

PERSUASION

Jane Austen



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From the Pages of Persuasion



Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character: vanity of person and of situation. (page 4)

Always to be presented with the date of her own birth, and see no marriage follow but that of a youngest sister, made the book an evil; and more than once, when her father had left it open on the table near her, had she closed it, with averted eyes, and pushed it away. (page 7)

Half the sum of attraction, on either side, might have been enough, for he had nothing to do, and she had hardly any body to love. (page 25)

She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning. (page 29)

Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions. A large bulky figure has as good a right to be in deep affliction, as the most graceful set of limbs in the world.

(page 65)

He was evidently a young man of considerable taste in reading, though principally in poetry; and besides the persuasion of having given him at least an evening's indulgence in the discussion of subjects, which his usual companions had probably no concern in, she had the hope of being of real use to him in some suggestions as to the duty and benefit of struggling against affliction. (pages 95-96)

“A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman! —He ought not—he does not.” (page 173)

“Even the smooth surface of family-union seems worth preserving, though there may be nothing durable beneath.”

(page 187)

“When one lives in the world, a man or woman’s marrying for money is too common to strike one as it ought.” (page 189)

“Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing.” (page 221)

“Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you.”

(page 223)

“If I was wrong in yielding to persuasion once, remember that it was to persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk. When I yielded, I thought it was to duty.” (page 230)

“It was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides.” (page 232)

When any two young people take it into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point, be they ever so poor, or ever so imprudent, or ever so little likely to be necessary to each other’s ultimate comfort. (page 234)

Persuasion



Jane Austen

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Persuasion

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Jane Austen



The English novelist Jane Austen was born December 16, 1775, the seventh of eight children, in the Parsonage House of Steventon, Hampshire, where she spent her first twenty-five years. During her brief lifetime Austen witnessed political unrest, revolution, war, and industrialization, yet these momentous events are not the central subjects of her finely focused novels. Rather, Austen wrote of her immediate experience: the microcosm of the country gentry and its class-conscious insularity. Jane's father, the Reverend George Austen, was the erudite country rector of Steventon, and her mother, Cassandra (nee Leigh), was descended from an aristocratic line of learned clergymen. By no means wealthy, the Austens nonetheless enjoyed a comfortable, socially respectable life, and greatly prized their children's education.

Jane and her beloved elder (and only) sister, Cassandra, were schooled in Southampton and Reading for a short period, but most of their education took place at home. Private theatrical performances in the barn at Steventon complemented Jane's studies of French, Italian, history, music, and eighteenth-century fiction. An avid reader from earliest childhood, Jane began writing at age twelve, no doubt encouraged by her cultured and affectionate family. Indeed, family and writing were her great loves; despite a fleeting engagement in 1802, Austen never married. Her first two novels, "Elinor and Marianne" and "First Impressions," were written while at Steventon but never published in their original form.

Following her father's retirement, Jane moved in 1801 with her parents and sister to Bath. That popular watering hole, removed from the country life Jane preferred, presented the sociable young novelist with a wealth of observations and experience that would later emerge in her novels. Austen moved to Southampton with her mother and sister after the death of her father in 1805. Several years later the three women settled in Chawton Cottage in Hampshire, where Austen resided until the end of her life. She relished her return to the countryside and, with it, a renewed artistic vigor that led to the revision of her early novels. *Sense and Sensibility*, a reworking of "Elinor and Marianne," was published in 1811, followed by *Pride and Prejudice*, a reworking of "First Impressions," two years later.

Austen completed four more novels (*Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*) in the Chawton sitting room. Productive and discreet, she insisted that her work be kept secret from anyone outside the family. All of her novels were published anonymously, including the posthumous release, thanks to her brother Henry, of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*.

The last years of Austen's life were relatively quiet and comfortable. Her final, unfinished work, *Sanditon*, was put aside in the spring of 1817, when her health sharply declined and she was taken to Winchester for medical treatment of what appears to have been Addison's disease or a form of lymphoma. Jane Austen died there on July 18, 1817, and is buried in Winchester Cathedral.

The World of Jane Austen and Persuasion



- 1775 The American Revolution begins in April. Jane Austen is born on December 16 in the Parsonage House in Steventon, Hampshire, England, the seventh of eight children (two girls and six boys).
- 1778 Frances (Fanny) Burney publishes *Evelina*, a seminal work in the development of the novel of manners.
- 1781 German philosopher Immanuel Kant publishes his *Critique of Pure Reason*.
- 1782 The American Revolution ends. Fanny Burney's novel *Cecilia* is published.
- 1783 Cassandra and Jane Austen begin their formal education in Southampton, followed by study in Reading.
- 1788 King George III of England suffers his first bout of mental illness, leaving the country in a state of uncertainty and anxiety. George Gordon, Lord Byron, is born.
- 1789 George III recuperates. The French Revolution begins. William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* is published.
- 1791 American political philosopher Thomas Paine publishes the first part of *The Rights of Man*.
- 1792 Percy Bysshe Shelley is born. Mary Wollstonecraft publishes *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.
- 1793 A shock wave passes through Europe with the execution of King Louis XVI of France and, some months later, his wife, Marie-Antoinette; the Reign of Terror begins. England declares war on France. Two of Austen's brothers, Francis (1774-1865) and Charles (1779-1852), serve in the Royal Navy, but life in the countryside of

Steventon remains relatively tranquil.

- 1795 Austen begins her first novel, “Elinor and Marianne,” written as letters (the fragments of this early work are now lost); she will later revise the material to become the novel *Sense and Sensibility*. John Keats is born.
- 1796-1797 Austen authors a second novel, “First Impressions,” which was never published; it will later become *Pride and Prejudice*.
- 1798 Poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth publish *The Lyrical Ballads*.
- 1801 Jane’s father, the Reverend George Austen, retires, and with the Napoleonic Wars looming in the background of British consciousness, he and his wife and two daughters leave the quiet country life of Steventon for the bustling, fashionable town of Bath. Many of the characters and depictions of society in Jane Austen’s subsequent novels are shaped by her experiences in Bath.
- 1803 Austen receives her first publication offer for her novel “Susan,” but the manuscript is subsequently returned by the publisher; it will later be revised and released as *Northanger Abbey*. The United States buys Louisiana from France. Ralph Waldo Emerson is born.
- 1804 Napoleon crowns himself emperor of France. Spain declares war on Britain.
- 1805 Jane’s father dies. Jane and her mother and sister subsequently move to Southampton. Sir Walter Scott publishes his *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.
- 1809 After several years of traveling and short-term stays in various towns, the Austen women settle in Chawton Cottage in Hampshire; in the parlor of this house Austen quietly composes her most famous works. Charles Darwin and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, are born.
- 1811 Austen begins *Mansfield Park* in February. In November *Sense and Sensibility*, the romantic misadventures of two sisters, is published with the notation “By a Lady”; all of Austen’s

subsequent novels are also brought out anonymously. George III is declared insane, and the morally corrupt Prince of Wales (the future King George IV) becomes regent.

- 1812 *Fairy Tales* by the Brothers Grimm and the first parts of Lord Byron's *Childe Harold* are published. The United States declares war on Great Britain.
- 1813 *Pride and Prejudice* is published; it describes the conflict between the high-spirited daughter of a country gentleman and a wealthy landowner. Napoleon is exiled to Elba, and the Bourbons are restored to power.
- 1814 *Mansfield Park* is published; it is the story of the difficult though ultimately rewarded life of a poor relation who lives in the house of her wealthy uncle.
- 1815 Austen's comic novel *Emma* is published, centering on the heroine's misguided attempts at matchmaking. Napoleon is defeated at Waterloo. Charlotte Brontë is born.
- 1817 Austen begins the satiric novel *Sanditon*, but abandons it because of declining health. She dies on July 18 in Winchester and is buried in Winchester Cathedral.
- 1818 *Northanger Abbey*, a social satire with overtones of (parodying) terror, and *Persuasion*, about a reawakened love, are published under Austen's brother Henry's supervision.

Introduction



You could not shock her more than she
shocks me;
Beside her Joyce seems innocent as grass.
It makes me most uncomfortable to see
An English spinster of the middle class
Describe the amorous effects of “brass,”
Reveal so frankly and with such sobriety
The economic basis of society.

—W. H. Auden

Just as Jane Austen is the favorite author of many discerning readers, *Persuasion* is the most highly esteemed novel of many Austenites. It has the deep irony, the scathing wit, the droll and finely drawn characters of Austen’s other novels, all attributes long beloved of her readers. But it is conventionally said that as her last novel, the novel of her middle age, it additionally has a greater maturity and wisdom than the “light, bright and sparkling” earlier novels, to use Austen’s own famous description of *Pride and Prejudice*, her most popular work. In other words, *Persuasion* has often been seen as the thinking reader’s *Pride and Prejudice*.

But *Persuasion* is less “light” in more than one sense; Anne Elliot, its heroine, is introduced as more unhappy and constrained by her situation than any heroine of Austen’s since Fanny Price of *Mansfield Park*. In contrast to Elizabeth Bennet’s or Emma Woodhouse’s sparkle and volubility, Anne’s “spirits were not high” (p. 14), and remain low for much of the novel. But whereas Fanny Price, like Anne ignored and held in low esteem by family members, is perfectly poised to be rescued by love, in fact Anne is barely a Cinderella figure, and not only because she is wellborn, of a better social rank than even the heroine of *Emma*. In fact, Anne Elliot has more in common with Charlotte Brontë’s Victorian heroine Jane Eyre in that she seems at first distinctly ineligible for the role of a beloved, appearing to the world as apparently unlovable and without much physical charm. Anne, however, has none of Jane Eyre’s ready temper, tongue, and fire; she tends to think and feel