

Militarism and Masculinity in Jane Austen's *The Brothers*

“You will not think I have made a bad exchange, when we reach Trafalgar House—which, by the bye, I almost wish I had not named Trafalgar—for Waterloo is more the thing now. However, Waterloo is in reserve—and if we have encouragement enough this year for a little Crescent to be ventured on—(as I trust we shall) then we shall be able to call it Waterloo Crescent—and the name joined to the form of the building, which always takes, will give us the command of lodgers—. In a good season we should have more applications than we could attend to.” (Austen, 156)

Three days after reading Robert Southey's paean to the battle that brought to a close the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* (1816), Jane Austen began work on the novel that she referred to as *The Brothers*, and which her family later titled *Sanditon*.¹ The latter is more than appropriate, given that Sanditon is the name of the seaside resort in which the novel's central character, Mr Tom Parker, is so heavily invested. Mr Parker's ambitions for Sanditon include the building of a Waterloo Crescent, a plan that characterises the Regency world as one in which, as Roger Sales argues, 'everyone and everything can be merchandized through advertising' (201). For Clara Tuite, as for Peter Knox-Shaw, Mr Parker is recognizably a post-Waterloo figure in the sense that his entrepreneurial activities contribute to the post-Waterloo growth in domestic tourism and leisured consumerism. In naming the crescent after Waterloo, Tuite suggests, Mr Parker identifies the battle as 'an object of cultural and commercial desire' and cannily anticipates the future value of that which is already past (612). But whilst Mr Parker's Waterloo speculations are a clear indication of his interest in consumer desire, his awareness that

Waterloo is ‘more the thing’ suggests a more long-standing interest in the Napoleonic Wars—from the naval battle of Trafalgar (1805) to the battle of Waterloo (1815)—and with this, in the masculine world of militarism. This reading of the text that might have been called *The Brothers* is indebted to the tradition of feminist criticism that has located Austen’s writing in relation to the radical, proto-feminist thought of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Emma Clery’s recent contributions to this tradition Austen emerges as a writer profoundly opposed to ‘institutionalized forms of gender difference’ (‘Gender’, 173). In this article, then, I want to suggest that one way to recover the text’s interest in masculinity is to attend to its examination of men’s interest in war.

Southey’s *The Poet’s Pilgrimage to Waterloo* was the second Waterloo poem to have passed through Austen’s hands. The first was Walter Scott’s *The Field of Waterloo* (1815), a poem based on his visit to the place where Napoleon had been defeated. It is now well-known that the battle of Waterloo prompted the growth of battlefield tourism; Scott’s poem, which opens somewhere between Brussels and Waterloo, invites the reader to approach with him the site of the battle. The poem seems not to romanticize the experience: the travellers are confronted with the destruction wrought by warfare when they find the field scarred by a ‘line [made] so black’ by the passing of soldiers and artillery and see how ‘spots of excavation tell | The ravage of the bursting shell’ (VI. 106, 114–5). The sombre tone lingers as the poem segues from surveying the aftermath of the battle as it greets the expectant traveller to narrating the battle as ‘long hours of doubt and dread’ for the soldiers (VIII. 145). But for all this, the poem is celebratory. The Duke of Wellington, commander of the allied forces, leads ‘like a beam of light’ (X. 191), and with his guidance they vanquish the ‘dark torrent’ of Napoleon’s forces (XI. 208). In Scott’s hands Waterloo is recorded as a modern battle, one in which the

allies' cannon unleashed 'flash' and 'fire', but also as a triumph for the annals of heroism (XI. 201, 203). The poem laments the loss of so many lives in the heat of battle, whether 'high-born chiefs' or those of 'lowlier name', but it offers consolation with the thought that 'sacred [is] the heroes' sleep' (XXII. 464, 465, 471). Following his characteristic bent for the historical, Scott concludes by listing past Anglo-French conflicts, from the medieval to the almost modern, in order to place Waterloo as an 'immortal' victory:

Yes—Agincourt may be forgot,
And Cressy be an unknown spot,
And Blenheim's name be new;
But still in story and in song,
For many an age remember'd long,
Shall live the towers of Hougomont
And fields of Waterloo! (XXIII. 480–487)

This is, of course, a carefully edited selection of battles, for Scott recalls only the English victories—Agincourt (1415), Cressy (1346), Blenheim (1704)—in order to add Waterloo to their number.

Austen may not have actually read Scott's celebration of Waterloo and its heroes. Austen and Scott shared the same publisher, John Murray, and she wrote to thank him for his 'polite attention in supplying [her brother Henry] with a Copy of Waterloo' and then again in order to return the poem on Henry's behalf (3 November 1815, 23 November 1815). If it is possible to read ambivalence about Scott's *The Field of Waterloo* in these polite exchanges, then it is also permissible to note that, in borrowing rather than purchasing the poem, neither Austen nor her brother made a contribution to the charitable fund for the Waterloo widows

and their families, for whom it was sold. Austen's functional acknowledgements of Scott's text illuminate the significance of the fact that she discusses reading Southey's *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* in a conversational letter to her friend, Althea Biggs. Like Scott, Southey had travelled to see the place where the battle of Waterloo had been fought and his experiences as a tourist are, similarly, integral to his poem. Organized into two sections, 'The Journey' and 'The Vision', the first of which narrates the poet's journey through France and Belgium, *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo*, like *The Field of Waterloo*, is both a lament for the brutality of war and a hymn to victory. True, Scott balances the ominous 'black line' with the luminosity of the allies' actions with greater ease, for Southey has to work harder to prevent the 'gloomy, thick, impenetrable shade' that leads to the 'ground wherein the slaughtered lie' from overshadowing the glory of the victory (I. iii. III. 10, XII. 69). The prefatory 'Argument' attempts to affix the poem to its purpose:

The contest in which this country was engaged against that Tyrant, was a struggle between good and evil principles, and never was there a victory so important to the best hopes of human nature as that which was won by British valour at Waterloo ... The peace which [England] has won by the battle of Waterloo, leaves her at leisure to pursue the great objects and duties of bettering her own condition, and diffusing the blessings of civilization and Christianity. (unnumbered pages)

Here Southey asserts that Waterloo was a victory secured by martial valour for the benefit of mankind, but such is the narrative of the damage created by and to the supposedly glorious theatre of war that it takes the second part of the poem, the allegorical vision, to defend this claim. In 'The Vision' the poet ascends a tower in order to get a better perspective on the battle. There he meets 'Wisdom' who proffers sophisticated French materialism: 'Live whilst

thou livest, for this life is all!’(II. i. XVII. 102) The poet overcomes this seductive reasoning and is then able to sing the victory as the triumph of valour: ‘O Men of England! Nobly have ye paid | The debt which to your ancestors ye owed.’(II. iv. XXV. 147–8)

While it might be coincidence that Austen began to write *Sanditon* so soon after she had been reading Southey’s *Pilgrimage*, it seems not to be accidental that the novel begins with the overturning of Mr and Mrs Parker’s carriage, an accident that occurs when they are trying to locate a doctor who might be persuaded to move to Sanditon and thereby enhance its allure to health tourists. At first glance, the accident reveals only that the eager promoter of Sanditon knows little about the geography of the south coast, for though Mr Parker confidently believes that they have been overturned at “‘the very place’” they wanted, the rustic cottage in the near-distance turns out not to be the home of the gentleman surgeon who had placed an advertisement in the newspaper (138). However, it is significant that the accident happens near a village which the Parkers’ rescuer, the sensible Mr Heywood, maps for the confused travellers by noting that the village they seek is “‘on the other side of Battle’” (140). Battle is a small town that surrounds the abbey built to commemorate one of the most important Anglo-French battles in English history: the battle of Hastings (1066). Unlike the battles that Scott mentions in *The Field of Waterloo*—Agincourt, Cressy and Blenheim—the battle of Hastings was a major defeat for the English. With this in mind, Austen’s recent reading of Southey’s *Pilgrimage* can be felt in the way that her passing reference to Battle as a point between two locations—a pivotal point in that sense—brings a past military failure to bear upon Mr Parker’s determination to be successful. Phillip Shaw has done much to draw attention to the aesthetic challenges posed by war, and Waterloo in particular; that battle, he writes, ‘exceeded, even as it generated, the ascription of narrative closure’, so much so that even Scott and Southey had to wrestle to produce a ‘totalizing vision’ of that which could not but be ‘an impossible object of desire’ (x, 113, 6). As I have

suggested, both Scott's poem and Southey's *Pilgrimage* are accounts of an enthusiast's journey to 'see' a glorious battle that had already happened and both poems reveal the gloomier aspects of warfare only to cover over despoliation with the brilliance of the victory. While the Parkers' journey gently parodies the fashion for travelling to see the impossible, it is significant that Austen's pilgrims are forced by Mr Heywood's hospitable solicitations to reconcile themselves to having met with the most quotidian of disappointments near a place connected with the grandest of failures, for with this Austen seems to be undermining the kind of enthusiasm for victory that Southey's *Pilgrimage* works so hard to sustain.

Having suggested that Austen's encounter with Southey's *Pilgrimage* ripples through the opening chapter of *Sanditon*, and that the Parkers' carriage accident can be read as a move to counter that poem's celebration of victory, I want to consider how the novel continues to engage sceptically with military triumphalism by refusing to reinforce male, or rather masculinist, enthusiasm for war as a manly activity. After all, Austen's reflection on Southey's poem makes no mention of the laureate's solemnizing of soldiers' valour:

We have been reading the "Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo", & generally with much approbation. Nothing will please all the world, you know; but parts of it suit me better than much that he has written before. The opening—the Proem I beleive he calls it—is very beautiful. Poor Man! One cannot but grieve for the loss of the Son so fondly described. Has he at all recovered it? What do M^r and M^{rs} Hill know of his present state? (24 January 1817)

When Austen writes that the poem met with general approbation, she must be referring to the company at Chawton: the poem had not met with universal critical approbation, and Austen's comment that 'nothing will please all the world' seems to acknowledge this. That said, it is significant that Austen seems to have been taken only with 'parts', and specifically with the introductory 'proem' in which Southey describes returning from his travels to his much-missed family, including his only son, Herbert, who died less than a month after the poem was completed. The opening lines of the proem address the landscape of Southey's Lake District with the words 'Once more I see thee' (I. 1), words that echo William Wordsworth's 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey', a poem in which the poet comes to understand the power of his mind in part by contrasting himself with his 'dear, dear' but less 'matured' sister. The return from Belgium leads Southey to reflect on his first arrival in the Lakes, and this also becomes a reflection on masculinity: 'Hither I came in manhood's active prime, | And here my head hath felt the touch of time' (III.17–18). The poet's interest in his masculine identity is extended as the familiar landscape prompts him to reflect on the importance of his familial role as a father. The poet had travelled to Waterloo with his eldest daughter, Edith May, and the returning parent greets his other daughters warmly on his return, but more so his son: 'there stood one whose heart could entertain | And comprehend the fullness of the joy; | The father, teacher, playmate, was again | Come to his only and his studious boy' (XV. 85–88).

In singling out Southey's proem for praise, Austen might be said to be responding enthusiastically to the poet's investment in the kind of patrilineal and patriarchal masculinity shared by brothers, fathers and sons, that is, masculinity claimed by men by virtue of their not being women. But the proem is unstable, and Austen seems to be aware of this. By placing his account of the end of his journey at the beginning of the poem, Southey ensures that the gloom of war brought to the poem by the actual journey does not return in its closing stages

to compromise the work done by the allegorical vision to secure the poem's celebration of the victory. However, this sleight of hand only highlights the precariousness of the poem's balance between the darkness of battle and the brilliance of victory. A proem that describes one man's return from a tourist trip to see a battlefield makes for an awkward introduction to a poem that acknowledges, but must also deny, the significance of the loss of lives and limbs at Waterloo in order to maintain the Horatian rhetoric of *dulce et decorum*. Austen seems to be responding to this, for if the poet's reflections on his manhood are intended to prefigure the poem's hymn to martial valour, Austen's reflection on Southey's personal experience of loss cuts through this line of thought, for her comment on the death of Southey's son undermines Southey's Waterloo poem with what Mary Favret terms the everyday-ness of war, that is, the fact that war begets loss. Rather than commend the poem's celebration of the Waterloo victory as a national achievement secured by the nation's heroes, then, Austen's comment on the proem can be read to suggest that her partiality is also a refusal to participate in the kind of celebration of masculinity that Southey gestures to in the 'Argument' and, ultimately, manages to find in 'The Vision'.

Of course, in comparison to Austen's *Persuasion*, the novel written in the immediate aftermath of the end of the war, *Sanditon* is far less overtly preoccupied with military men, but just as *Persuasion* avoids contributing to the celebration of Waterloo, in part by sidestepping the climactic engagement and returning to the false peace of 1814–5, so *Sanditon* takes the post-Waterloo moment as an opportunity to interrogate the cultural function of the relationship between militarism and masculinity. *Sanditon* does not include military men as characters, as *Persuasion* does; rather, the text explores men's, notably Mr Parker's, longings for the kind of masculinity they associate with military activity. Whilst Mr Parker's plan for a Waterloo Crescent is symptomatic of the text's interest in economic speculation, his almost regret at having named Trafalgar House before Waterloo became the

‘thing’ also reveals a longer-standing interest in the war, or more specifically in the set-piece successes garnered by the heroic Nelson and Wellington. This is further suggested by his description of Trafalgar House, for with this he reveals that the house is something like a ship and he is something of a frustrated naval captain. The Parkers’ old family house is situated in a sheltered and shaded nook, but Trafalgar House has been built high up on a coastal cliff, that is, close to the sea. The position of the house means that it faces the unrestrained force of the wind, or as Mr Parker sees it “‘the grandeur of the storm’”, as well as the beating sun. The ship-like house even has a sail in the form of a “‘canvas awning’” designed to protect the interior of the building from the heat (157). To see Trafalgar House’s ship-like qualities is to be able to see more sense in Mr Parker’s ‘long[ing]’, after convalescing with the Heywoods, ‘to be on the sands, the cliffs, at his own house, and every where out of his house at once. His spirits rose with the very sight of the sea and he could almost feel his ankle getting stronger already’ (160). Although his desire to be in and out of his house ‘at once’ seems paradoxical, a house that is like a ship is always both a house and not a house at once.

Even the daily mechanics of family life in Trafalgar House have something of the hardships of life at sea. Whereas the old house is well positioned for the production of fruit and vegetables, the new house has no sheltered land for growing food and so must take on fresh produce, principally from the old house’s kitchen garden, on a daily basis. It falls to Mrs Parker to remember the “‘comfortable’” old house and to inadvertently admit that the gardener frequently brings them the wrong items from the old garden (156, 157), but as quietly unsure as Mrs Parker obviously is about the benefits of Trafalgar House, Mr Parker embraces the drawbacks in the manner of one whom imagines naval life as heroic. Mr Parker puts himself in the role of the successful commander when he surmises that the Sanditonians who are yet to leave the village for the hill “‘may be taken totally unawares, by one of those dreadful currents which should do more mischief in a valley, when they *do* arise, than an

open country ever experiences in the heaviest gale” (157–8). Mr Parker inadvertently reveals that his argument is nonsense when he refers to a row of trees that he has planted near the house to form a much-needed defensive windbreak, but he refers to these trees as his “plantations” (158), a term which suggests that he imagines himself as one who has invaded and conquered in the manner of a military force expanding an imperial or colonial frontier, a position the arrival of Miss Lambe looks set to challenge. In his ship-like house, however, Mr Parker can inhabit the role of the naval captain, but the wider significance of his investment in a militarism as a particular kind of masculinity is made apparent by his desire that his sons should be brought up to be manly. The new house is unsuitable for the younger members of the family and Mrs Parker worries particularly about the effect of the sun on their children. In response, Mr Parker urges her to purchase a parasol for their daughter and she agrees, as this will allow Mary to think of herself as “quite a little woman” (157). In contrast, Mr Parker hopes that his boys will be toughened up by running about in the sun: “as for the boys, I must say I would rather *them* run about in the sunshine than not. I am sure we agree, my dear, in wishing our boys to be as hardy as possible” (157). It is clear that Mr Parker identifies Trafalgar House as a space in which his boys might participate in the kind of militaristic activities which he thinks become them as young men, for here Austen revisits *Persuasion* and Sir Walter Eliot’s opinion that naval men are aged by exposure to the elements. With this, Sir Walter attacks those he believes to be beneath him in rank and status, but knows to be rising in wealth and importance. To both Sir Walter and Mr Parker, tanned and toughened skin is a hallmark of a naval man, but whereas Sir Walter disparages this as middle-class, Mr Parker values it as masculine.

Austen’s encounter with *The Poet’s Pilgrimage* can be detected in the way that *Sanditon* weaves together entrepreneurialism, militarism and masculinity, only to question all three. Of

course, there are good reasons to follow Brian Southam's argument that Austen was an enthusiast for the nation's military men, one being the warmth of her response to what she notes down in her correspondence as 'an Essay on the Military Police & Institutions of the British Empire, by Capt. Pasley of the Engineers': 'I am as much in love with the Author as ever I was with Clarkson or Buchanan, [...] The first soldier I ever sighed for; but he does write with such extraordinary force & spirit' (24 January 1813). Tim Fulford suggests that 'in admiring his masculinity [...] Austen suggested that imperial war was the arena in which the gentleman—via service in the regular army rather than the militia—could discover the manly authority that the nobility had surrendered, the authority necessary to govern effectively' (177). And yet it is possible to over-estimate the affection that seems to take Austen by surprise as a 'first'. The book she mistakenly notes down as an essay on 'police', rather than 'policy', was reading matter for the book society to which she belonged, and her affection for the author has to be qualified by her comparison of her reading group and the Steventon and Manydown Book Society: 'what are their Biglands & their Barrows, their Macartneys & Mackenzies to Capt. Pasley's Essay on the Military Police of the British Empire' (24 January 1813). It isn't entirely clear which group Austen really thinks has the drier selection—quite possibly there are no winners in this contest—but the dry humour does suggest that Austen's earlier profession of 'love' parodies women's supposed susceptibility to military men. Austen's capacity to be sceptical about the desirability of military men can be traced in her published novels: Lydia Bennet falls victim to a dashing young man in uniform, but Anne Eliot knows she was right to reject the equally dashing and equally untried and untested captain Wentworth, for with this she resists being manoeuvred into a vulnerable position, as determined by the gender binary.

The text that Austen conceived of as *The Brothers* explores that gender binary in its representation of men who idealize militarism as a facet of masculinity. The overturning of

the Parkers' carriage and Mr Parker's ankle injury make for a comparatively mild rebuke to the man whose notions of masculinity are tempered by a good deal of geniality, not to mention his sister's indefatigability. The dangers of this kind of investment in masculinity are only made manifest when Austen introduces Sir Edward, nephew by marriage to the 'great lady of Sanditon', Lady Denham (150). Sir Edward makes such a favourable first impression on the Parkers' house guest, Mr Heywood's daughter Charlotte, that she is momentarily impressed by his florid oration on the sea:

He began, in a tone of great taste and feeling, to talk of the sea and the sea shore—and ran with energy through all the usual phrases employed in praise of their sublimity, and descriptive of the *undescribable* emotions they excite in the mind of sensibility.—The terrific grandeur of the ocean in a storm, its glassy surface in a calm, its gulls and its samphire, and the deep fathoms of its abysses, its quick vicissitude, its direful deceptions, its mariners tempted in the sunshine and overwhelmed by the sudden tempest. (174)

Like Mr Parker, Sir Edward is drawn to the sea as a 'masculine' space—he describes the sea as masculine by employing the language of the sublime, and he imagines mariners locked in manly combat with its elemental force—but for Sir Edward this kind of masculinity does more than ratify the gender binary: it legitimizes sexual violence. Sir Edward follows his oration by trying to recall lines on the sea by Scott, lines he believes to be so affecting that the ““man who can read them unmoved must have the nerves of an assassin!”” Rather than condemn this dangerous man, Sir Edward asserts that he should not wish to meet such a one ““un-armed”” (174). Sir Edward's projection of himself in armed combat lead him to imagine a corresponding femininity, which he finds in Scott's *Marmion*, a poem ostensibly concerned

with the battle between the English and the Scottish at Flodden Field (1513), but which, as J. R. Watson observes, responds to the Napoleonic Wars with its account of the values inherent to the code of chivalry. Sir Edward seems to have been less taken with the examination of values, for he recalls only, ““Oh! Woman in our hours of ease””. ““Delicious, delicious!””, he concludes (175).

As the text makes plain, Sir Edward is plotting to assault his aunt’s distant relative and close companion, Miss Clara Brereton. As a vigorous reader of sentimental novels, Sir Edward has come to see the passionate villain of any story as its hero. His ‘great object in life was to be seductive. ... He felt that he was formed to be a dangerous man—quite in the line of the Lovelaces’” (183–4). To Clara’s credit, she is aware that Sir Edward wants to ‘undermine her principles’, but though the narrator confirms that ‘Clara saw through him, and had not the least intention of being seduced’, the flat statement that he intended to ‘carry her off’ makes plain that Sir Edward feels that he has the right to force himself upon her (184). Clara Tuite has argued that *Sanditon* foregrounds the importance of female agency in combating patriarchal privilege; certainly, the novel seems to want Charlotte Heywood to intercede. While Sir Edward warns Charlotte that neither she ““nor can any woman be a fair judge of what a man may be propelled to say, write or do, by the sovereign impulses of illimitable ardour”” (176), in the final chapter of the unfinished novel Charlotte notices Sir Edward and Clara, the latter precariously ‘white and womanish’, in the grounds of Sanditon House (207). Though Charlotte thinks she must have spotted a lovers’ tryst, her first impression of Clara had been of her vulnerability: ‘Perhaps it might be partly owing to her having just issued from a circulating library—but she could not separate the idea of a complete heroine from Clara Brereton. [...] She seemed placed with [Lady Denham] on purpose to be ill-used’ (169). As cautious as one must be with an unfinished novel, the final

chapter gives Charlotte the opportunity to see the danger that Clara is in and so leaves open the possibility that she will foil Sir Edward's planned sexual assault.

That said, the final chapter does not place too much of a burden on Charlotte's shoulders, for whilst the unfinished manuscript suggests that Charlotte will challenge Sir Edward's elevation of masculinity in its most dangerous forms, the extant novel is already doing this. My discussion of *Sanditon* began with Mr Parker's plan for Waterloo Crescent as an economic speculation in the post-Waterloo marketplace for domestic tourism. According to Tony Tanner, the treatment of Sanditon's coastline as 'an exploitable resource, a commodity' is symptomatic of what Austen sees as a 'sick society' (258, 285), but to Mr Parker, Sanditon's sea is integral to two intersecting speculations: the sea makes the 'sick' better and 'men' more masculine. In this article I have suggested that the text questions both and one way it does this is by revealing their similarities. Like Mr Parker, Sir Edward's desires are fundamentally economic. Though a fellow speculator—he has invested in turning a strip of waste ground into “a tasteful little cottage ornée” for paying lodgers—Sir Edward is 'a poor man for his rank in society' and he is more preoccupied with ensuring that he, rather than Clara, inherits Lady Denham's fortune (153). Given this, his plot to seduce Clara is fundamentally a plan to disarm the woman he correctly identifies as his equal because 'rival' in matters financial and to restore her to the more suitably feminine role of sexual victim (184). With this, the text indicates that the masculine roles that are celebrated by poems like *The Poet's Pilgrimage* that sung the praises of Wellington's army ultimately contributed to sustaining ideas of masculinity that legitimize men's desires for victory over women.

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ⁱ Austen mentions reading *A Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* in a letter written on 24 January 1817. According to Deirdre Le Faye's chronology in Janet Todd's *Jane Austen in Context*, Austen began writing *Sanditon* on 27 January 1817.