

## Sir Edward's "Ingenuity": A Corrected Reading in the *Sanditon* Manuscript

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When James Edward Austen-Leigh published his revised edition of *A Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1871, he revealed the existence of a hitherto unknown fragment of a novel in 12 chapters. His tantalizing summary of what he termed "The Last Work" left readers to speculate on the full text for decades.

At last, in 1925, R. W. Chapman's transcription of the 120-page manuscript, published as *Fragment of a Novel*, appeared with a short preface and textual notes. Chapman thus had a complete and accurate text that he could reissue in Volume VI of the monumental OUP edition of *The Works of Jane Austen (Minor Works, 1954)*. This text in turn was used by B. C. Southam for his revised edition of *Minor Works* as Volume VI of *The Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen* (1967). Admirers of Jane Austen can now be confident that we have a definitive text of this fascinating last effort. Or do we?

Well, not quite. Through a misreading of a crucial word in an extended passage on the debonair and mindless Sir Edward Denham, Chapman possibly conveyed to subsequent readers a false notion of Jane Austen's ironic view of this would-be seducer. Although Sir Edward has pretensions of learning, tastefully but forcefully deflated by Charlotte Heywood, he cannot be taken seriously as a man in pursuit of wisdom. Our young rake's heroes are men of action rather than intellectual probity.

Constrained by economic circumstances—and a very limited mental capacity—Sir Edward has spent much of his abundant leisure time reading sentimental novels, which have had the same deleterious effect on his mind that they were reputed to have on their female readers. Particularly fancying Richardson, "he felt that he was formed to be a dangerous Man—quite in the line of the Lovelaces." Thus, according to Chapman's text, "With a perversity of Judgement, which must be attributed to his not having by Nature a very strong head, the Graces, the Spirit, the Sagacity, & the Perseverance, of the Villain of the Story outweighed all his absurdities & all his Atrocities with Sir Edward" (1925, page 109; 1967, page 404).

Although Sir Edward's admiring such a trait in his romantic antecedents as "Sagacity" should have struck editors as incongruous, this passage has remained intact through all modern publications of the fragment.

However, scrutiny of the manuscript in the Library of King's College, Cambridge, reveals that Chapman's long-established reading of these lines is inaccurate. What Jane Austen wrote was: "With a perversity of Judgement, which must be attributed to his not having by Nature a very strong head, the Graces, the Spirit, the Ingenuity, & the Perseverance, of the Villain of the Story outweighed all his absurdities & all his Atrocities with Sir Edward." The correct reading, "Ingenuity," is plainly seen in the facsimile edition (1975, page 75, line 14). An identical "Ingenuity," this time correctly

transcribed by Chapman, appears on page 107, line 11. Jane Austen's "sagacity," found on page 67, line 3, is very different in appearance.

Jane Austen's ironic comment is now precisely focused, and our laughter at Sir Edward's ineptitude is based on an accurate summary of the dubious traits that he esteems and hopes to emulate.

Curiously, despite preserving Chapman's false reading, the continuer of the tale—"Another Lady"—must have instinctively felt that although Sir Edward prizes "ingenuity" he can lay no claim to this virtue: He runs off with Charlotte in the least appropriate and most unimaginative vehicle for seduction, an open gig. And he conveys her not to his "tasteful little Cottage Ornée" (thus in the manuscript) or some other suitable location for a night of enforced passion, but . . . to her own front door!

I wish to thank Mr. Peter Jones of the Library of King's College, Cambridge, for granting me access to the *Sanditon* manuscript.

#### WORKS CITED

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