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Sense, Sensibility, and Soap: An Unexpected Case Study in Digital Resources for Book History

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SENSE, SENSIBILITY, AND SOAP



An Unexpected Case Study in Digital Resources for Book History

Janine Barchas

Unrecorded in even David Gilson's *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* is the little-known fact that soap manufacturer Lever Brothers published editions of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* during the 1890s as part of a unique marketing campaign for Sunlight soap.¹ The first English company to combine massive product giveaways with large-scale advertising, Lever Brothers offered a range of prizes in "Sunlight Soap Monthly Competitions" to "young folks" (contestants could not be older than seventeen) who sent in the largest number of soap wrappers. The Sunlight advertising blitz, targeted to working- and lower-middle-class consumers, proved such a boon to sales that Lever Brothers ran the competition for a full seven years, annually escalating the giveaways. Prizes included cash, bicycles, silver key-chains, gold watches, and—for the largest number of winners—cloth-bound books. For this purpose, Lever Brothers published and distributed its own selection of fiction titles by "Popular Authors" and "Standard Authors," including cloth-bound editions of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. By 1897, the year the competition closed, Lever Brothers had awarded well over a million volumes.

Lever's "Sunlight Library" editions were published at a time when advertisements for soap, by corporate giants such as Lever Brothers and Pears Ltd., provided "an immense stimulus to popular literature," underwriting the national thirst for fiction to the tune of hundreds of thousands of pounds per year.² In 1901 the *Review of Reviews* reported that Pears alone had recently spent £126,000 on advertising in a single year, surmising that much "of this a goodly sum must have found its way into the pockets of publishers."³ Business historians calculate that Lever spent the vast sum of £2 million on advertising between 1885 and 1905, "far more than any of his competitors."⁴ Lever and Pears also owned their own publishing outlets, generating annuals, miscellanies, and bits of commissioned fiction. Ad copy employed literary allusions, as in a common newspaper advert in 1886 that

praised the “BEAUTIFUL COMPLEXION” achieved with Pears’ Soap with snippets from Shakespeare and Pope: “Thou hast the sweetest face I ever looked on” and “If to her share some female errors fall, Look on her face and you’ll forget them all.” The soap industry’s influence on literary taste and print culture innovations may be more significant than literary scholars have yet acknowledged.

I discovered the above in a search spurred by a worn, stray copy of the Lever edition of *Sense and Sensibility* (Figure 1). The book is a revealing piece of social history and, considering its original production values, a remarkable survivor. While giveaways may not equate, bibliographically speaking, with ephemera, the Lever edition—printed on cheap paper and bound in decorated cloth—was not printed to last. The original inking was uneven and sloppy, with haphazard words retaining an accidental bold look while other sections of text appear gaunt and pale. The margins are mismatched, with some pages barely spared loss of text by the binder’s cuts. Modestly attractive on the outside, the book is bound in boards covered in no-nonsense ungrained red cloth. The binding is split-fountain stamped with a floral design, boasting “Lever Bros. Ltd” in gilt at the bottom of the spine (Figure 2). The title *Sense and Sensibility* is stamped neatly on the decorated front cover, while Jane Austen’s name appears only on the book’s title page. But for the binding’s floral cover, there are no extras or internal illustrations, although there is a modest Arts and Crafts aesthetic to the small initial letters and typical head- and tailpieces that mark each chapter. While the central text remains serviceable, if brittle, for reading, the original mix of papers must have been of very low quality, causing the edges of the well-worn book to stripe as different gatherings browned at different rates over time. The novel’s text, which might have been set from any of the Bentley-edition derivatives circulating at the time, is not accompanied by any paratext—so neither an introduction nor a Lever puff piece glosses the novel.⁵ At 379 pages, the story appears to be intact, with no cuts to content. Of course I cannot be sure that the copy I examined is complete, especially since its suspiciously brighter endpapers are of higher quality than its central pages, allowing the remote possibility of a repair in even a cheap book.⁶

In staking a claim for this copy’s significance as a historical object, I want to stress, ironically, its low production values. Only when compared to the lurid paper covers of late nineteenth-century Railway Editions, now known as “yellowbacks,” which sold for one or two shillings at train stations, does the Lever edition’s cloth binding appear to take a step toward gentility, with its stamped multicolored design, including a hint of gilt on the spine (Figure 3). Nonetheless, the binding’s simple and sappy florals still mark it as an

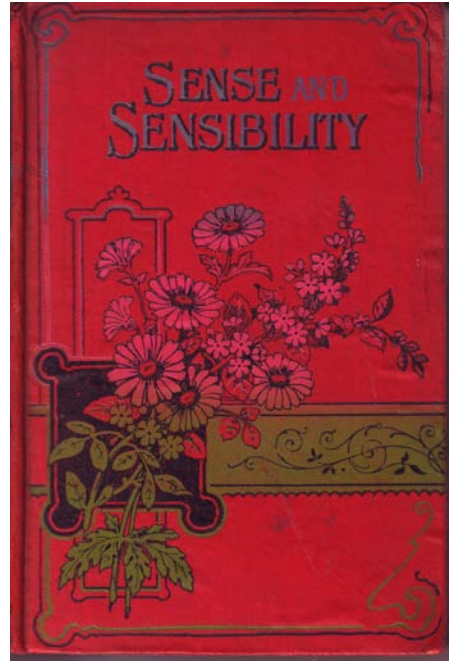


Figure 1 Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* in red cloth (Port Sunlight: Lever Brothers, n.d.).

Figure 2 Spine of Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (Port Sunlight: Lever Brothers, n.d.).

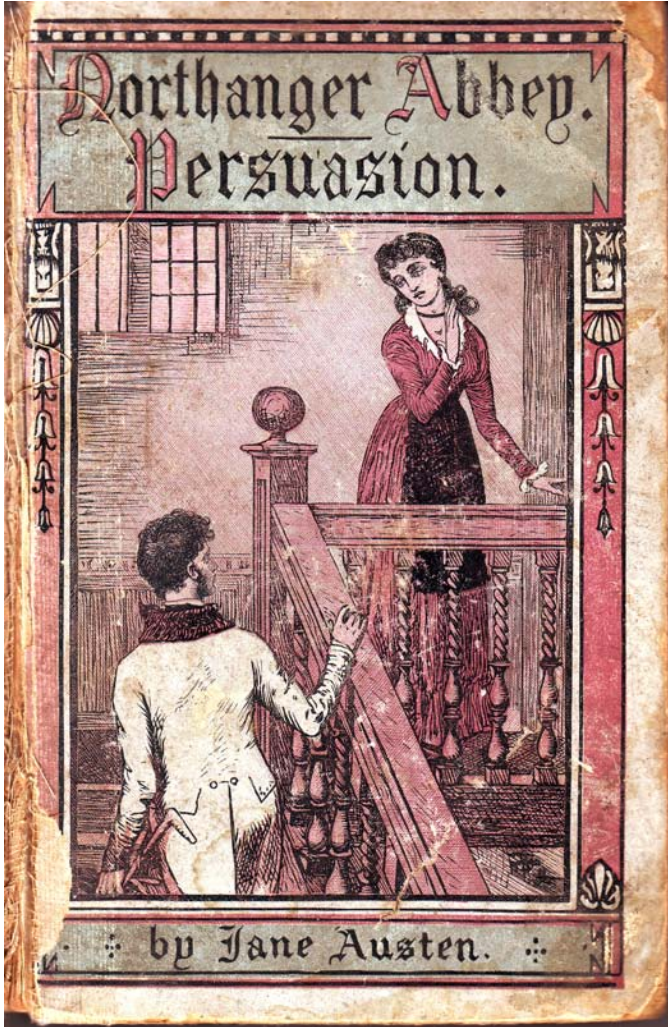


Figure 3 Yellowback edition of Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion* (London: Ward, Lock, and Bowden, n.d.).

inexpensive working-class book meant to be enjoyed as a commodity rather than fetishized as an important tome. Yellowbacks, because of their extremely low production values, were not deemed of interest to bibliophiles until John Carter and Michael Sadleir urged their historical consequence in 1934.⁷ Perhaps giveaways such as this Lever edition are the next to be raised to academic visibility. For calibration, imagine the Lever copy of Austen's novel beside a loftier and now-much-collected contemporary in another

type of publishers' cloth binding: the famous 1894 Peacock Edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, with its gilded front cover design, gilded page-edges, and lavish line drawings and full-page illustrations by Hugh Thomson (Figure 4). The yellowback, Lever, and Peacock editions all give tangible proof of the broad market spectrum for Austen's works at the end of that century, and the splendid ordinariness of the surviving Lever copy offers a unique window into her reception at that moment in history.

Although I have not discovered any early soap ads that actually quote her novels, the Lever edition was not the first (or last) interjection of Austen into the soap business. A novel of manners such as *Sense and Sensibility* seems to have been deemed particularly suitable by both Lever and Pears as a vehicle for promoting soap to the working and middle classes. Viewed in conjunction with advertisements for its Sunlight and Swan Soaps, Lever's publication of *Sense and Sensibility* also partakes of a pervasive nostalgia that mixes with contemporary commercial culture. Jane Austen, her literary stock increasingly on the rise after 1850, just as her copyrights were conveniently expiring, was made an unwitting pawn in the profit-making schemes of Pears and Lever.⁸ Reading Austen within early commodity culture yields surprising juxtapositions and insights into how readers of cheap editions may have approached her work under the influence of the book's peculiar commercial packaging. The fact that such editions seldom make it into scholarly libraries, where collections tend to focus on "firsts" (or on association copies), should not prevent us from studying them as historical objects.

This essay is also a cautionary case study about how modern e-resources can supplement traditional bibliographical tools in researching word and image. The Lever Brothers edition of *Sense and Sensibility* bears no date. In the absence of any bibliographical record, and with no introduction or paratext to help situate or explain the copy's existence, I only came to understand this book's identity as a contest giveaway and late-Victorian marketing tool after scratching away at the history of Lever Brothers, a company about which I knew absolutely nothing at the start. In order to place the book in material context, I compared its visual packaging to other nineteenth-century publishers' bindings using a number of open commercial databases. I also traced Lever advertisements across the 1890s with Gale's scholarly database of nineteenth-century periodicals and newspapers. I will narrate my findings roughly in the order in which the facts revealed themselves to me, because understanding the process of historical research about a visual object makes plain just how such information might be derived for similar books or items. The image-rich databases of open nonlibrary websites can assist in such recovery, when standard bibliographical resources do

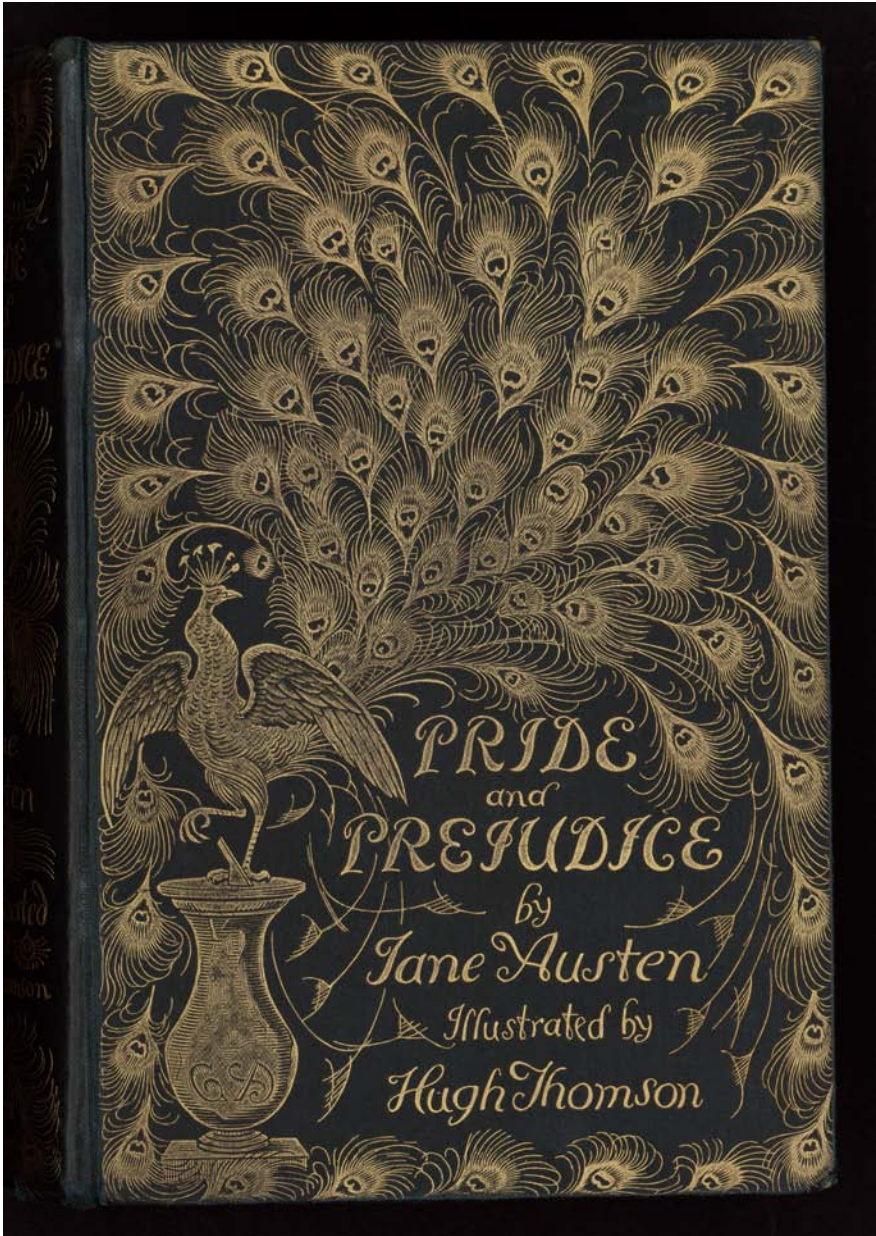


Figure 4 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: G. Allen, 1894). Copy formerly owned by Evelyn Waugh. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

not always account for books produced outside of traditional norms. Cheap cloth bindings, especially series bindings, are not usually the concern of the descriptive bibliographer, whose focus is on the publication process and authority of the evolving printed text.⁹ Commercial sites, including Ebay and AbeBooks, can therefore supplement the latest scholarly resources in surprising and meaningful ways.

At first, a precise dating of and explanation for the Lever Brothers copy of *Sense and Sensibility* seemed, without Gilson's usual aid, virtually impossible. To make matters worse, WorldCat (OCLC) lists no known extant library copies, in which ownership inscriptions can occasionally help date an unknown edition. The imprint on the bottom of the title page simply reads: "Port Sunlight: Lever Brothers, Limited." As the benevolent despot of his company town, William Hesketh Lever built homes for his workers and even specified the size and use of gardens needed for healthy living. He encouraged organizations at Port Sunlight that promoted art, literature, science, and music,¹⁰ and he "insisted that all his junior staff devoted a portion of their time to education: they were given evening classes in languages, English literature, accountancy, basic science and engineering, all paid for by the company."¹¹ I started, therefore, to imagine Lever stocking the Port Sunlight library with edifying and entertaining books, including *Sense and Sensibility*. While Lever's manifold social schemes allowed the possibility of in-house publishing merely for the education of his Sunlighters, there were—as Gilson's bibliography and contemporary newspaper ads attest—plenty of cheap editions of *Sense and Sensibility* in circulation by the 1890s. In other words, if Lever only needed a dozen or so copies for a community library, publishing his own would not have been cost effective. A mandate that all Sunlight employees be equipped with their personal issue of Jane Austen seemed, even in view of Lever's panoptic paternalism, unlikely. I therefore searched for another explanation.

The Oxford *Dictionary of National Biography* entry for William Hesketh Lever gave me a starting point at 1889, the year production commenced at Port Sunlight. I next compared the copy's cover art to other English books from roughly this era, using Ebay as a surprisingly effective tool. Searching for books by dates, I located and scanned hundreds of images of bindings from the period in a matter of minutes. AbeBooks, a commercial bookseller site, provided further images within specific date ranges. The style of the decorated cloth binding quickly and definitively dated the Lever edition to the 1890s, positioning it alongside several other series employing the Victorian idiom of symbolic flowers and issued with similar bindings.

Specifically, the decorative art of the Lever binding resembled inexpensive contemporary cloth editions in publishers' series from that decade, including a copy of *Emma* published around 1892 in "The Lily Series" by Ward, Lock, and Co. of London (Figure 5). For under \$20, I purchased a copy of the Lily *Emma* with advertisement pages at the back. These advertisements revealed that Ward, Lock promoted the hundred-plus titles in their Lily Series as "GIFT BOOKS AT EIGHTEENPENCE EACH," although they offered them in three formats and price points: "Very attractively bound in cloth, with design in gold and silver, price 1s. 6d.; also in cloth gilt, bevelled boards, gilt edges, 2s.; or ornamental wrapper, 1s."¹² If bought without gilt edges (my *Emma* had none), their attractive cloth-bound gift books, in a limited range of colors, were about as expensive as popular low-market yellowbacks. Since the Lever *Sense and Sensibility* resembles the "Lily Series" at "1s. 6d." in externals (inside, Ward, Lock's *Emma* proved of higher quality), the overall impression of the Lever edition proved even more modest than my anachronistic eye, swayed by the book's age and Victorian aesthetics, had initially gauged. Interestingly, the Lily Series was deemed particularly suitable for school prizes ("Forming admirable Volumes for School Prizes and Presents to Young Ladies"), suggesting that pretty-but-inexpensive gift books comprised a familiar genre in the early 1890s. The same title could be had in different colors (*Emma* came in green and red cloth, and possibly other colors), so as to better tailor its look for the intended recipient.

Suggestive of scholarly dismissal of this whole category of cheap books is the fact that Ward and Lock's *Emma* in "The Lily Series" also fails to secure mention in Gilson's *Bibliography* (WorldCat does list two *Emmas* in a different series by that same publisher).¹³ Using various e-catalogs as well as Chester W. Topp's nine-volume bibliography, *Victorian Yellowbacks and Paperbacks 1849-1905*, which devotes an entire volume to cheap Ward and Lock publications, it was easy to confirm that this publisher specialized in niche marketing to the working classes through inexpensively packaged books, including a "Pansy Series" (aimed at young readers and sporting covers decorated with pansies) as well as "The Laddie Series" (targeted especially to boys)¹⁴ (Figure 6). The practice of marketing serviceable series of cloth-bound books named for sunshine and flowers to the literate working classes appears to have been ubiquitous in the 1890s, with the Religious Tract Society (RTS) publishing a Sunshine Series and a Buttercup & Daisy Series, as well as its Golden Sunbeam & May Blossom Books. In fact, the RTS announced its mission as offering "Cheap Books for Children" for use as "Gifts and Rewards" in print advertisements that showed children washing their hands and faces. In other words, books were deemed suitable

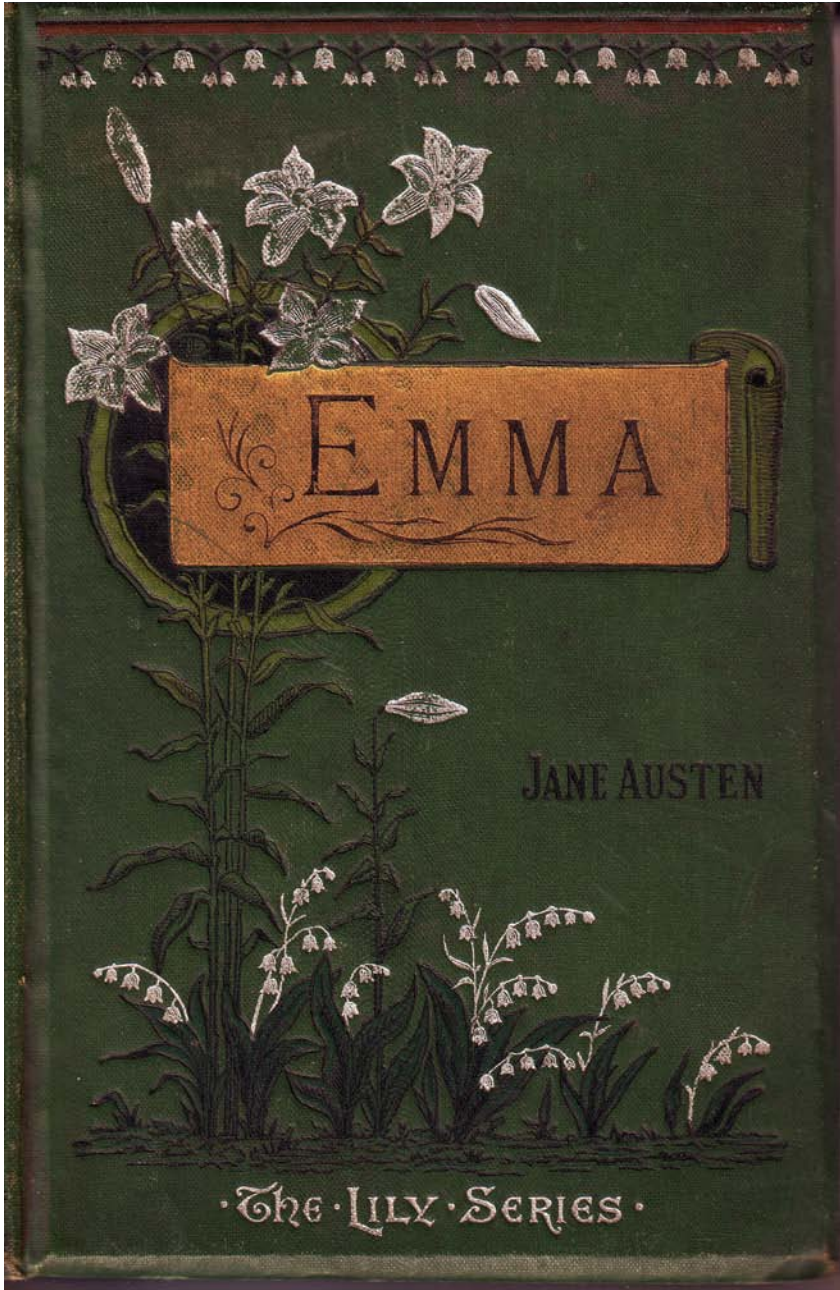


Figure 5 Jane Austen, *Emma* in “The Lily Series” in green cloth (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., n.d.).

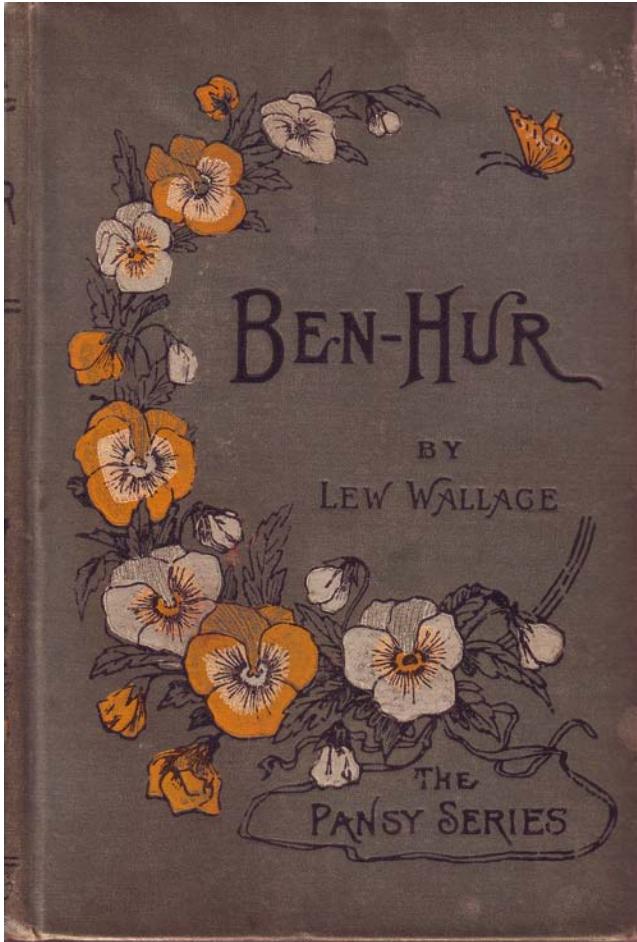


Figure 6 Lew Wallace, *Ben-Hur* in grey cloth (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., n.d.).

rewards for good personal hygiene. Given the Sunlight brand of soap for which Lever had become famous, along with what I took to be iconic daisies on the cover of its *Sense and Sensibility*, the Lever edition seemed to want to align itself, and by extension Jane Austen, with the mission of the RTS. These aesthetic clues were in keeping with Lever's paternalistic vision for Port Sunlight and its community of workers, which he ruled like "a benign puppet-master."¹⁵

A WorldCat search for titles published by Lever Brothers between 1890 and 1900 confirmed that its in-house books and pamphlets were largely

concerned with the running of the firm and the advertising and packaging of soap, even when those publications exhibited a literary bent. Much energy seems to have been devoted to the *Sunlight Year Book*, a multipurpose annual filled with household advice and sundry information, including world maps, train tables, fashion plates, and even instructions about pet care. Released around Christmas, this encyclopedia/address book/atlas/minipeerage swiftly became “the standard reference work for the schools to which it was given away free.” Thus the Sunlight brand gained “a respectability and ubiquitousness far beyond the bathroom and pantry.”¹⁶ These yearbooks constituted a brilliant giveaway scheme, as each page was accompanied by a unique slogan promoting Lever soap: “Don’t worry, use Sunlight soap!”; “See smiling faces all around, wherever Sunlight soap is found”; and, my personal favorite, “The best soap for washing pigeons.” It is easy to imagine a child studiously looking through the sections labeled “Rulers of the World” or “List of Cathedrals,” unwittingly absorbing Lever’s advertisement rhetoric from the volume’s headers and footers.

Some of Lever’s literary publications recorded in WorldCat invoke Sunlight Soap’s mission through puns and associations. Take, for example, the choice to publish *Sunny South* by F. C. Armstrong as well as works by the coincidentally-named Charles James Lever (a popular fiction writer who, dying in 1872, had no apparent connection to the soap company).¹⁷ Did the squeaky clean morality of Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* offer up an unseen pun in connection with slogans for soap? At first, the catalog approach dead-ended, largely because so few Lever editions of popular novels have apparently made it into academic libraries: WorldCat lists a Lever edition of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (one copy held by Oxford University), Scott’s *The Antiquary* (one copy at Edinburgh University), and Thomas Cobb’s *Wedderburn’s Will: A Detective Story* (Emory owns an 1895 copy).

Perhaps searching nineteenth-century newspapers for Lever soap ads would yield more bibliographic information. I turned to the new scholarly databases of “Nineteenth-Century British Library Newspapers” and “Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals” published by Gale.¹⁸ Even though I did not find “Austen” in any soap advertisements, I did find mentions of “books” as prizes in many 1890s Lever ads, and there I was able to track “The Sunlight Soap Monthly Competition,” which ran from 1890 to 1897. Lever was the first company to design giveaways on such a grand scale. Advertisements announced that the competition was “for young folks only,” urging them to send in soap wrappers for chances at various categories of prizes. A minimum number of coupons, twenty-four in 1890 and fifty by 1897, guaranteed the sender a prize for his or her efforts—in the first year

this was an art print, and it subsequently became a book. The competition started in 1890 with £600 in prizes awarded monthly. For 1894, Lever announced it would award “232,800 prizes in Prizes of Bicycles, Watches, and Books, value £41,904.” With prizes reflective of working-class values, it is significant that the bulk of this marketing collateral took the form of books.

The competition’s rules divided England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales into eight (later reduced to seven) geographical “districts” according to population. Newspaper ads and fliers in 1897 explained how, every month, “the 1 competitor in each District who sends in the largest number of Sunlight coupons from the District in which he or she resides, will receive £21 cash,” the next ten would receive “carriage paid, at winner’s option, a Lady’s or Gentleman’s ‘Premier’ Bicycle, price £21.” Forty further competitors in each district received gold watches, while “the remaining Sunlight Competitors will each receive Cloth-bound Books, by Popular Authors, in the proportion of 1 Book for every 50 Sunlight coupons sent in.” These ads also detailed rules (boys and girls aged seventeen or younger; wrappers from sold products only and not dealer’s stock), eligibility (not Lever employees or families), prizes, and even the totals awarded in the different districts. In 1897 large ads from February through at least September listed detailed accounts of the “£66,156 in prizes of cash, bicycles, watches, and books given free during 1897” (Figure 7). This, then, was the soap circus in which Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* was made a participant.

The ads proved detailed enough to roughly calculate that Lever gave away a quarter of a million books yearly during the latter half of its long-running campaign. Naturally, the Lever advertisements inflate dramatic totals with headline prices that use retail amounts for the bikes, watches, and books rather than Lever’s true cost. Any calculations have to take the poetic license behind advertised figures into account. For the midcompetition year of 1894, the Lever announcements proudly rank the giveaway books into four retail categories, from 5 shillings at the top end to 1 shilling at the bottom. Since cheap yellowbacks (or books in “picture boards”) retailed between 1 and 2 shillings and the popular Bentley edition of *Sense and Sensibility* was advertised for 6 shillings, Lever was at the low end of the print-culture marketplace, as reflected in the poor production values of its reprint of *Sense and Sensibility*.

From these advertised tallies of books at different price points and the total number given away in each category each month in one of eight districts, it was easy to calculate that in 1894 (not the peak year for prizes) Lever promised to award 230,400 books.¹⁹ If this middle year in an escalating giveaway campaign is taken as an estimated mean, then by the end of the



SUNLIGHT AND LIFEBOUY SOAP COMPETITIONS.

The first of these Monthly Competitions will be held January 2nd, 1897, to be followed by others each month during 1897. Competitors sending in the most coupons win the best prizes, but every competitor sending in not less than 50 Sunlight, or 50 Lifebuoy coupons, wins a prize.

RULES.

1. Competitors may send EACH an EVERY MONTH an EITHER or BOTH "Sunlight" or "Lifebuoy" Soap Wrappers, or both in SEPARATE PACKETS, so long as they are in the wrapper of the soap wrapper "SUNLIGHT" or "LIFEBOUY".

2. For this Competition the United Kingdom will be divided into three Districts, each of which will be awarded every month during 1897, as each of the three Districts is "SUNLIGHT SOAP" or "LIFEBOUY SOAP" Wrappers as they see them. Cut off the top portion of each wrapper and preserve the top portion as the "SUNLIGHT SOAP" or "LIFEBOUY SOAP" Wrappers as they see them. Cut off the top portion of each wrapper and preserve the top portion as the "SUNLIGHT SOAP" or "LIFEBOUY SOAP" Wrappers as they see them. Cut off the top portion of each wrapper and preserve the top portion as the "SUNLIGHT SOAP" or "LIFEBOUY SOAP" Wrappers as they see them.

RULES.

Competitors must send the word "SUNLIGHT" or "LIFEBOUY" whichever wrapper they prefer to use. Do NOT send an address of postage to a separate letter.

3. The Competition will CLOSE the LAST DAY of EACH MONTH. Coupons received on the last day of a month will be sent to the office and will be distributed on the first day of the next month.

4. Competitors who send in coupons must send a stamp which will be distributed on the first day of the next month.

5. Competitors who send in coupons must send a stamp which will be distributed on the first day of the next month.

£66,156

in PRIZES

OF CASH,

BICYCLES*

WATCHES*

And BOOKS

GIVEN FREE

For Sunlight & Lifebuoy

Soap Wrappers.

NAME OF DISTRICT.	PRIZES FOR SUNLIGHT COUPONS.	Total Prizes in all Districts during 1897.
1. IRELAND.	The 4 competitors in each District who send in the largest number of Sunlight Coupons from the District in which he or she resides, will receive £25 each.	£2000 0 0
2. SCOTLAND.	The 10 competitors in each District who send in the next largest number of coupons will receive, in order of merit, as follows:—	17500 0 0
3. LONDON, MIDDLESEX, KENT, SURREY.	1. Each competitor in "Premier" class, 100 pence. The 10 competitors in each District who send in the next largest number of coupons will receive, in order of merit, as follows:—	141250 0 0
4. WALES, LANCASHIRE, DEVON, DURHAM, NORTHAMPTON, NORTHUMBRIA, WESTMIDLANDS, YORKSHIRE, ISLE OF MAN.	1. Each competitor in "Premier" class, 100 pence. The 10 competitors in each District who send in the next largest number of coupons will receive, in order of merit, as follows:—	100000 0 0
5. SHROPSHIRE, HEREFORD, SOMERSET, WILTSHIRE, STAFFORDSHIRE, WORCESTER, GLOUCESTER, WARWICKSHIRE, DERBY, LEICESTERSHIRE, LINCOLNSHIRE, NORFOLK, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, NORTHUMBRIA, WESTMIDLANDS, YORKSHIRE, ISLE OF MAN.	The 10 competitors in each District who send in the largest number of Lifebuoy Coupons from the District in which he or she resides, will receive £25 each.	£2500 0 0
6. NORFOLK, SUFFOLK, ESSEX, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, BEDFORDSHIRE, HERTFORDSHIRE, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, DEVON, DEVONSHIRE, CORNWALL.	The 10 competitors in each District who send in the next largest number of coupons will receive, in order of merit, as follows:—	8000 0 0
	GRAND TOTAL of all Prizes given for Sunlight and Lifebuoy Coupons during 1897.	£66,156 0 0

Figure 7 Loose advertisement flier for the 1897 Sunlight and Lifebuoy Soap Competitions.

Sunlight Soap Monthly Competitions, which ran for over seven years, Lever might have given away more than 1.5 million books, a staggering number of volumes pumped into working-class communities. Soap advertising, it now seemed, did more than just fill “the pockets of publishers.”

It is not certain that all the Lever book giveaways bore a Port Sunlight imprint. The announcements do not specify the titles, and some book lots may have been bargains struck with other publishers and dealers for cheap Victorian overstock. But every book that Lever could hand out with its own name on the spine or title page served as a prominent piece of advertisement in someone’s home; surely it did not take Lever long to start publishing its own branded editions.

The duration of the competition explains the lack of a date on the *Sense and Sensibility* title page. In a giveaway scheme with no predetermined endpoint, an undated book would continue to look “new” for years. Online I found a handful of similarly undated Lever Brothers editions for sale, including a used copy of *Sandford and Merton* inscribed 1898 and another of *Ben Hur*. Both were advertised as containing an inventory of the 1897 giveaways. Since 1897 was the endpoint of the competition, presumably these lists would proudly boast of all titles given out. Physically, the binding styles of these Sunlight Library copies did not resemble that of my Lever *Sense and Sensibility*, with the prominent flowers replaced by a stamped binding of abstract design in the same split-fountain color scheme (Figure 8).

I bought one of the copies with the advert pages, reasoning that, although the books on this list might span a wide range of popular taste, in isolation each had to sympathize with the Lever mission. How might Austen have appeared to young contestants receiving *Sense and Sensibility* as a Sunlight Library book? What were the associations with the soap that a first-time reader might transfer to Austen? I found that Lever soap advertisements circa 1900 tended toward the self-consciously nostalgic—a style in which Jane Austen could become a fit vehicle for the company mission and image. Many Sunlight Soap ads feature young people in outdated collars and costumes, posing with giant mock-ups of the Lever soaps, ostensibly to promote its effectiveness on modern fabrics. The effect is often comical, since the nods to history are associative rather than credible: “to save time is to lengthen life,” reads the slogan beneath a long-running ad for Sunlight that shows a girl in the type of massive Elizabethan collar that demands a queenly amount of starch (Figure 9). Similarly, a magazine ad for Swan Soap, a bath soap marketed especially to “ladies” for the washing of skin and fine fabrics, features a retro couple in Renaissance costume crossing a

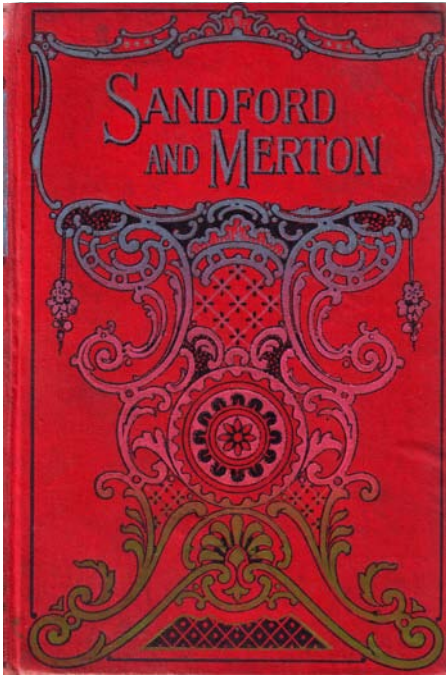


Figure 8 [Thomas Day], *Sanford and Merton: A Tale for Boys* in red cloth (Port Sunlight: Lever Brothers, n.d.).



Figure 9 Sunlight Soap advertisement in *The Graphic* (December 6, 1902): 781.

creek by stepping on a giant piece of floating Swan Soap. The caption reads: “A Stepping Stone to happiness.”

Two popular full-page magazine ads for Swan Soap feature couples in eighteenth-century costume. In one the couple is dressed in something approaching Restoration attire (the gentleman wears a powdered wig, a ruffled front, and shoe buckles) and sits by a creek, delighted by a giant piece of Swan Soap that floats past (Figure 10). The words “IT FLOATS” are carved on the tree behind them, as befits the tradition of enthusiastic lovers. In another ad a couple ride in a Regency gig—the gentleman in a tricornered hat, knee breeches, and regimentals sitting beside a laughing companion who wears an elaborate bonnet—while a giant piece of Swan Soap is latched to the vehicle by the girl’s bonnet strings (Figure 11). These historically specific getups seem intended to draw a sigh of contentment from a female consumer who is duly reminded that modern washable fabrics require comparatively less effort to keep clean, the Victorian equivalent of Virginia Slim’s famous “You’ve come a long way, baby” campaign. Perhaps the company’s book giveaways also trained their audience in a historically dependant advertising idiom. Jane Austen does seem remarkably of a piece with the Regency-clad personages in Lever ads.

The Lever edition of *Sense and Sensibility* was not the first to yoke Jane Austen to the manufacture of soap. By the 1870s yellowbacks regularly featured advertisements for a range of household products, including soaps.²⁰ An advertisement for Brooke’s “Monkey Brand” of soap appears, in fact, on the back of the yellowback edition pictured in Figure 3 (Figure 12). Gilson also documents advertisements for Pears’ Soap attached to *Sense and Sensibility* on at least three occasions, first in an 1884 Routledge “Sixpenny Novel” edition.²¹ Cassell’s 1887 “Red Edition”²² includes what Gilson calls a “folding leaf,” entitled “Curious & beautiful optical illusion presented by the Proprietors of Pears’ Soap.”²³ Armed with Gilson’s description, I located several copies of this popular advertisement floating about as loose Victorian prints on Ebay and elsewhere, and found that this was another long-running advertising gimmick modified from year to year.

Early versions of the Pears’ Soap optical illusion (one extant copy was inscribed in pencil “Jubilee year 1884”) featured two large “strobic circles” and the nearby directive “Hold this Diagram by the right-hand bottom corner and give it a slight but rapid circular twisting motion, when each circle will separately revolve on its own axis.” Nearby, it suggests “Please place this in your Scrap Book.” By 1887 the same advertisement found in the *Graphic* magazine for June 18 had increased the circles from two to seven (Figure 13). Since the illusion necessitates rapidly turning the page and even



IT FLOATS

A FRIEND FOR FAIR FORMS AND FACES.

LADIES like it because it floats.

LADIES are pleased with its dainty appearance.

SWAN White Floating SOAP is manufactured from the purest and sweetest of white oils and lard, and is especially made for washing dainty fabrics, for the toilet, and the bath.

SWAN SOAP

WHITE FLOATING Dainty, Pure, Fragrant.

LADIES are charmed with its fragrant aroma.

LADIES are delighted with its exquisite purity.

SWAN SOAP IS BEYOND THE ART OF SOAPMAKING.

Manufactured by Lever Brothers, Ltd., London, England.

Figure 10 Lever soap advertisement in *Black and White* (March 8, 1902): 359.



SWAN SOAP.

For Delicate Fabrics.
For Tender Skins.
For the Toilet and Bath.
Dainty, Fragrant.
Wholesome, Healing.
IT FLOATS.

Swan Soap

White Floating
FOR THE BATH AND DAINY FABRIC

MANUFACTURED BY
LEVER BROTHERS LIMITED,
SHEPHERD WALK, LONDON.

SWAN SOAP.
Made from the Sweetest
of Oils and Fats
Scenting, Softening,
Rinsing, Pure,
Always in Sight.
IT FLOATS.

SWAN SOAP IS BEYOND THE ART OF SOAPMAKING.

Figure 11 Lever Soap advertisement in *The Graphic* (January 12, 1901): 63.



Figure 12 Brooke's soap advertisement on back cover of Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion* (London: Ward, Lock, and Bowden, n.d.).

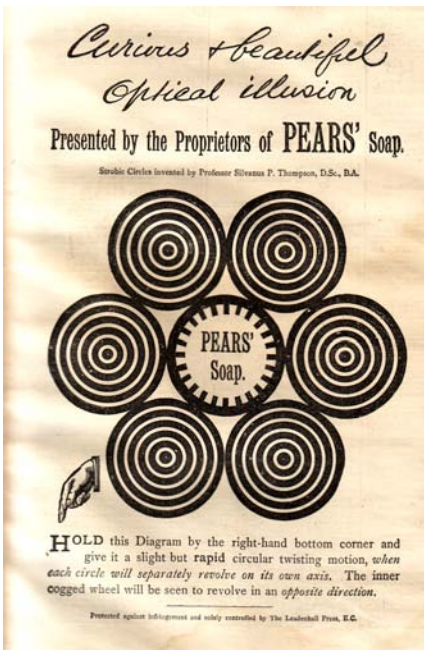


Figure 13 Pears' Soap advertisement cut out of June 18, 1887 issue of *The Graphic*.

encourages readers to tear it out of the book for a keepsake, this Pears advertisement might have had readers twirling and tearing their copy of Austen's novel—a curious example of “reader response” and of the type of non-reading activities that, Leah Price points out, Victorians took to with their books.²⁴ Just such innovative marketing techniques earned Thomas Barratt, chairman of Pears, a reputation as one of the fathers of modern advertising.²⁵ That he practiced his art in copies of Austen may be lesser known. With these prior intersections of Pears Soap and *Sense and Sensibility*, the 1890s Lever printing may have been a competitive attempt to use Jane Austen, an author whose own stock was rising rapidly, as an advertising vehicle.

Today, Jane Austen has become an industry in her own right. The author's name and portrait grace many nonbook products, from kitchen towels to board games, action figures to stationery, and, yes, even soaps. The 1994 UK Trade Marks Act (TMA) insists that the use of an artist's name be meaningfully connected to a product's origin. For example, in the year 2000, when a toiletry business sought to register “JANE AUSTEN” as a trademark for a line of toiletries and soaps, the application was refused under s.3(1)(b) of the TMA on the grounds that “it was devoid of any distinctive character.” Legal historian Simon Stokes explains how “the application was opposed by the trustees of the Jane Austen Memorial Trust who owned Jane Austen's house and museum in Hampshire and who had developed a trade in related souvenirs. It was held that unless educated through use to see the name differently, the public would not regard ‘Jane Austen’ as a badge of origin” for soap products.²⁶ Perhaps my own research will someday be used to make the case for a strong historical connection between Austen and soap! In view of the history behind the Lever edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, such commercialization of Jane Austen's legacy proves far less modern and alien than I would have predicted, with connections between Austen's books and commercial advertising older and tighter than I had imagined.

Only when I obtained the Lever Brothers edition of *Sanford and Merton* was I able to reconstruct the larger context in which *Sense and Sensibility* was offered as a book prize. In the advertisement pages I found a list of “The ‘Sunlight’ Library of Books by Standard Authors, given during 1897 for Sunlight and LifeBuoy Soap Wrappers”:

Ivanhoe.	Throne of David.
Uncle Tom's Cabin.	Pelham.
Robinson Crusoe.	Vanity Fair.
Swiss Family Robinson.	Handy Andy.
David Copperfield.	Andersen's Fairy Tales.
Old Curiosity Shop.	Opening a Chestnut Burr.

Night and Morning.	Pendennis.
Ernest Maltravers.	Little Women and Good Wives.
Eugene Aram.	Beulah.
Rienzi.	Mother's Recompense.
Last of the Barons.	Barriers Burned Away.
Home Influence.	Pirate and Three Cutters.
The Lamplighter.	Little Savage.
The Wide, Wide World.	Daisy.
Pickwick Papers.	Infelice.
Nicholas Nickleby.	Melbourne House.
Oliver Twist.	St. Elmo.
Old St. Paul's.	Last Days of Pompeii.
Kenilworth.	Paul Clifford.
Bride of Lammermoor.	Scalp Hunters.
Old Mortality.	Disowned.
Waverley.	Devereux.
Rob Roy.	Godolphin.
Vicar of Wakefield.	Alice.
Prince of the House of David.	Barnaby Rudge.
Ben-Hur.	Days of Bruce.
Midshipman Easy.	Bleak House.
Valentine Vox.	The Monastery.
Last of the Mohicans.	Quentin Durward.
Jane Eyre.	Gulliver's Travels.
Twenty Years After.	Black Dwarf and Montrose.
Aunt Jane's Hero.	Guy Fawkes.
Masterman Ready.	Harold.
Tower of London.	Rifle Rangers.
Vashti.	Three People.
At the Mercy of Tiberius.	Shirley.
Pillar of Fire.	Helen Mordaunt.
Stepping Heavenward.	Flag of Truce.
Pride and Prejudice.	Woman's Friendship.
Sense and Sensibility.	Little Fishers and Their Nets.
Queechy.	Sandford and Merton.
Three Musketeers.	Japhet in Search of a Father.
Guy Mannerling.	The Roll of the Drum.
Harry Lorrequer.	The Tiger Hunters.
Jack Hinton.	The Wood Rangers.
Naomi.	The Guerilla Chief.
Vale of Cedars.	Did She Love Him?
Four Girls at Chautauqua.	Windsor Castle.
Chautauqua Girls at Home.	Antiquary.
Heart of Midlothian.	The Abbot.

From this list I learned that *Pride and Prejudice* was another Lever title, although I have yet to locate a surviving copy. Author names are not listed. Contestants are warned that not all of these titles are guaranteed in stock and that “lists of books on hand” will be forwarded to those who send in a self-addressed stamped envelope to the “Competition Department, Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, Port Sunlight, near Birkenhead.”

Lever binding designs were stamped, like the Ward, Lock gift books, on a range of cases in colored cloths. Armed with these specific titles, I found Lever copies on the above list bound in beige, blue, green, and red cloth (there may have been even more colors). Thus the flower design, stamped on titles of various sorts, did not—as I had first suspected—mark a primarily female audience for books such as *Sense and Sensibility*. However, only the Lever copies containing the advertisement pages for the 1897 giveaway scheme were stamped with the abstract Victorian pattern (not the flowers), as if Lever had marked the final phase of its giveaways with a new binding style. A comparison of *Ben-Hur* in both binding styles (I bought the other version too) suggested that while the exterior binding style differed, the interior text was still printed from the same plates (Figures 14–16). Surprisingly,

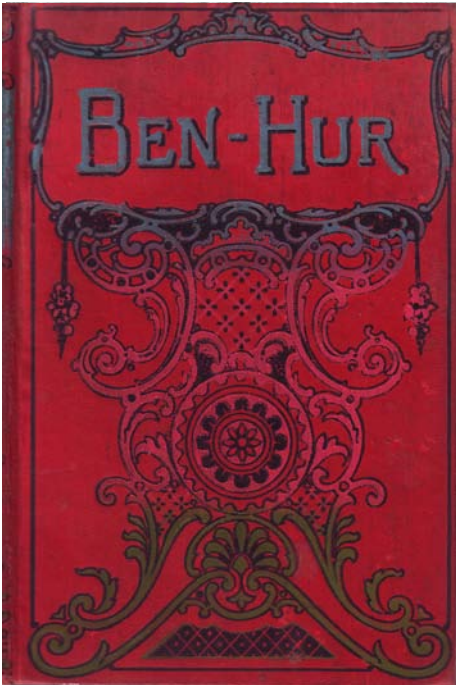


Figure 14 Lew Wallace, *Ben-Hur* in red cloth (Port Sunlight: Lever Brothers, [1897]).

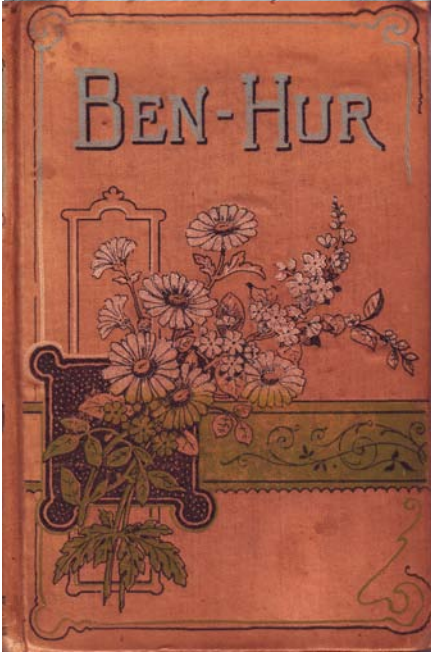


Figure 15 Lew Wallace, *Ben-Hur* in light brown cloth (Port Sunlight: Lever Brothers, n.d.).

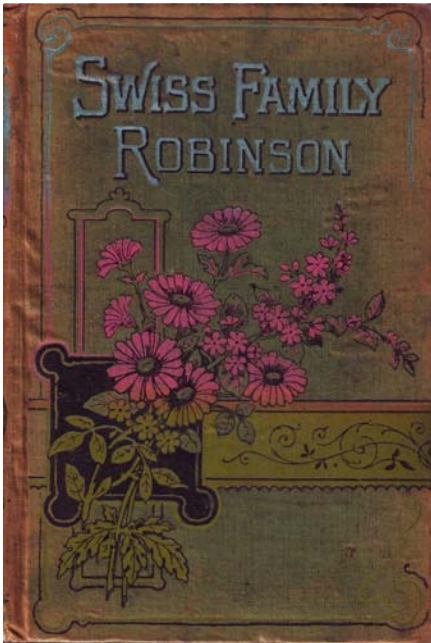


Figure 16 William H. G. Kingston, ed., *The Swiss Family Robinson* in green cloth (Port Sunlight: Lever Brothers, n.d.).

the endpapers in the Lever copies rarely matched, as if the binder had simply used whatever paper was on hand for each title. Only the 1897 copies all contained the same green patterned endpapers. Some production values, too, differed from book to book: *Sanford and Merton*, for example, proved heavily illustrated. With great differences in typography, paper, layout, and quality, the packaging that shaped these books into a unified series included the books' title pages, with their Lever imprints, and the two distinct binding designs.

I was surprised at the implied selection criteria for this list of "Standard Authors," which, while it includes many usual suspects and a great deal of Sir Walter Scott, contains a host of titles now utterly obscure. In fact, more than half of the company that Austen keeps on this list would not join her in the next century's canon—not even among juvenile literature. Bibliographically negligible editions such as Lever's prize books, presumably a reflection of popularity in the late 1890s, are time capsules of their cultural moments, even when the copy text may be suspect, the production values low, and the editing nonexistent. Books worth keeping for posterity—for the preservation of history—include those no one thinks to keep.

I thought it had ended there. By chance, however, an Ebay search some weeks later came across a copy of *Sense and Sensibility* published by Miles & Miles of London (Figure 17). The binding design is almost identical to that of the flowered Lever copy, with the addition of the words "The Marguerite Series" on a strip of gilt on the front cover. Instead of "Lever Bros.," the bottom of the spine on this copy reads "Miles & Miles" while the words "The Marguerite Series" appear inside the same circle that the Lever spines share, but leave empty (Figure 18). Otherwise the lettering, stamp design, split-fountain colors, and production values are identical to the bindings on the flowered Lever editions. Eventually, another copy turned up in a red cloth similar to my Lever *Sense and Sensibility* (Figure 19). Inside, the Lever and Miles & Miles editions are bibliographically identical, as all three are printed from the same poor plates, yet there are striking differences: the red Miles & Miles copy included a frontispiece illustration (of a couple in Victorian dress) and had greater girth, having been printed on substantially thicker paper. Once again, no edition by Miles & Miles, or any "Marguerite series," is mentioned in Gilson. Although neither edition bears a date, if the Miles & Miles version of *Sense and Sensibility* predated the Lever imprint (for why would a private publisher imitate a giveaway scheme?), the resemblance could explain the genesis of the Lever cover design.

My guess is that the short-lived Marguerite series by Miles & Miles predates the Lever giveaways of the 1890s. The existence of a daisy variety

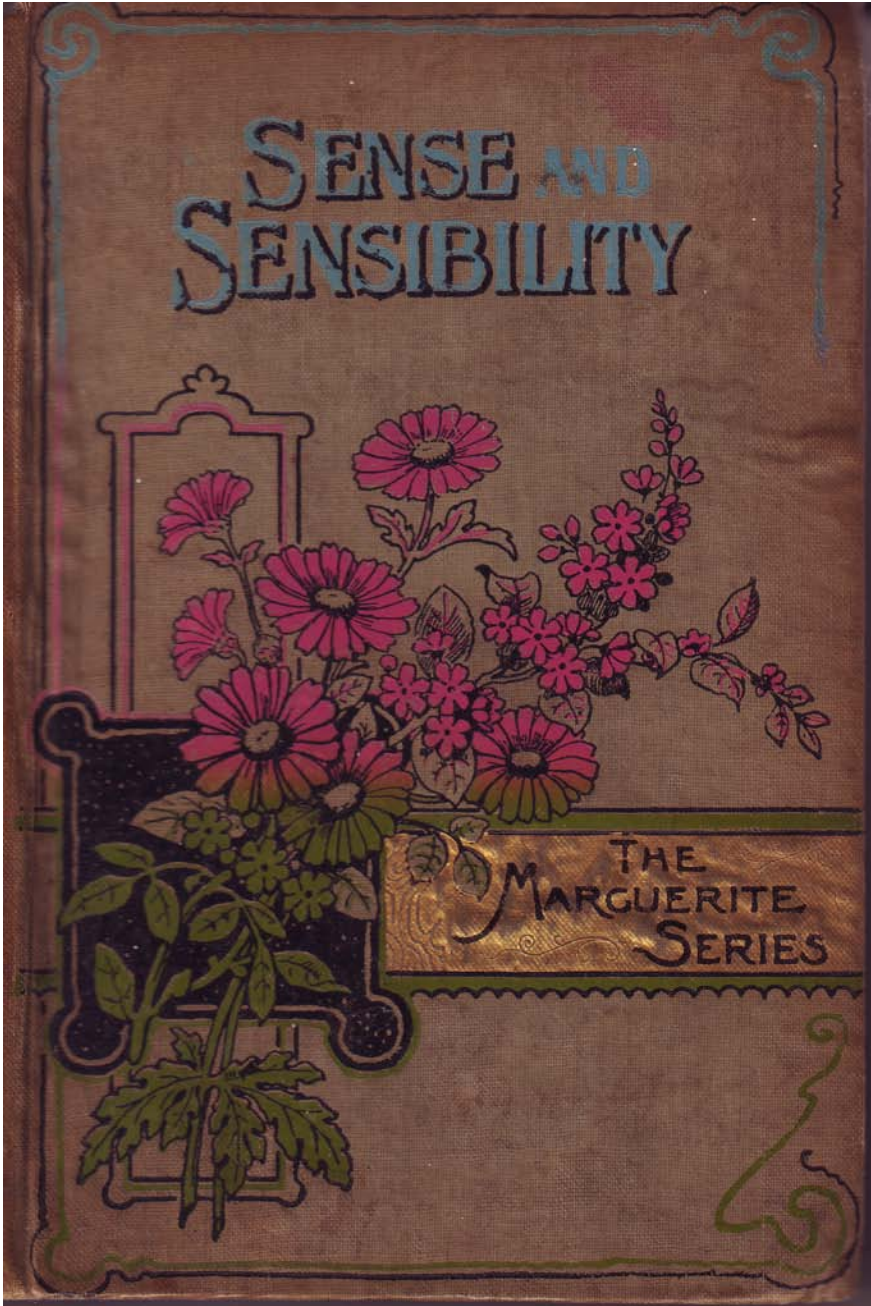


Figure 17 Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* in “The Marguerite Series” in tan cloth (London: Miles & Miles, n.d.).

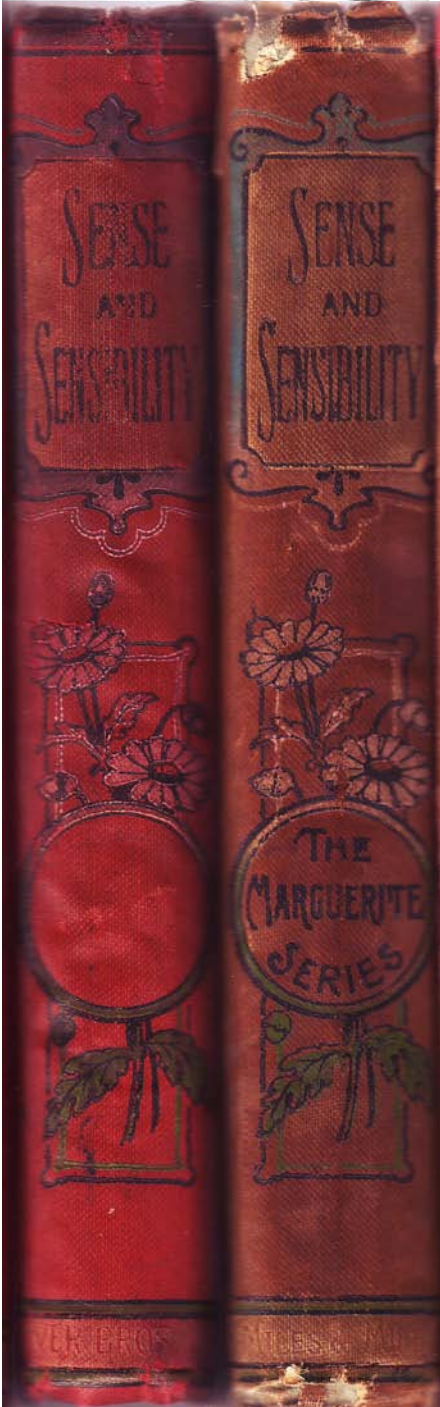


Figure 18 Spines of Lever Bros. (left) and Miles & Miles (right) editions of *Sense and Sensibility*.

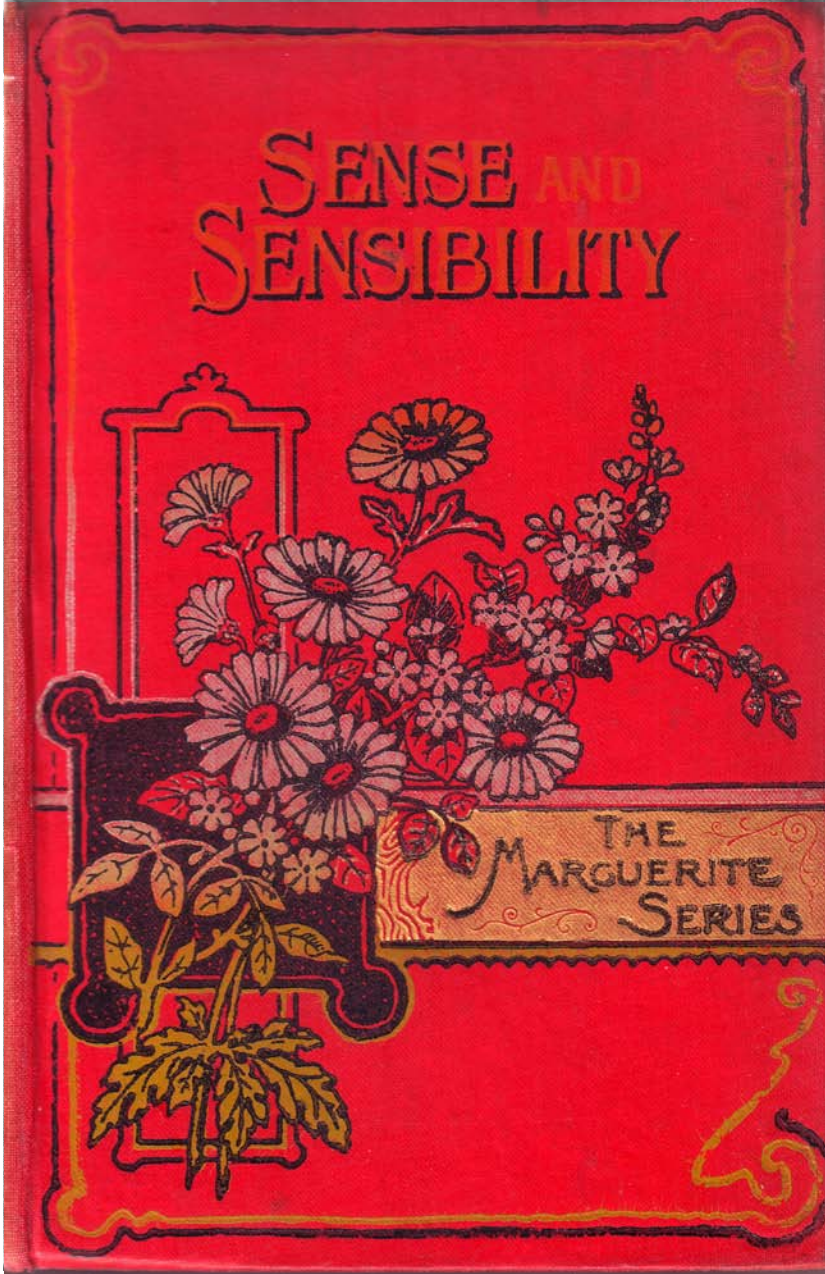


Figure 19 Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* in “The Marguerite Series” in red cloth (London: Miles & Miles, n.d.).

called “Marguerite” further suggests that the stamped flowered design was originally made for the cases of this Miles & Miles series, a cheap short-lived reprint series for which I have been able to locate only two other titles, both by Dickens—*Bleak House* and *Pickwick Papers*, both included in the 1897 Lever giveaway list (Figure 20). Did Lever Brothers broker a deal with Miles & Miles once its giveaway scheme grew to include books after 1890? While there is no evidence to suggest that Miles & Miles went out of business, for it continued to print other books in the 1890s, perhaps Lever bought out its emergent Marguerite Series to use as hallmark giveaways. Although I had hitherto assumed that the Lever Brothers name in the imprint signaled that Lever had initiated the selection of its giveaway titles, this new evidence suggested otherwise. The bibliographical similarities made it more than likely that Lever Brothers outsourced the production of its early giveaway books to a publisher whose name was replaced, doubtless by agreement, with that of Lever on the spines and title pages of a series already in production. Had Lever, in fact, made *any* selection decisions in the inclusion of specific titles for its soap-promoting scheme? Perhaps I had sought interpretive meaning behind Austen’s inclusion in the Lever Soap giveaways in vain. Instead, *Sense and Sensibility* functioned as a Duchamp readymade in reverse—an object plucked out of its original artistic context in order to do the sudden bidding of an unanticipated commercial purpose. Another few months passed before I came across yet another 1890s copy of *Sense and Sensibility*, again identical in text and vaguely similar in binding style, this time bearing a “Londoner Press” imprint (Figure 21). Its endpapers are crowded with advertisements (including more cleaning products). Right now, as I copyedit this article for print, a copy of *Sense and Sensibility*, bound in the same floral design on green cloth, bearing a “Standard Authors Publishing Company” imprint is for sale on Ebay. Lever Brothers did not secure an exclusive.

As a popular book that had been out of copyright for decades, *Sense and Sensibility* was probably an opportunistic, almost accidental, choice for a Sunlight Library edition. My instincts to locate interpretive potential in the association between Austen and Lever had been thoroughly curbed by historical context, which was not found via the traditional bibliographical route. Ebay and AbeBooks, with their large and ever-changing image banks of book covers, had provided a visual context for that stray Lever edition of Austen’s novel. I would never have found such a range of cultural evidence for this word and image mystery in a library or scholarly database alone—and certainly not that quickly. Advertisements inside books have always been key evidence for dating a copy with an incomplete or misleading imprint. Covers have not garnered the same attention. Online commercial sites



Figure 20 Charles Dickens, *Pickwick Papers* in “The Marguerite Series” in red cloth (London: Miles & Miles, n.d.).

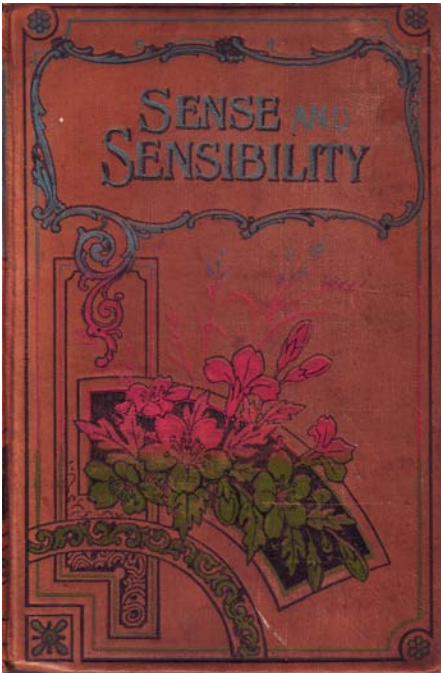


Figure 21 Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* in brown cloth (London: The Londoner Press, n.d.).

are rarely, if ever, mentioned prominently in scholarly articles, which still rely upon traditional bibliographies that, for the most part, treat cover art as accidentals of the printing process. But these days there is much more to book history than what can be found among the copies of research libraries.

Notes

1. See David Gilson, *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* (1982; repr., Winchester and New Castle, Del.: St. Paul's Bibliographies and Oak Knoll Press, 1997).

2. W. T. Stead, "Where Britons Are Holding Their Own: The Story of Pears' Soap," *Review of Reviews* 24 (July–December 1901): 437–445, 445.

3. *Ibid.*, 443.

4. Morgan Witzel, *Management History: Text and Cases* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 123.

5. As a cheap reprinting, some bibliographers might not consider the Lever copy a proper "edition" worthy of documenting. Gilson himself warns that, because so few Austen reprints "survive in libraries," many go unrecorded in bibliography. Gilson, *Bibliography*, 225.

6. A watermark on the front free endpaper of my copy reads "Desmond Bond."

7. See John Carter, ed., *New Paths in Book Collecting: Essays by Various Hands* (1934; repr., Freeport, N.Y.: Constable, 1967), which includes an essay by Michael Sadleir that opens with a working definition: "'Yellow-back' was the nickname given to the particular type of cheap edition evolved about the middle of last century for display and sale on railway book-stalls. It was usually (but not always) a cheap edition of fiction; it usually (but not always) cost two shillings; its basic colouring was usually (but not always) yellow—to which last characteristic, not surprisingly, it owed its *soubriquet*" (127).

8. For the separate copyright expiry dates for Austen's novels, see Gilson, *Bibliography*, 211. First published in 1811, the copyright to *Sense and Sensibility* expired in 1839.

9. Exceptional among book historians, Thomas Tanselle and Sue Allen have been calling attention to nineteenth-century publishers' bindings as a lacuna in bibliography for decades. In 1967 Tanselle argued for more systematized descriptions of nineteenth-century cloth bindings, outlining how subjectivity in descriptions of color creates ambiguity. See Thomas Tanselle, "A System of Color Identification for Bibliographical Description," *Studies in Bibliography* 20 (1967): 203–234. The problems so eloquently outlined by Tanselle may have found a partial solution in digital imaging.

10. See Edward Hubbard and Michael Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005).

11. Adam Macqueen, *The King of Sunlight* (London: Corgi, 2004), 125.

12. A similar advertising list was bound with a "Lily Series" copy of E. P. Roe's *Opening of a Chestnut Burr* (London: Ward, Lock, [n.d.]), inscribed "To Jack with Grandma's love./Xmas 1890." That inventory only goes up to number 91 of the Lily Series, however, whereas Austen's *Emma* is listed as number 121 in a similar inventory of the Lily titles attached to *Ben-Hur* in the Pansy series. Together, such advertising lists and inscriptions narrow dates for reprint series.

13. The New York Public Library (NYPL) catalog estimates the date of its Ward, Lock *Emma* to be 1889, listing it as No. 164 in a "Select Library of Fiction" series, with 435 pages. The NYPL also lists a copy of *Sense and Sensibility* as No. 163 in that same series, with 331 pages, as well as copies of *Pride and Prejudice* (340 pages) and *Northanger Abbey/Persuasion* (440 pages). Gilson notes the first two NYPL copies in entries for a Ward, Lock 1881 editions of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma* (E53 and E57). In both cases, he assumes that the later Ward, Lock books were reprints, reasoning that "the series numbering seems not to have been constant." He duly admits "no copy seen" with "(details derived from E57 and from assumption)" (256). Thus, while Gilson nowhere mentions a Lily Series, he does allow for the

existence of differently packaged Ward, Lock reprints. The National Library of Scotland (NLS) gives a 1900 date for its Ward, Lock *Emma*, which has, like the NYPL copy, 435 pages. I, too, did not examine the NYPL or NLS copies and cannot know the relationship between the Ward, Lock Lily Series and the Select Library of Fiction series from the same publisher—which again differs from the initial 1881 Ward, Lock edition listed in Gilson. Whether the later Lily Series constituted an Austen reprint or a new edition, however, does not matter for the purposes of my current investigation into the packaging and marketing of Austen.

14. See Chester W. Topp, *Victorian Yellowbacks & Paperbacks, 1849-1905*, Vol. 2, *Ward & Lock* (Denver: Hermitage Antiquarian Bookshop, 1995).

15. Macqueen, *King of Sunlight*, 124.

16. *Ibid.*, 44-45.

17. The Lever novel reprinted under the Lever Bros. label in the 1890s is *The O'Donoghue: A Tale of Ireland Fifty Years Ago*.

18. I am immensely grateful to John Lafave of Gale Publishing who, upon hearing of my project, gave me trial access to these new products.

19. An advertisement in the *Review of Reviews* in 1893 promises the following monthly giveaways during 1894 in each of eight districts: 200 books at 5s.; 300 at 3s. 6d.; 400 at 2s. 6d.; 500 at 2s.; and 1,000 at 1s. That makes for a total of 2,400 winners of books per month in each of the eight districts that year, or 230,400 books as giveaways for 1894 alone.

20. See “George Routledge,” in Topp, *Victorian Yellowbacks & Paperbacks*.

21. Gilson, *Bibliography*, 261, entry E65.

22. *Ibid.*, 262, entry E71.

23. See *ibid.*

24. See Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

25. “Thomas J. Barratt Dead: Chairman of the Firm of A. & F. Pears an Advertising Genius,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1914, 11.

26. Simon Stokes, *Art and Copyright* (Oxford: Hart, 2001), 167. See also “Jane Austen Trade Mark,” *Reports of Patent, Design, and Trade Mark Cases* 117, no. 23 (2000): 879-892.