middle years" (141). Jane Austen's life shows why *The Watsons* is a fragment and why it is lacking in power; *The Watsons* shows that the pressure of circumstances in Jane Austen's life affected her creative powers. There is no constructive way to argue against this closed system of cause-and-effect relationships. It carries with it its own probability, otherwise it would not still hold sway. The only thing that I can do is to return to my perceptual understanding, to my first impressions on rereading *The Watsons* after many years. I was struck, as I said, by its dialogical imagination, its dramatic exposition of character and event, and by its use of the dance. All of these seemed to me to be instances of heightened creative power—creative power of the kind that made F. B. Pinion say "*The Watsons* is full of promise" (75). Walton Litz explicates the promise when he shows that "in *The Watsons* Jane Austen is straining after methods of organization and presentation adequate to her developing grasp of manners" (88)—methods that throw "a great deal of responsibility for judgment on the reader" (90). For him the awkwardness of the fragment lies in this straining toward something new; Litz sees that *The Watsons* "looks forward to *Emma* and *Persuasion*" (87). This heightened creative power also impressed Margaret Drabble, who expresses what was my sense of the fragment in rereading it when she says, "*The Watsons* is a tantalizing, delightful and highly accomplished fragment" (15). And Virginia Woolf provides what was perhaps the first instance of recognition of Jane Austen's heightened creative power when she wrote: "In *The Watsons* she gives us a foretaste of this power; she makes us wonder why an ordinary act of kindness, as she describes it, becomes so full of meaning. In her masterpieces, the same gift is brought to perfection" (29). What these interpretations of *The Watsons* make clear is that the text of the fragment is saying different things to different readers. It will certainly continue to do that because each reader brings different predispositions to the text and those predispositions create for him horizons of expectation different from those of other readers. What this paper should have demonstrated is that if a reader approaches the text as evidence of the pressure of circumstances operating on Jane Austen's creative imagination then such a reader is likely to read *The Watsons* in such a way as to find that evidence. If a reader approaches the text without that predisposition, such a reader will most likely see it in another way. The argument in this paper that Jane Austen had perfectly good esthetic reasons for not finishing *The Watsons* should provide any reader who wants it an alternative to a psychobiographical pressure-of-circumstances theory when taking up the fragment for reading. To my lights it allows the reader to experience the unfinished novel in a more immediate way and to provide for it a less restrictive interpretation than some that I have cited today.

In conclusion, then, my argument for the permanent fragmentary nature of *The Watsons* is, first, that after her first two published novels appeared, Jane Austen chose not to repeat herself; and, second, that in her later novels, *Emma* and *Persuasion*, Jane Austen transformed a character, an event, and a case from *The Watsons* brilliantly. These two arguments in their turn show the two sides of Jane Austen's economy as a

novelist: her refusal to repeat herself and her refusal to abandon what could still be used. The argument from the esthetics of Jane Austen's economy as an artist provides grounds for fresh interpretations of this unfinished novel. In thinking about this fragment in this way as it relates to *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*, I find myself more than ever in agreement with Virginia Woolf, who said of *The Watsons*, "It has the permanent quality of literature" (27).

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