

Jane Austen's Legacy: Anna Austen Lefroy's Manuscript of *Sanditon*

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Jane Anna Austen Lefroy, Jane Austen's "literary niece," was the first to attempt a continuation of Jane Austen's incomplete *Sanditon*, although her work was the last to be published, almost 150 years later. The existence of Lefroy's manuscript was virtually unknown until it appeared at auction as Lot 266 in the December 13, 1977, sale at Sotheby Parke Bernet. Dr. James M. W. Borg, a bookseller, publisher, and independent scholar, was the successful bidder (and current owner). In 1982, knowing of my interest in Jane Austen and my previous Austen publications, he inquired if I would be willing to edit the Lefroy manuscript for publication by his Chiron Press. I agreed and soon began transcribing the heavily revised manuscript.

With the growing interest in Lefroy's manuscript (as seen in Le Faye's article and those published here by Peter Sabor and Kathleen James-Cavan), perhaps a description of the manuscript would be valuable because only Dr. Borg and I have worked with the original document. Anna Lefroy's manuscript consists of 113 handwritten pages on wove writing paper. Fifty-four leaves are divided into three gatherings and hand stitched with thread. The remaining 21 leaves, consisting of a plot revolving about Clara Brereton, are loose foldings. Although Lefroy's continuation of *Sanditon* is incomplete, her manuscript is approximately the same length as Austen's fragment and therefore doubles the length of the novel. Notes in blue, orange, and red pencil, with numbers indicating word counts and with "1st edition—23 lines—160/words per page" on the last leaf, indicate that Lefroy had thoughts of publishing the work. The manuscript is a working draft, and, as such, contains numerous additions and deletions, as well as paste downs and clippings. The revisions were done at various times—some concurrently, some as a page or section was completed, and others at a later reading, often in pencil or a different ink. The numerous emendations and variants show that Lefroy took Austen's advice about the importance of revising text, as Austen called it "scratching out some of the past" (*Letter* No. 100).

In 1983, the Chiron Press published a limited edition of 500 copies of Lefroy's continuation in the style of Jane Austen's first editions—blue-gray covered boards with a cloth spine and spine label. The work also contained a transcription of Lefroy's "Reminiscences of Aunt Jane," frequently quoted in biographical sources, but published from the original manuscript in this edition for the first time.

Other biographical sources have incorrectly quoted Lefroy's remembrances, using unreliable secondary sources.

Anna Lefroy inherited from her Aunt Jane the manuscripts for *Sanditon*, *The Watsons*, and the two canceled chapters of *Persuasion*. Austen probably left the manuscript to her because of Anna's interest in writing and also because the two had discussed the future course of the work. Deirdre Le Faye's article on the Lefroy manuscript publishes for the first time a letter from Anna to James Edward post-marked August 8th, 1862. In the letter Anna discusses her thoughts on publishing Austen's *Sanditon* fragment, possibly taking on the task of "'slightly alter[ing], & very carefully correct[ing]'" the manuscript as her Aunt might have done if she had lived. Significantly, the letter also confirms that Anna and Jane had discussed *Sanditon* during its composition, specifically the Parker family. These discussions would have allowed Lefroy to develop those characters in line with her Aunt's thoughts: "'The other members of the Parker family (except of course Sidney) were certainly suggested by conversations which passed between Aunt Jane and me during the time that she was writing the story. . . .'"

Although Austen's *Sanditon* manuscript is 6,000 words longer than *The Watsons*, she gives the reader little indication of plot. For Lefroy, plotting the continuation of *Sanditon*, even though she was familiar with her aunt's style, must have been a difficult task. Although we know that the two had discussed characterization in *Sanditon*, we will never know how much Austen told Lefroy about the future direction of the plot before she became too ill to work on the manuscript. Perhaps Anna's continuation concludes where Austen and Lefroy's discussion of *Sanditon* ended. Later, in writing her continuation, Lefroy could rely on her aunt's advice in their correspondence and discussions about plot, dialogue, setting, and characterization. Clearly this was not enough information to help Lefroy complete the novel. Anna has developed the characters but is only able to hint at how the inevitable matchmaking among members of the "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village" will be completed.

A. Q. Morton in *Literary Detection: How to Prove Authorship and Fraud in Literature and Documents* uses *Sanditon* to illustrate his theory that through stylometry a manuscript of undetermined authorship can be identified by studying an author's habits with regard to common words ("a," "an," "and," "such," and "very") and the positions of these words in sentences. Morton compares Marie Dobbs's style in her completion of *Sanditon* with Austen's in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, and the fragment of *Sanditon*. Although on a superficial level, the styles of Dobbs's completion and Jane Austen

appear similar, a more careful study reveals significant differences. He concludes that Dobbs's effort to imitate Austen does not succeed and that attempts to imitate an author will always more closely resemble the writer's own work rather than that of the person she is imitating (189-91). Morton's formula would likely reveal a similar disparity in language and technique if applied in comparing Lefroy's continuation with Austen's work.

Lefroy's continuation is, of course, not of the same literary quality of Jane Austen's work, as Anna readily admits: "'There seems to me just the same difference as between real Lace, & Imitation'" (Letter quoted in Le Faye). Her effort, however, cannot be judged by the same criteria as the two completions by Dobbs and Alice Cobbett. Lefroy's personal knowledge of her aunt's literary predilections, their literary discussions, their writing collaboration, and especially their discussions about the characters in *Sanditon*, give Anna Austen Lefroy's continuation of *Sanditon* literary and historical significance as an indication of Jane Austen's own plans, up until the time of her death, for the continuation of her work. As Peter Sabor notes, one of the principal problems with Lefroy's continuation is that she tries to remain so close to Jane Austen's own style and thoughts that there seems nowhere to go without Jane herself there to point out the way.

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