

“Knit Your Own Stuff”; or, Finishing Off Jane Austen

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I'm sure you are wondering how this talk came by its title. As I set about explaining, I do want to assure you that, unlikely as it seems, I *am* on the way to Stanton Parsonage. I shall take a rather roundabout route, by the back lanes, but I shall end up at the Watsons' front door.

I start out from the home of Joan Austen-Leigh. That was where I once held Jane's housewife, where, for a sudden startled moment, looking not so much at the housewife as the minute size of the needle inside it, I had a very intense sensation of knowing Jane, glimpsing the Jane we do not know. It was Jane de-familiarized—Jane sewing, not Jane writing—although the question that was passing through my mind might have referred to either: *how did she do it?* I don't pretend this experience is unique—although it was peculiarly female. We all have these moments. Mine remained with me, and had some part, I am sure, in my later desire, decision, to write *Miss Abigail's Part or Version & Diversion*, which in a way reflects that juxtaposition of the needle and the pen, since it is the other side of Jane too, the story of *Mansfield Park* from the servant's point of view, the underside of that large household, the side you don't see.

This kind of literary inbreeding is not new—one Janeite friend of mine has pleasant memories of *Pemberley Shades*, which follows the fortunes of Lizzy and Darcy after they are married—but it is especially popular these days and has reached new heights of sophistication. Several novels revolving around Jane and her work, besides my own, have made their appearance lately: Fay Weldon's *Letters to Alice on first reading Jane Austen*; Joan Aiken's sequel, *Mansfield Revisited*, and one by Barbara Ker Wilson about an imaginary visit Jane made to Australia.

The activity is not, of course, limited to Jane. There's a novel about Dickens called *Our Mutual Friend*, as well as an excellent completion of *The*

The Four Published Completions of *The Watsons*

1. Concluded by L. Oulton. London: Hutchinson; New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1923. 265 pp.
 2. Completed in accordance with her intentions by Edith & Francis Brown. London: Mathews & Marrot, 1928. 183 pp.
 3. Jane Austen's fragment continued and completed by John Coates. London: Methuen, 1958. 318 pp.
 4. By Jane Austen and another. London: Peter Davies, 1977. 229 pp.
- Also: Hubback, Catherine Anne (Austen), *The Younger Sister*, 3 vols. 1850.

Mystery of Edwin Drood by Leon Garfield; there's one based on Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, explaining what happened to Quint and Miss Jessel before the beginning of that novel; Jean Rhys's *The Wide Sargasso Sea* tells the story of Mr. Rochester's mad wife in *Jane Eyre*. George Macdonald Fraser has, of course, made more money than all of them put together with his series centred on Flashman, the bully out of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. *Flaubert's Parrot*, by Julian Barnes, which was recently a runner-up for the Booker Prize, belongs in this category, and contains some wry self-mockery, very appropriate for all writers who indulge in this kind of fiction. The ninth in his set of ten commandments for authors reads:

There shall be no more novels which are really about other novels. No 'modern versions', reworkings, sequels or prequels. No imaginative completions of works left unfinished on their author's death. Instead, every writer is to be issued with a sampler in coloured wools to hang over the fireplace. It reads: Knit Your Own Stuff.

So now you see why this talk is named as it is.

What is the appeal of this kind of novel? Why should *four* writers complete *The Watsons*? The simplest explanation is, of course, plain, old-fashioned greed. "I wish it could all come over again." Margaret Drabble points out that the frustration of *The Watsons* is not even related to not knowing what will happen. "Even if Jane had not told Cassandra and Cassandra had not told us, we would have been able to guess. It is simply a regret that there was not more. One would have wanted more of the same." In that way, every completion, sequel, prequel or whatever is a tribute, mostly of deep affection, to the profound influence of that original author.

Both Jane's unfinished novels have had more than one ending tacked on. Besides the four completions of *The Watsons*, there are two of *Sanditon*, one of which, by Alice Cobbett, is entitled "Somehow Lengthened . . . a development of *Sanditon*." I rather like that. "Somehow Lengthened." It puts me in mind of one of those light aluminum ladders that sways dangerously in the wind and is about to be climbed by one who has no head for heights. *Will she fall off?* you wonder anxiously. She does, of course. Nobody plays these games who doesn't, since it is impossible to scale the heights with Jane. The question is, how few bruises she will sustain.

One of the first problems: how is the writer who embarks upon a completion to regard the existing text? Jane herself would have re-worked *The Watsons*; is the writer who takes over obliged *not* to? Must what Jane wrote be regarded as sacred? Only the most foolhardy would violate the sanctity of Jane's text, I think you would agree. We do have one who comes into that category: John Coates. I must say I was highly incensed when I discovered him disfiguring some of my favourite lines, like a naughty boy drawing a moustache on the portrait of the Queen. You remember that Miss Osborne says to Charles Blake, after Emma has stood up with him: "Upon my word, Charles you are in luck. You have got a better partner than me." Jane's next line reads simply "to which the

happy Charles answered 'Yes.'" Coates makes this into "To which the happy boy, with the frankness of youth, replied simply: 'Yes.'" What overkill! This is not an isolated instance. Every page is scattered with similar examples, small alterations to style, changes of personality and appearance. The "old grievance" between the Edwardses over the matter of Mr. Edwards staying late at his club disappears. After the little barbed exchange, you will remember that Jane explains "So far the subject was very often carried;—but Mr. and Mrs. Edwards were so wise as never to pass that point; and Mr. Edwards now turned to something else." That perfect little comment on marital relations is entirely done away with. Coates even changes Emma's name to Emily.

In the case of *The Watsons* we have more than text to consider; there is also the matter of those indications as to the development of the plot, which come to us orally from Jane via Cassandra and were set down by Edward Austen-Leigh in the *Memoir*. I will remind you that Mr. Watson was soon to die, after which Emma was to become dependent upon her brother and sister-in-law for a home. She was to decline an offer of marriage from Lord Osborne, and much of the interest of the tale was to arise from Lady Osborne's love for Mr. Howard and his counter affection for Emma, whom he was finally to marry. You might justifiably think there is less reason to be faithful to this scheme than to the text: apart from the possibility that Jane herself might well have decided to modify it, it might have been slightly garbled in transmission before it reached the *Memoir*, like the messages whispered along the lines in party games.

And what we are involved in here, it is as well to remember, is just that: a game, an amusement. There is no scholarly justification for it at all; in fact many scholars would disapprove absolutely. That is probably why three out of the four writers feel obliged to defend themselves in a preface or a postscript. I rather like the feisty attitude of the author of the 1928 version, Edith Brown, who was one of Jane's great-grand-nieces:

I will not apologize. I like my great aunt Jane, and she would have liked me. She would have said "I am pleased with your notion, and expect much entertainment." Solemn people can say, if they like, that we should not do this, but I decline to be solemn about Aunt Jane. She was fun, much more than she was anything else, and this has been fun to do.

I agree entirely. To be too serious or solemn is inappropriate to the exercise. All the same, there is one more intriguing bit of pseudo-scholarship involving *The Watsons*. Both the Brown and "Another" versions derive much from a nineteenth-century novel, *The Younger Sister*, by Catherine Hubback (nee Austen). Catherine, who was the daughter of Jane's brother Frank, never knew Jane, but was very close to her stepmother, Martha Lloyd, and listened many times to her aunt Cassandra read aloud *The Watsons*. Catherine Hubback later turned to novel-writing, as so many women did, to retrieve the family fortunes, and her first novel, in three volumes, called *The Younger Sister* was published in 1850. This novel was based very closely indeed on *The Watsons*. *The Younger Sister* is very hard to come by and I have not been able to read it,

but Edith Brown, Catherine Hubback's grand-daughter, explains that the first volume is Jane's novel "through a haze of memory"; the second contains Jane's incidents; the third has no connexion with Jane at all. In other words, it is, in a way, although never acknowledged as such, the very first completion of *The Watsons*. And since it was written by someone who heard the story from the two women closest to Jane herself and knew it well enough to have an amazing amount of it off by heart, even after a lapse of years, Brown and "Another," base their own versions upon it, reasoning that it must express Jane's original intentions more closely than anything else could.

Even on its own terms, this argument is based upon a number of insubstantial hypotheses. The connexion between *The Younger Sister* and *The Watsons* is at best tenuous. Hubback's novel bears no more resemblance to Jane's writing than Cassandra's sketch to Jane's appearance. Cassandra's picture of Jane is often reproduced but only for want of anything better. The most cursory glance reveals that it is very badly drawn. I entirely agree with the eminent critic, Ellen Moers, who says quite firmly that there is no acceptable picture of Jane. But then Cassandra's sketch exists. There it is.

The same goes for *The Younger Sister*. There it is: an unwieldy Victorian triple-decker which used a spar or two and some planking second-hand from Jane's much trimmer but unfinished craft. Almost identical chunks of conversation, as well as incidents and characters which turn up in both Brown and "Another" indicate exactly what these two writers borrowed from Hubback's novel.

With the exception of Coates, who was not, it seems clear from his Afterword, aware of it, the writers adhere to the plot outline provided in the *Memoir*. In the Coates' version, Mr. Watson is reprieved, and none of the sisters is banished to Croydon (where in the other versions, Emma plus one of more of her sisters spend some very uncomfortable weeks). He does, however, have Emma marry Mr. Howard. That major event provides the conclusion in every case. As regards incident, the worst that happens is that Emma sprains her ankle in the "Another," and Penelope hurts her back in a fall from a horse in the Coates. There is also a duel in the Coates, although it happens offstage and does not directly involve the principal characters. Otherwise the plot progresses amidst nothing more startling than accidental encounters on walks and in the conservatory, visits exchanged between Stanton and Wickstead Parsonage, dinners and balls at Osborne Castle and evening parties at Croydon. There is a more earthy smell about the Coates: the outdoor life of the English countryside is very much to the fore in references to partridges, setters, thistles, open gates, Shorthorns and turnips. He makes one scene out of that meet of fox-hounds referred to by Lord Osborne. Only in the Oulton, where we are taken first on an expedition to the seaside, and later, quite wildly and improperly, to Italy, are there any unusual changes in locale. The other three venture no farther afield than Croydon and Portman Square.

The most interesting differences between the four versions are to be found, as you might expect, in character. Coates takes his own line in this

as in every other way, but even amongst the other three—which are more similar generally—there are some intriguing differences. Jane has introduced a very large cast, to begin with. Mr. Watson and his four marriageable daughters; three possible suitors in Lord Osborne, Tom Musgrave and Mr. Howard; Lady Osborne in love with Mr. Howard. And then there are Miss Osborne, Miss Carr, brother Robert, his wife and daughter, brother Sam and the girl he is in love with and her parents, not to mention the supers lurking in the wings who may very well be called upon: rich Dr. Harding, Aunt Turner, her second husband and a number of military men. More than twenty. Who is to be led forward into the spotlight? Who is to be quietly throttled offstage? The shorter versions (Oulton & Brown) are not equal to the logistics. In the limited space they have allowed themselves, some of the characters go missing, especially in the Brown, which has some lively passages in its early additional chapters but fizzles sadly at the end and doesn't tell us half what we want to know. "Another" and Coates sustain the continuation longer and cover everyone's fortunes more satisfactorily; Coates even throws in a few more characters for good measure. In the others, one senses the authors' relief in being able to shed one of their responsibilities when Mr. Watson, as "Another" has it, "was no more."

Which characters are favoured? The Edwards are not very lucky: nobody much takes to them, and they fade into the background, except for Mr. Edwards in the Coates, who sets great store by full moons, new moons, black cats and other superstitions. This is often quite fun, especially when family and friends arrange the omens to suit their convenience. It is also very useful to Sam at the end, since just before he is to ask for Mary's hand in marriage, Mr. Edwards is sitting with his leg up on the sofa, having just fallen downstairs, an accident which he has fortunately interpreted as a sign that he is about to receive "an unexpected request that will bring exceptional good fortune."

Miss Watson is well treated in all but the "Another," where she never escapes from Croydon—a rather hard fate. In the Oulton, she even regains her original lover, Mr. Purvis. This is by means of a highly improbable series of coincidences, it is true, but the Oulton is notable for coincidences. The Brown is fractionally more subtle: when Emma and Elizabeth go to Croydon, who should turn up at one of Mrs. Robert Watson's evening parties but Mr. Jasper Purvis, younger brother to Elizabeth's former admirer. He has the good sense to take up where his brother left off, and Elizabeth's marriage to him is celebrated at the end of the novel. Elizabeth undoubtedly does best in the Coates. He invents her a rather special lover, no mere sub-Purvis, but Mr. Jones, a curate and former tutor to Emily (otherwise Emma), a man of saintliness and humility. Their courtship owes much to a button Elizabeth is going to sew on his coat.

"Have you the button, sir?"

"He has lost it," said Elizabeth, looking in her work-basket.

"I have certainly *mislaid* it," said Mr Jones, "though whether in the literal sense of the word, I have actually *lost* it or not, I do not yet know."

"But you cannot at the moment produce it?"

"No," he admitted. "I cannot produce it. Miss Watson was so good as to proffer me the loan of one of hers."

Here he cast a look of . . . tender gratitude at Elizabeth. . . .

"I can offer you a choice between two," said Elizabeth. "Neither is an exact match I fear; one is somewhat too large, and the other somewhat too small."

"Either will do, Miss Watson. I shall be more than satisfied with either. Whichever will be least missed."

"You may take your choice, sir. The larger is a spare one of mine that has not been required, and the smaller has been discarded by my father."

At this information as to their origin, Mr Jones drew near and examined the buttons. The large one was bright blue and a great deal too fine for his sombre coat, on which the small one would not have been noticed. But the large one had belonged to Miss Watson. After a long scrutiny he picked it up with his thick, red, clumsy fingers.

"That is a very elegant button, Miss Watson," he said, in a gentle voice.

"It is a remarkably handsome button, if I may say so. I do not know how long it is since I have seen such a very fine button. . . ."

Penelope next. In the Oulton, we see very little of her, learning only that she "had returned for some time and Emma had learned to dread the sound of her sharp voice". After Mr. Watson's death she goes as teacher in a private seminary. In the Brown, she merely flashes in and out of the narrative, arriving at Stanton with Robert at the time of Mr. Watson's death and leaving after announcing that she is to be married to Dr. Harding. In the "Another," we see a lot more of the "masculine and bold" Pen. She calls Emma "your little ladyship," isn't above slamming the door when she's in a temper and, when her father complains that she is bent on having her own way, replies "so is everyone; but they don't all know how to get it as well as I do." It is a pity that, after her father's death, she disappears to Chichester to marry Dr. Harding, and all we hear of later is her "noisy but good-humoured" household.

In the Coates, Penelope is transformed into a blue-eyed, golden-haired, beauty. By the time we meet her, she has already *refused* Dr. Harding, and it is soon explained that she never set Purvis against Elizabeth; it was all a misunderstanding. She is certainly a Penelope of "great spirits" who "never cares what she says": looking in the mirror at the way Emily has re-arranged her ribbons, she concludes

"No, my dear. It will not do. . . . You wish to make me demure; and I am not demure. I fear I am somewhat pert."

We are rather grateful for that pertness, especially in this version, where Emily is not merely "refined" but rather odiously righteous. It is Penelope who marries Lord Osborne, in a pleasing twist to the plot; the two of them have quite put Emily and Mr. Howard into the shade.

"Snappish" Margaret, the sister who is "a little fretful and perverse", does not improve in any of the versions. And what about that "great flirt" Tom Musgrave? Does Margaret get her man? Not in the Oulton she doesn't. After her father's death, she takes a situation as companion to a

delicate girl, and there she remains until the death of her charge, after which she marries someone designated only "a naval officer." At the end of the Brown, we know nothing more than that Margaret is still not married to Tom.

In the "Another," Tom, under the influence of champagne, proposes to Margaret in the conservatory at Osborne Castle. Several chapters and incidents in the plot turn upon Tom denying the engagement, Robert Watson's delight in the prospect of litigation and a large claim for damages. Tom is eventually brought to heel and marries Margaret, but she hasn't got much of a bargain. He spends all his money on horses and they live in a "bare, unsheltered situation" in a house of "extreme unsightliness," in a "mutual spirit of ill-will."

In the Coates, Tom meets a similar fate, but much earlier. He has only proposed because of his certainty that Emma will marry Lord Osborne, but Margaret manages to keep him to it, even though she has to scream and faint and finagle to do so. Once they are married, Tom is wiser, nicer, and much, much sadder: Margaret leads him a terrible dance. So does his wife in the Oulton, where he falls "prey to a vixen." She, "on his endeavouring to console himself with strong waters, secured the keys of the cellar and retained them with a firm hand." No more being "famously snug" with a barrel of oysters for poor old Tom, let alone marrying "somebody very great."

Except in the Brown, where he and his mother are allowed to lapse into obscurity, Lord Osborne does a great deal better than his friend, better than anyone; so well, in fact, that I suspect the authors had a hard time preventing him from winning Emma in the end. Jane's own Lord Osborne is a bit of a dunce, but once Emma has "made him think", in these three completions, he uses his brains to such good purpose that he becomes quite likeable. In the Oulton, he is consoled—and I do rather applaud the author's determination to keep it all in the family—by marriage to Mrs. Blake. In the "Another," he decides to take off for a tour of the continent, from which he returns, I am happy to say, with a Spanish wife of noble blood. In the Coates, Lord Osborne is never quite so tongue-tied, not even at the beginning. A little awkwardness is the only fault left him; otherwise he is the pink of young, male, aristocratic perfection, and it *is* perverse of Emily to go on favouring Mr. Howard, who doesn't make his presence felt with anything like the same verve.

Mr. Howard as hero is, I fear, a bit limp. This may well be related to the difficulties of keeping him and Emma apart for the duration of the story. The misunderstandings do sometimes make him look more of a fool than Lord Osborne. The Oulton is particularly at fault in this respect. Meeting Tom Musgrave at the gate of Stanton parsonage, he actually believes a cock-and-bull yarn Tom spins him about Emma marrying an old flame, and clatters away on his horse without seeing his beloved at all.

In the "Another," Mr. Howard isn't quite so gullible, although he does hesitate exasperatingly before declaring his love to Emma. But he is very attractive when reading Shakespeare aloud, and even more so when he is discovered by Emma and her friends "hard at work constructing some

new trellis work for the luxuriant creepers which adorned his entrance; his coat was off, and his arms partly bare." Bare arms! Hot stuff! But it is interesting to consider, isn't it—because that brings you up sharply against it—the implications of having the hero involved in manual labour. How many times, if at all, does that happen in Jane's own work? In Jane's own work, you may reasonably think we don't miss it. Here it is welcome. It indicates vitality, muscle, sweat: it is a kind of short-hand for sexual attractiveness. Compare this scene with one inherited from the Hubback novel, where Emma and Elizabeth, comfortably ensconced in the parsonage at Wickstead, help Mrs. Blake to make small silk bags which Mr. Howard and Charles fill with pot-pourri. It is a pretty little vignette but doesn't do much for our hero.

Even Mr. Howard's proposal doesn't really rate beside Lord Osborne's in the "Another." Lord Osborne declares himself at length and with charm, and then, two paragraphs later, we are told Mr. Howard has also proposed, but his proposal comes at second-hand, as it were, in a letter, of which not even the text is provided. It does stack the cards against him, but Emma is faithful. (The reader, perhaps, is not.)

Mr. Howard certainly holds centre stage in the Oulton, which pulls no punches in the grand moment of reconciliation. Emma, suffering the after-effects of a chill, is far from strong, when she catches sight of Mr. Howard at a party.

He merely bowed and passed on.

Emma had never sought to disguise her feelings from herself, but how deeply her heart was engaged she had not realised until that moment, when she felt that it must break.

A minute or two later Mr Howard grew aware of a sudden commotion, and then heard it said that a lady had fainted.

Instinctively, he knew that it was Emma—and almost immediately, he knew not how, had reached her side. Motioning everyone away, he raised her in his arms, and carried her out to the hall, where there was a couch, but just before he laid her down she opened her eyes, and there was no mistaking the look of deep joy which flashed into them, as she saw him bending over her.

"Emma—my dearest Emma!"

One cannot help but be reminded of that instruction in *Love & Friendship* "Run mad as often as you choose, but do not faint." The next day Mr. Howard visits Emma, but the conversation the reader has every right to expect—in which explanations are made, doubts resolved, forgiveness bestowed and undying love re-stated—does not materialize: Mr. Howard declares his passion in the shrubbery, where the author does not allow us to follow. The lack of dialogue throughout this version is, indeed, striking. But if Mr. Howard doesn't say much, after all, the proper dashing, romantic hero is strong and *silent*. And Mr. Howard is undoubtedly supposed to fulfil that role. There is smell of horticulture about his wooing, in which, "casting prudence to the winds," he draws Emma into the greenhouse, and later, during a ball at Osborne Castle, gives her a white rose from his buttonhole, which he begs her to wear for his sake.

Later—in the greenhouse again—he claims it back, places it in his breast, and then, raising her hand, kisses it. In this version, Mr. Howard will persist in popping up in my mind as a Rudolph Valentino look-alike, wearing white tie and tails, not even period costume.

The Oulton does rather well by the children, however—Augusta Watson as well as Charles Blake. In this version, unlike the "Another," in which she is obnoxious, Augusta is a pretty and charming child, "with much more natural refinement than either her father or mother," and she and Charles Blake, who, upon hearing of Emma's engagement to Mr. Howard, "thirsted for his uncle's blood for fully three days after" are attendants at Emma's wedding. The concluding paragraph of the book focuses upon them in fact, and projects rather pleasingly into the future.

As Charles and Augusta spend the greater part of their holidays together at the Howards', and do not find matter for heated argument above seven times in the week, it is confidently believed by several that they will ultimately embark on the more serious argument of life, with all its possibilities for sweetness, or disaster.

The charm of Jane's Charles is nicely maintained in the "Another," when he visits Stanton for the first time, only waiting for Emma to appear, obviously not very interested in the conversation: "standing by his mother, earnestly contemplating the crown of his hat, and drawing figures with his finger on the beaver." In the Coates, although he has a larger role in the plot, Charles is not so endearing. He seems altogether older; one doesn't feel any longer like calling him affectionately, "little" Charles Blake.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert behave predictably, treating Emma and whoever accompanies her to Croydon as unpaid servants. In the Oulton, which takes us on a holiday prescribed by Sam for Augusta's health, we see more of Mrs. Watson, who, the writer explains with pleasantly Jane-like irony, "like most wives, was not averse to suffering the mild anguish of a temporary separation from her husband." At the seaside, she occupies herself playing cards with her friend, the "vulgar, overdressed" Mrs. Jemima Burton, of whom her husband does not approve. This they do in the "common sitting-room" of the hotel, where subsequently Emma is subject to the unwelcome attentions of a number of undesirable young military men, one of whom ogles her alarmingly.

Brother Sam, the surgeon, appears in person in every completion. He is uniformly pleasant, hardworking and affectionate, but, frankly, a bit dull. Sam is always well provided for by the end of the story. In the Oulton, he is assistant to Mr. Curtis, who conveniently has no heirs or other bothersome claims upon his money or his practice, both of which Sam will, it is clear, inherit, as well as winning Mary as his wife. In the Brown, he stands in for the local apothecary and successfully ministers to Lady Osborne's gouty hand. He is still in love with Mary Edwards, but, as is the way with this particular completion, it peters out at the end and we are not told whether he actually marries her. Coates also allows Sam to win Mary Edwards, but gives him a rather more spectacular case than

Lady Osborne's gout in which to prove his skill: he is responsible for saving the life of Captain Styles, who, as a result of a duel, lies "in Millington Spinneys with a ball in his neck in imminent danger of bleeding to death." In the "Another," interestingly enough, Sam does *not* marry Mary, who is to become the bride of Captain Hunter, but he still does quite well professionally, since he takes over the practice of Pen's husband, Dr. Harding.

The one really dynamic element in the plot outline described in the *Memoir*, the one wild card in that very ordinary little pack of events, is Lady Osborne's love for Mr. Howard. Much interest was to centre upon it, we are told. Yet Brown loses Lady Osborne completely, and in the "Another," although her proposal to Mr. Howard is still part of the story, she remains in the background. Is it unwillingness to handle the rather delicate matter (more so for us than for Jane?) of an older woman in love with and in a position of authority over a younger man? The Oulton, the only one which tries to follow through, flies high and falls flat on its face. In Florence, "under the perfect blue of the Italian sky," Lady Osborne makes her last, futile attempt to persuade Mr. Howard to propose. Her failure is pitied: she was "one who had suffered, and would yet again suffer, before she laid her head on the quiet pillow of her grave." The prose has, I'm afraid, heated up with the climate.

In the Coates, Lady Osborne is transmogrified. In Jane's fragment, Lady Osborne is "very handsome" with "all the dignity of rank"; Coates' Lady Osborne is "small" with "a very red face," and "almost entirely without the customary elegance of rank." Moreover, although she has the best horses and carriage in the district, her dresses are ten years out of date. Needless to say (since Coates did not know she was supposed to), she is not in love with Mr. Howard. Altogether she is one of the grosser divergences from the original, but also, it must be said, one of the more memorable characters of all four completions. She is bluff, kind, hearty, dog-, horse- and hunting-mad, with a sensible interest in health. It is impossible not to enjoy her advice to Elizabeth Watson over the salting of meat.

"I always tell Twig to add saltpetre, especially with beef. It brings out the colour of the meat—a rich pink colour. It is not to everybody's taste, I admit, but I find it more palatable that way myself. The world is growing too refined for me. It cooks fresh meat till it has no taste, and it treats salt meat so that it turns a muddy grey. I confess I am old-fashioned. I like my meat red, just as I like my cheese high and my pastry heavy. There is more nourishment in that sort of food. And there was more colour in young folk's cheeks when I was a girl and we made our meals of such things, than there is today when we blow out our stomachs with soups and potatoes and that plant they call cabbage. Green stuff is suitable for cattle, whose intestines have been specially designed for it, but it does not agree with humans."

Near the end of the Coates there is a lively exchange between Penelope and Lady Osborne, when the latter discovers that it is Penelope and not Emily whom her son is going to marry. It is instructive that the snappiest

dialogue takes place between two characters who are, essentially Coates' inventions, not Jane's at all.

That brings me to what is surely of crucial importance in the writing of such endings: the obligation not to be *dull*. For me that takes precedence over faithful imitation. Jane's effects depend upon sharp, crystalline observation of a society intimately known to her, of the uneventful round of life in a country village nearly two hundred years ago. That is very hard to imitate: you cannot dazzle your readers with the pyrotechnics of incident; villains and grotesques and flights of fancy are denied you; the re-creation of her incomparable style is not to be looked for. It is, consequently, all too easy to be *dull*. So I forgive John Coates a great deal. That does not include all his alterations to the fragment, but it does include his ignorance of the outline in the *Memoir*. Coates is the one who takes most liberties, but he also succeeds better at making a continuation that is entertaining in its own right. He even makes sure that the infamous road through the village is mended. Coates had written nine novels and two plays before he wrote this, and perhaps that gave him the courage to be disobedient. By which you will see that naughty boy Coates, drawing moustaches on the Queen, succeeds best for me, which is why he is the one to whom I would award a woolwork picture, "Knit your own stuff."