Jane Austen

Jane Austen, b. 1775, Steventon, Hampshire, England
Lived in Bath (Somerset), 1801-1806
Southampton (Hampshire), 1806-1809
Chawton (Hampshire), 1809-1817
Visited London and Kent
d. 1817, at Winchester, of Addison's Disease

From: http://viking.hgo.se/maps/england.html

Austen's Oeuvre

	Drafted	Published
"The Juvenalia":	1787-95	20th c.
Love and Friendship; Catherine; Lady Susan		
Elinor and Marianne	1795	1811 as *Sense and Sensibility*
First Impressions	1796-97	1813 as *Pride and Prejudice*
Susan	1799	1817 as *Northanger Abbey* (Sold to publisher in 1802; withheld. Repurchased and revised, 1816)
"The Watsons" (abandoned)	1804	20th c.
Mansfield Park	1813	1814
Emma	1814	1815
Persuasion	1815-16	1817 (published posthumously with *Northanger Abbey*)
"Sanditon" (fragment)	1817	20th c.

Other Major British Authors of Austen's Time

Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823): Radcliffe pioneered the Gothic novel, tales of terrifying adventures set in lonely castles or ruined abbeys. She was also praised for her extended descriptions of landscapes. Her novels were very popular and initially praised by critics, though she later fell out of favor. Austen parodied the Gothic novel in *Northanger Abbey*.

Best known work: *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)

Fanny Burney (1752-1840): Burney's major novels feature a beautiful and intelligent but naïve young heroine. They trace her entry into society, the lessons she learns about true and false love, and typically end with the heroine's marriage to a rich but honorable man. Austen admired and was influenced by Burney.

Best known work: *Evelina* (1778), an epistolary novel (novel in letters)

Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849): An advocate (with her husband) of women's education, Edgeworth lived most of her life in Ireland. She published a range of books, including novels based on Irish life and history as well as novels based on contemporary English society, and a large body of children's stories. She was admired by Austen and also Sir Walter Scott; Scott acknowledged her influence on his own work.

Best known work: *Castle Rackrent* (1800), which traces three generations of an Irish family; regarded as the first true historical novel in English.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797): an outspoken advocate of political and judicial equality, social reform, and the rights of women.

Best known work: A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851): Daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, who died shortly after her birth, and the novelist and philosopher William Godwin; later the wife of Romantic poet Percy Shelley. She wrote a number of novels, most of which have science fiction elements, as well as stories, biographies, and travelogues.

Best known work: Frankenstein (1818).

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832): a prolific, popular, and enormously influential writer, Scott began his career as a scholar of poetry and writer of popular verse romances (such as *Marmion*, 1808). He later turned to novel writing, publishing anonymously at first in case the novels failed and damaged his reputation as a poet. He is known for both his historical novels (such as *Waverley* and *The Heart of Midlothian*) and his "romances": novels of courtly life set in the Medieval or Tudor periods (such as *Ivanhoe*), though his historical novels are seen as more significant.

Scott praised Jane Austen in an essay published in 1815:

> We bestow no mean compliment upon the author of "Emma" when we say that keeping close to common incidents, and to such characters as occupy the ordinary walks of life, she has produced sketches of such spirit and originality that we never miss the excitation which depends upon a narrative of uncommon events, arising from the consideration of minds, manners, and sentiments, greatly above our own. In this class she stands almost alone; for the scenes of Miss Edgeworth are laid in higher life, varied by more romantic incident, and by her remarkable power of embodying and illustrating national character. But the author of "Emma" confines herself chiefly to the middling classes of society; her most distinguished characters do not rise greatly above well-bred country gentlemen and ladies; and those which are sketched with most originality and precision, belong to a class rather below that standard. The narrative of all her novels is composed of such common occurrences as may have fallen under the observation of most folks; and her dramatis personæ conduct themselves upon the motives and principles which the readers may recognize as ruling their own, and that of most of their own acquaintances.
>
> —From "The Quarterly Review," October, 1815.

In a diary entry of 1826, Scott himself contrasted his work to Austen's:

> READ again, and for the third time at least, Miss Austen's very finely written novel of "Pride and Prejudice." That young lady has a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The big bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me.
>
> —From "The Journal of Sir Walter Scott," March, 1826.

The Romantic Poets, including William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), John Keats (1795-1821), and Lord Byron (1788-1824). Austen certainly read the work of these poets, and seems to have had mixed feelings about it. Among her novels, *Persuasion* engages most directly with Romantic poetry (Captain Benwick, for example, reads poems by Scott and Byron, p. 67). In general, the values her novels promote seem to be at odds with Romantic values on emotional expression, individualism, revolutionary change, and the power of imagination. Austen preferred the earlier poets William Cowper and George Crabbe.

Literary Terms

Free indirect discourse (also called "free indirect style"): Austen pioneered this technique, which is now quite common; it was one of her most important contributions to the development of the novel as a genre. In free indirect discourse, the narrative adopts the perspective, sentiments, or ideas of a character, while remaining in the third person. Essentially, the narrative replicates the character's thoughts or perceptions. The use of this technique allows us to see the character from the distanced, objective point of view of third person narration, while also seeing how and what the character thinks.
For example:

> On the morning appointed for Admiral and Mrs. Croft's seeing Kellynch-hall, Anne found it most natural to take her almost daily walk to Lady Russell's, and keep out of the way till all was over; when she found it most natural to be sorry she had missed the opportunity of seeing them. (*Persuasion*, Norton p 22)

The passage reflects Anne's thoughts and perceptions: her rationalization and then her regret.

Often, free indirect discourse leads readers to understand that the character's perception is incomplete, erroneous, deluded, or based on faulty assumptions. In other words, free indirect discourse allows the reader to understand not only what the character is thinking or perceiving, but also what she is failing to think or perceive. For example:

> Their house was undoubtedly the best in Camden-place; their drawing-rooms had many decided advantages of all the others which they had either seen or heard of; and the superiority was not the less in the style of the fitting-up, or the taste of the furniture. Their acquaintance was exceedingly sought after. Every body was wanting to visit them. (*Persuasion* Norton p 90).

Here we see the limitations and egotism of Sir Walter and Elizabeth's style of thought. To the extent that we do not take these passages at face value (believing straightforwardly that they live in the best house), the narrative becomes **"ironic"** (we see more than the character sees; we gather a meaning that is at odds with what is literally stated).

In some of Austen's other novels, such as *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, the heroine's perceptions are incorrect at first: we see that she is making mistakes, which she herself is later brought to recognize. In *Persuasion*, Anne's perceptions are less frequently undercut: from the beginning, she has a higher degree of insight into herself than some of the other heroines, and her perspective is more closely aligned with that of the narrator.

Focalization: in a third-person narrative, when the narration is given from the perspective of a particular character, the narrative is being "focalized" through that character. The first example quoted above is "focalized" through Anne; the second through Sir Walter and Elizabeth (often lumped together as "they" in the novel).

Much of *Persuasion* is "focalized" through Anne. As a result, Anne has the most fully developed "internality" (we see more of her psychology and feelings).

Society

In England, social class has always played an overtly important role in social life. From the establishment of the English monarchy in the Middle Ages through the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, class was almost inevitably determined by birth. You would belong to the social class into which you were born. The rise of capitalism in the eighteenth century produced both new "middle classes" and a greater degree of social mobility (both upward and downward). New opportunities for making money also meant that wealth no longer corresponded exactly with social class. A "nobody" like Wentworth makes a fortune in the wars; Mr. Elliot marries a "rich woman of inferior birth"; Sir Walter's income is no longer adequate to maintain his aristocratic lifestyle on his country estate.

Marriage: During this period, marriage was an important tool of class mobility, and also social security, for both men and women. Since middle and upper class women had almost no job opportunities, marrying well was women's main avenue for achieving domestic comfort and financial security. If a woman did not marry, she might remain in her parents' household as a "spinster." Single women with no other source of income might become governesses or companions in an aristocratic household, open a school, or try to write for profit (like Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and a number of lesser known women writers).

Women had very limited civil and legal rights. For the most part, their security depended on the good will of their male relatives. In some cases, a widow and her children could be evicted from the home they had occupied upon the death of the husband, who would have no legal means of protecting their financial future (this happens to the Dashwoods in *Sense and Sensibility*).

The British Baronage: The reigning monarch could bestow a title (Duke, Marquis, Earl, Viscount, or Baron) and accompanying lands ("estate") on a man. For example, if the King "creates you" Baron of Portage, the whole estate of Portage is now yours, and you are called Lord Portage. You also get a seat in the House of Lords, in Parliament. When you die, your eldest son inherits your title and estate; the rest of your children are mere commoners. Under most circumstances, women could not directly inherit property or titles (exception: a woman could inherit the throne). The eldest living son was always the heir, unless he committed an egregious crime and was legally "dispossessed." In the absence of a son, an estate might pass to a younger brother of the deceased lord, a more distant male relative (such as Mr. Elliot), or in some cases to the husband of a married daughter. Legal restrictions governed how much of an estate one could sell. Austen tells us that "only a small portion" of Sir Walter's estate is sellable (p 8), but estates could be rented out, often to "new money" (such as that of the Crofts).

You were not required to live on your estate. Most estates were located in rural areas. If you were wealthy, you might find the country boring and spend most of your time traveling abroad or living in your London "townhouse." If you were going broke, like Sir Walter, you might find it cheaper to live in a spa town (Bath or Bristol), or on the continent (Paris or Rome).

These titles could only be inherited or granted by the monarch. However, in 1611 the monarchy created a new category: "baronet." This title, which did not come with estate or seat in parliament, could be purchased for about £1000. It was a money-making

ploy on the part of the monarchy. Snobs would not consider baronets to be genuine nobility. It is therefore significant that Sir Walter (a baronet) takes his title so very seriously. Knighthood was (and remains) an honorary title bestowed by the monarch, ranking below baronet. Lady Russell's husband was a Knight; having respect for traditional categories of rank, she therefore looks up to Sir Walter.

Traditionally, the aristocracy lived lavishly on the fortune they had amassed from agricultural profits, generated by the dependent people who farmed their lands. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, this older agricultural economy was replaced by a capitalist market economy—a shift facilitated by the industrial revolution. As a result, the aristocracy was, as Austen puts it, "growing distressed for money" (p 7). During the nineteenth century, the aristocracy engaged in various political maneuvers designed to protect its income, including the controversial **Corn Laws** (kept prices of domestic corn high and supply low) and "**enclosure**" (closing off and privatizing land that had been communally farmed). Other methods of trying to stay afloat included investing in domestic or **imperial** ventures (for example, buying plantations or gold mines in the colonies; investing in the East India company). The money economy was extremely volatile, and investments were risky (as illustrated by Mrs. Smith's situation in *Persuasion*).

Gentry: This term generally referred to untitled but wealthy upper middle class families living in the country, who did not have to work for a living. Their fortune might have come from inheritance, marriage, or past success in business. Their estates were clustered around small villages. Like the aristocracy, they enjoyed luxuries and participated in a highly ritualized round of social activities, but typically spent most of the year in the country and did not quite parallel the aristocracy's extravagant standards for entertainment, dress, or travel.

Middle Classes: Untitled men and their families who were or had been engaged in trade or the professions, but lived comfortably. During this period, successful middle class families often had more liquid funds than did the aristocracy. Once the money was made, the middle class often sought to ally themselves with the aristocracy, though marriage or purchasing an estate. However, the aristocracy looked down upon anyone who had been involved in trade, and resisted accepting the middle class into their social milieu. The codes of dress and manners became highly significant indicators of one's class background, often preventing the middle class from "passing" in upper class circles.

Working Class: In Austen's time, the Industrial Revolution was still predominately rural. Mills needed fast-running streams for power; the steam engine was not yet widely used. Railways were not yet widespread; transportation improvements centered on canals, steamboats, ships, and road travel (improving carriages and road surfaces). Ships, in particular, were a source of great national pride.

This was a period of high prices and low wages; the vast majority of the English population was living in poverty. But conditions were not as bad as those that came later, during the economic downturns of the 1830's and 40's.

Traditionally, it had been incumbent on the aristocracy to provide "welfare" measures for the peasants attached to their estates. The Lady of the Manor might, for

example, send soup and medicine to a sick child living on the estate. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, however, the aristocracy had begun to abandon its traditional social responsibilities (something frowned upon throughout Austen's novels). Among the upper classes, the problem of poverty was not widely believed to be solvable; it was not viewed as an issue that required action. The "Speenhamland System" was put in place, providing tax-based parish funds to supplement low wages, keeping workers at subsistence level. The system was inadequate but probably helped prevent the level of desperation that might have issued in revolutionary action on the part of the working class. In some cases, the rural working class protested industrialization, engaging in demonstrations or "machine breaking." These groups came to be called the **Luddites**. Fear of a working class revolution prompted exceedingly violent suppression of working class activism; for example, after 1812 tampering with machines carried the death penalty. Working class conditions did not significantly improve until the late nineteenth century.

One rarely sees the working class in Austen's fiction, but one does see concerns with the moral and social responsibilities of the upper classes. Some critics see *Persuasion* as the novel in which Austen finally abandons hope for the reform of the aristocracy, and puts her faith instead into the new middle class (modeled by Wentworth and the Crofts).

Evening dresses of 1806 and 1807

Autumnal walking dress with pelisse, 1815

For additional fashion illustrations and other tidbits about Regency social life, see "The Republic of Pemberley": www.pemberley.com

Money

Adapted from Edward Copeland, "The Economic Realities of Jane Austen's Day" (in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997, 131-48.)

It is difficult to convert the British pound (£) of Jane Austen's day into a 21st century American dollar value. However, one can arrive at an approximation by multiplying £1 x $80. In *Persuasion*, Austen rarely gives us exact sums of money, though she does so in her other novels. In *Pride and Prejudice* for example, Mrs. Bennett is understandably excited when Bingley moves into the neighborhood: "a single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year" (1). According to this formula, Bingley has an annual income of at least $320,000. Darcy, the wealthiest character in Austen's fiction, has an income of about £ 10,000 ($800,000) a year, plus large assets (Pemberley).

In Austen's day, much of the gentry's annual income came from interest-earning investments. Money was most often invested in the "National Funds" (loosely comparable to today's government savings bonds), earning either 4% or 5% annual interest. The money to be invested might have come through inheritance (for the true aristocracy: "old money" like Darcy's) or from trade (for newly minted gentry: "new money" like Bingley's). It was also possible to for men to acquire an annual "living" (salary) by being appointed to a permanent position in the government or the church.

Marriage Settlement: the sum of money a woman would bring to a marriage. The amount of investment capital a woman could contribute to a family was an important factor in her marriage-ability. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet has £1,000, which would bring only £40 per year in income (about $3,200). She certainly cannot live independently on this income, and must marry in order to have any security.

Servants and Carriages: In addition to their practical value, servants and carriages served as outward signs of a family's wealth (or lack thereof). Sir Walter refuses Anne's plan of retrenchment: "'What! Every comfort of life knocked off! Journeys, London, servants, horses, table…. No, he would sooner quit Kellynch-hall at once, than remain in it on such disgraceful terms'" (p. 10).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bennets have an annual income of £2,000 (about $160,000), which is enough to maintain a carriage, though not enough for dedicated carriage horses (they must borrow the farm horses). Austen's own family had £600 ($48,000), which was not enough to keep a carriage.

Without owning a carriage, you could still be considered respectable if you had at least one servant. Having no servants would be like having no furnace, no hot water heater, no dishwasher, no vacuum, no oven, no refrigerator, no lawnmower and no laundry machines. The fact that Mrs. Smith is "unable even to afford herself the comfort of a servant" (101) indicates her seriously impoverished state.

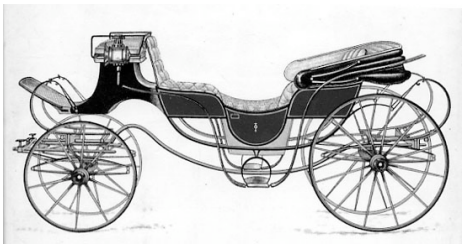
To keep a servant, you would need an income of at least £100, preferably £200. Having one servant would be comparable to living in a studio apartment that has hot water, a small stove, and a vacuum cleaner.

An income of £400-500/year enabled you to live comfortably. You could keep three servants and hire a boy to help with the garden (comparable to having a small house with a decent kitchen, central heating, and a lawnmower). You would have some leisure time to visit friends. You would not be able to entertain, keep a carriage, or travel.

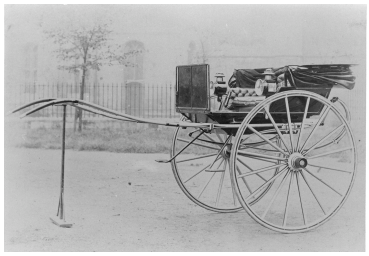
On £2,000/year, the Bennets keep 6 women servants and 5 men, which is proportionate to their income. They probably have a cook, a housekeeper, two housemaids, a scullery maid, a footman, a butler, a coachman, a groom and stable boy, a gardener and a gardener's boy (to care for the "small park").

Darcy's income would enable him to keep at least 26 servants, which would be quite necessary for maintaining a large estate like Pemberley. Some aristocratic estates required 40 or even 60 servants (!).

Registry Office for the Hiring of Servants (by Thomas Rowlandson, c. 1800-05)



A Stately Barouche



A Country Gig

A Lady's Phaeton

Insert Pool, “Basic Etiquette”

Politics

Parliament: During Austen's time, the British parliament consisted of the Sovereign (head of state), the House of Commons (elected statesmen), and the House of Lords (peers and high-ranking Anglican clergymen). The Prime Minister was selected and appointed by the Sovereign. Before 1832, only male Anglican (Church of England) aristocrats could vote. The Reform Act of 1832 granted the vote to male property owners (upper and upper middle classes).

Tory: Political party comprised mainly of aristocrats and country gentry who were closely identified with the Church of England. The party protected the commercial and political interests of the aristocracy against the rising middle class, as well as the working class, and strongly supported imperialism. The Tory party was consistently in power from 1793-1832. For the most part, Austen was Tory in her political views. This party later evolved into today's Conservative Party.

Whig: Political party supported mainly by middle class landowners and merchants. This party asserted the interests of the middle class against the aristocracy, and upheld the power of parliament against the crown. In the early 19th century, the Whigs became identified with religious dissenters, the interests of industry, and the push for social and parliamentary reform. This party later evolved into today's Liberal Party.

Radical: Stance of support for political, judicial, and social equality among all (or all male) citizens of a country, including advocacy for the rights of the working class. The "Chartist" movement, which advocated sweeping reform of parliament and the electoral system, began in the early Victorian period (1838), but did not succeed in winning the vote for working class men until 1867. The secret ballot was finally adopted in 1872, and women gained the vote in England in 1918.

Period Monarchs

George III, King of Great Britain, 1760-1820

George IV, the Prince Regent, became King in 1820 and ruled until his death in 1830. After his death, the throne passed briefly to William and then to Victoria in 1837.

The Regency: This term refers to the period from 1811-1820, when George the Prince of Wales acted as monarch on behalf of his father, George III, who had gone mad. This was a period of political instability and uncertainty. Jane Austen strongly disapproved of the Prince Regent, who was something of a libertine, and felt he had mistreated his wife, Princess Caroline. However, he admired her work, and she was compelled to dedicate *Emma* to him.

Period Prime Ministers

William Pitt (Pitt the Younger), 1783-1801 (resigned)
Henry Addington, Viscount Sidmouth, 1801-1804 (replaced)
William Pitt ("second ministry"), 1804-1806 (died)
William Cavendish-Bentinck, Duke of Portland, 1807-1809 (resigned)
Spencer Perceval, 1809-1812 (died)
Robert Banks Jenkinson, Earl of Liverpool, 1812-1827 (retired)

Military History

The French Revolution: a more significant event in British history than the American Revolution, in part because France was just across the channel. The Revolution is usually dated from the "storming of the Bastille" (king's prison) in 1789. A complicated and uneasy alliance of revolutionary parties aimed to overthrow the monarchy and institute a Republican system of government. The British had accomplished the same kind of change in the 17th century, executing King Charles I, abolishing the absolute power of the monarchy, and beginning a long process of shifting political power to an elected parliament. At first, the English supported the French revolutionaries. As the war went on, however, the tide of feeling turned. The French revolutionary parties included working class radicals who advocated the abolition of property rights, threatening the values of the English middle class. Fear of revolution spread in England, leading to harsh, repressive measures: habeas corpus was suspended, public meetings were prohibited, and advocates of even moderate political change were charged with treason. British radicals (including the Romantic poets) protested such measures, but even to them the war in France began to appear so bloody and chaotic as to be unsupportable. In 1793, British support for exiled (or executed) French aristocrats led France to declare war against Britain (and then Britain against France). This war ended with the Treaty of Amiens in 1802; however, Napoleon was crowned emperor in 1804, and the **Napoleonic Wars** ensued, lasting until 1815. Britain was also at war with the United States from 1812-15 ("War of 1812"). In short, Britain was at war for most of Jane Austen's life, though *Persuasion* is the only novel that deals directly with war.

Napoleonic Wars: The military characters in *Persuasion*, including Wentworth and Admiral Crofts, had been fighting in the Napoleonic Wars. Wentworth was "made commander in consequence of the action off St. Domingo" (p. 18), a battle that took place in February 1806. We can infer that Wentworth probably fought in the Battle of Trafalgar (October 1805), an important sea-battle between the British Royal Navy and the combined forces of the French and Spanish navies, in which the famous Admiral Lord Nelson was killed. 1807-1812 were famine years in England, made worse by French economic embargoes.

When the novel opens in 1814, Wentworth comes home to England because France had been defeated (or so it seemed). Napoleon had abdicated on April 6, 1814, and was exiled to the island of Elba. *Persuasion* ends in late February of 1815: that is, just before Napoleon escaped from Elba and Britain once again went to war. The so-called "Hundred Days" began on March 1, 1815 and ended with the Battle of Waterloo in June, 1815, followed by Napoleon's final surrender on July 15, 1815.

Persuasion reflects Austen's admiration of the British Navy, in which two of her brothers had served. The British naval forces were crucial in protecting England from invasion by Napoleon. The wars also provided an opportunity for men like Wentworth to make their fortunes, particularly through capturing enemy ships. Thus, Admiral Croft remarks, "There comes old Sir Archibald Drew and his grandson. … Ah! the peace has come to soon for that younker" (112), meaning that the grandson will not have the same opportunity for financial advancement through his naval career.

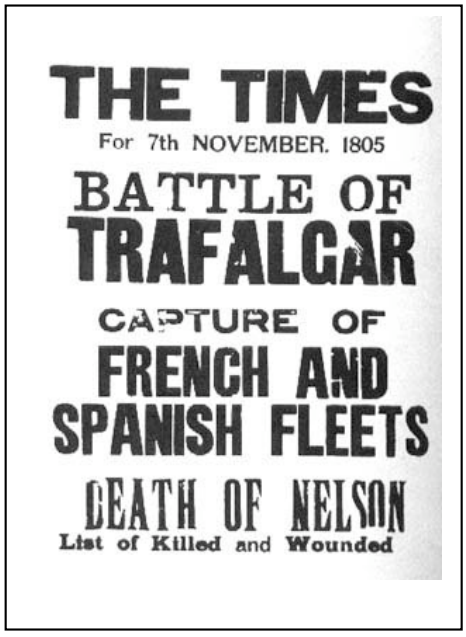
British Imperialism: The British merchant presence in India in the early 18th c. was small and totally focused on trade. The British engaged in a genuine if self-interested attempt to maintain good relations with the Indians. Inter-marriage was common, and the British did not yet have a sense of moral or religious mission.

In 1754, British troops were deployed to India as a result of Franco-British rivalry in the region. At this point, British merchants and military leaders began to interfere in local politics for private financial gain. The British East India Company wielded greater and greater political power both in India and in England. The prospects of making a fortune in India became increasingly attractive to young men of limited means. Some politicians expressed moral concern about extorting the Indians, but were largely overruled.

By the 1790's the whole Indian subcontinent was under British control. The "native" people were now denigrated, despised, and abused; the British "Raj" formed exclusive social circles. Less and less contact with the Indian people resulted in greater and greater bigotry, until the Indians occupied the status of animals in the British mind.

The nineteenth century witnessed expansion of British colonial interests in other parts of the world, including the East Indies, Bermuda, and the Bahamas (referenced by Admiral Croft, p 47); later Africa and parts of South America. By the early 20th century, the British government controlled approximately 25% of the world's landmass and population.

Ireland was also under English control. English economic restrictions kept the Irish in a state of famine. The early 19th century witnessed various failed or overturned attempts to improve the Irish situation, which remains to some extent unresolved even today. In fact, numerous 21st century problems of national identity, sovereignty, and geographical borders (such as the border between India and Pakistan) have their roots in 19th century British Imperialism (or European Imperialism, more generally).


THE TIMES

For 7th NOVEMBER. 1805

BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR

CAPTURE OF FRENCH AND SPANISH FLEETS

DEATH OF NELSON

List of Killed and Wounded


Britannia Triumphant

THE MOST DECISIVE and GLORIOUS NAVAL VICTORY

that has ever been obtained

THE Victorious BRITISH FLEET

Commanded by the most RENOWNED, most GALLANT, and ever to be LAMENTED HERO,

Admiral Lord Viscount NELSON

Religion

<u>Church of England</u> ("Anglican"): Conflicts between the Pope and the English monarchy in the Middle Ages led to the establishment of the Church of England in 1534. King Henry VIII declared himself head of the Church of England, and Catholic practices were vilified and violently suppressed. His act roughly coincided with a broader movement in Europe for reform of the Catholic Church ("the Reformation"). In theology, the Church of England stands midway between Catholic and reformed (protestant) traditions, though it is almost identical to Catholicism in much of its liturgy and ecclesiastical structure.

The Church of England was very closely linked to the government. The monarch was "Supreme Governor" of the church; the monarch or his "peers" appointed the clergy; the clergy had civil authority and often held office. Bishops and Archbishops sat in the House of Lords, and almost always supported the monarch. A position in the Anglican clergy was accompanied by a house and an income (called "a living"). Entering the clergy was considered a socially respectable career for younger sons of the gentry or aristocracy: in *Persuasion*, Charles Hayter, for example, is a curate (p. 49.) Often, this career was planned for a son from an early age, not a result of choice or strong religious convictions. In the eighteenth-century, the British clergy acquired a reputation for idleness, social climbing, and indifference to their religious duties.

<u>Dissenters</u> (also called "nonconformists"): This category included Catholics as well as protestant sects such as Methodists, Quakers, and Unitarians---anyone who "dissented" from the official beliefs and practices of the Church of England. In general, the protestant dissenters objected to the need for an intermediary (a priest) between the individual and God. Some placed a greater emphasis on the personal emotional component of religious experience (Methodists), others placed a greater emphasis on reasoning and liberal social philosophy (Unitarians). Some of these groups were also influenced by John Calvin's beliefs in predestination and in the bible as the sole source of truth. By Austen's time, dissenters were no longer subject to imprisonment or execution, and were permitted to worship under certain regulations. But they did not have full civil rights, and were barred by the "Test Act" of 1673 from holding public office. In 1787, a controversial motion to repeal this act was introduced in parliament. The motion remained a "hot button issue" until it was passed in 1828.

Members of the new middle class were likely to be religious dissenters (in part because of the strong alliance between the Church of England and the aristocracy). As the middle class gained power, the stigma attached to protestant dissent subsided. Catholicism continued to evoke suspicion and prejudice in England throughout the nineteenth century.

<u>Evangelicalism</u>: a movement within the Anglican Church. Evangelicals placed greater emphasis on the personal emotional component of religious experience, and introduced a much stronger and more open expression of feeling into religious texts and services. Evangelicalism was increasingly connected to social reform movements, including the abolition of the slave trade (1807) and slavery (1833), and attacked the moral laxity of the appointed clergy and the peerage. Austen, whose religious practices were traditional and conservative, disliked Evangelicalism.

Excerpt from: *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression: Jane Austen's* Persuasion. By Jocelyn Harris. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2007.

Persuasion: General Discussion Questions

1. What does the novel suggest about the nature and role of feeling, the dangers of feeling, or the relationship between gender and feeling? What does it suggest about appropriate ways of expressing and/or representing feeling?

2. What does the novel suggest about making appropriate distinctions between the private and the public? Where do we see public space (or behavior) contrasted with private space (or behavior)? Where do they overlap or interfere with each other?

3. Does the novel explore tensions between economic motives and moral behavior?

4. Does the novel question the extent to which a stable and cohesive society can or should accommodate individualism (both the individual avarice or ambition fostered by capitalism, and the emotionally expressive individualism fostered by Romanticism)? At what point does self-suppression become a form of self-destruction, especially for women?

5. What does the novel suggest about the following epistemological questions (questions about knowing): How does one come to know oneself? How does one arrive at an accurate reading of other people's feelings and behavior? How does one deal with the problem of multiple opposing interpretations of a situation?

6. According to the novel, how does one deal with the problem of self-delusion? Is a degree of delusion necessary to the well-being of the individual, relationship, or stable society? Is absolute truth always, or ever, a social good? Is truth more important that a sense of accord?

7. In the novel, what is the value of "persuadability," vs. "firmness"?

8. In the novel, what are the effects of class prejudice, or of pre-conceived principles in general?

9. Thinking of various characters, at what point does "pride" become "vanity"? When is it wise and proper to assert yourself, or to efface yourself? What is the proper role of self-esteem? Does the novel contrast true vs. false sources of self-esteem? What are the social and psychological effects of over- or under-valuing the self?

10. According to the novel, who deserves to have moral or social authority? How should authority be exercised? How much respect should an individual have for authority?

--Does "tradition" have value in and of itself? What are the competing claims of the old vs. the new? Can they be resolved?

11. The novel contains at least one important repetition (Wentworth repeats his proposal to Anne). What does the novel suggest about the personal, historical, or literary possibilities of repetition? What does it suggest about the relationship between repetition and difference, or sameness and change?

--Can time alone bring about change, or does change require action? What kinds of actions create change? How much change are people capable of making? What is the relation between change and revelation (discovering what was there all along)? What is the relation between personal and social change?

--Could this novel be written today? What seems specific to the time period, and what might carry over to our own day?

Persuasion: A Reading Guide

Chapters I-VI (Norton pp 3-35)

Synopsis: It is the summer of 1814. We are introduced to Sir Walter Elliot, whose wife has been dead for 14 years. Sir Walter has three daughters: Elizabeth, Anne, and Mary. Mary, a hypochondriac, has married Charles Musgrove and lives at Uppercross Cottage, near Charles's parents and sisters (Louisa and Henrietta). Lady Russell is a close family friend; she was a friend of Anne's deceased mother. Mr. Elliot (William Walter Elliot, esq.) a cousin, will inherit Sir Walter's estate in the absence of a son. We also meet Mr. Shepard, a lawyer, and his daughter, Mrs. Clay (a friend of Elizabeth's of whom Lady Russell disapproves). We learn that Elizabeth had hoped to marry Mr. Elliot, but instead he married "a rich woman of inferior birth" (6). The Elliots are going broke, and decide to rent out their ancestral home, Kellynch Hall, to Admiral and Mrs. Crofts. Mrs. Crofts is sister to the two Mr. Wentworths, one of whom (Fredrick) had long ago been briefly engaged to Anne. Sir Walter and Elizabeth depart for Bath, while Anne goes to Uppercross Cottage.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

What qualities seem to characterize Sir Walter, Elizabeth, Anne, Mary, and Lady Russell, in these early scenes? How does Austen convey their characters to us?

The opening chapter is rather unusual in that it seems to suggest that all of the stories are already over. What is it that sets the narrative in motion?

How does each character view the need to move away from home? What do their views show us about their values? Whose values does the novel seem to endorse?

How does Uppercross Cottage compare to Kellynch-hall?

What social and historical changes are reflected in the Elliot family's situation? Can we discern the narrator's attitude toward these specific changes, and/or toward change in general?

At this stage, does it appear to you that Anne was right to refuse Wentworth? Was Lady Russell right to dissuade her from marrying him? Was it a legitimate exercise of authority?

Chapters VII-XII (Norton pp 35-79)

Synopsis: Captain Wentworth arrives in the neighborhood. Anne avoids him. He is looking to marry—anyone but Anne—and commences flirtations with both Musgrove sisters. Henrietta has another love interest: her cousin, Charles Hayter (in England, it was not considered incestuous to marry a cousin). Eventually, she is persuaded by Louisa to patch things up with him, and Wentworth's attentions focus on Louisa. They all make a trip to Lyme, where Wentworth's naval friends reside (the Harwicks, and the bereaved Captain Benwick). Louisa gets the idea that it is a virtue in Wentworth's eyes to be "unpersuadable," to be firm and resolute (pp 58-59). This proves to be her downfall, literally (p. 74). Anne is the most competent person on the scene. Louisa is moved to the Harwick's house; Wentworth wishes Anne to stay and nurse her, but this is prevented by Mary's selfish egotism. Anne goes back to Uppercross with Wentworth and Henrietta; Wentworth immediately leaves to return to Lyme.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

Some critics suggest that Louisa's fall inversely mirrors Anne's decision to refuse Wentworth's proposal. Unlike Anne, Louisa refuses to be persuaded. She jumps too soon; Wentworth fails to catch her; she is gravely injured, and he is tortured by guilt. For the characters and the readers, what new light does this scene shed on Anne's earlier decision?

Wentworth and Mrs. Croft discuss the propriety of having women on board navy ships, pp 46-48. What light does this conversation shed on both characters? Overall, what assumptions about women or femininity does the novel seem to challenge, or not challenge? What assumptions about men or masculinity does it challenge, or not challenge? What values seem applicable to both genders?

Near the end of Chapter X (pp 61-62), Anne witnesses the Croft's "style of driving." Is this a metaphor for their marriage? How do the Crofts compare to other characters or couples?

This section contains two memorable physical interactions between Wentworth and Anne (p. 54 and 61). What do these two moments have in common? What do they reveal about the relationship? As a reader, do you find these scenes effective? Why or why not?

What do you make of Captain Benwick, and Anne's advice to him (p 68)? Earlier, Anne thinks: "He is younger than I am; younger in feeling, if not in fact; younger as a man" (65). What do you think she means?

Chapters XIII-XIX (Norton pp 79-120)

Synopsis: Anne leaves Uppercross, stays briefly with Lady Russell at Kellynch Grange, then joins her family at Bath. She is informed of Captain Benwick's possible interest in her, but he never arrives (another failed beginning to a story that does not occur). She later learns that he has proposed to Louisa. In Bath, she meets Mr. Elliot once again; he appears to be romantically interested in her. Lady Russell approves of him as a potential marriage partner, but Anne is suspicious of his motives. Anne also encounters an old schoolmate, Mrs. Smith, who is unwell and living in reduced circumstances. Sir Walter and Elizabeth are busy courting the Viscountess Dalrymple and her daughter (both of whom Anne disparages: she values the substance of the person above their rank). Finally, she encounters Wentworth in a shop; he seems changed.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

How does the environment of Bath contrast with other settings in the novel, such as Kellynch, Uppercross, and Lyme? Why doesn't Anne like Bath? Compare her perspective to that of Lady Russell (89), Sir Walter and Elizabeth (90-91), and Admiral Croft (112-13).

In Chapter XVII, Lady Russell paints a picture of Anne as "The future Lady Elliot" (105-06). What in this picture is attractive to Anne? What is not attractive? In what ways would this future be a return to the past?

Lady Russell is presented as intelligent and perceptive. Why isn't she suspicious of Mr. Elliot, as is Anne (106-07)? What affects the perspective of each character?

In chapter XVIII, we are presented with a letter from Mary, which gives us an opportunity to contrast Mary's style of writing and storytelling with Austen's own style of writing and storytelling. What is different?

A Regency-era pianoforte

Chapters XX-XXIV (Norton 120-168, end). You may also want to read Austen's original ending (Norton pp 168-77)

Synopsis: Most of the major characters now converge at Bath. Anne speaks with Wentworth at a concert, but is distracted by Mr. Elliot's advances; Wentworth forms the impression that they are in love. Mrs. Smith imparts details of Mr. Elliot's unsavory character, past misdeeds, and present scheming, including his determination to prevent Mrs. Clay (another scheming social climber) from marrying Sir Walter. Such a marriage might interfere with his inheritance (if they had a son). In a parlor at the White Hart Inn, Anne argues with Captain Harville about whether men or women form stronger emotional attachments. Wentworth, who is writing a letter in the same room, overhears the conversation; he leaves a letter for Anne, which resolves the miscommunications that have been impeding them (158). They are at last reunited, reconciled with one another and also with Lady Russell (167), and engaged (again) to marry.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

Did you find the ending surprising? Why or why not?

--If the group has access to the original ending: which do you find stronger, and why? What do you make of Austen's changes?

The scene at the White Hart contains numerous instances of double addressees: the portrait intended for Fanny is being re-gifted to Louisa; Wentworth writes to Anne under cover of writing to Benwick; words meant for Wentworth are addressed to Harville. What should we make of this pattern? Does it heighten the scene's effectiveness, or tie in to the novel's themes?

Some critics have argued that the subplot involving Mr. Elliot, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Clay is unnecessary to the novel, and perhaps interferes with its structure. Do you agree? In what ways does this subplot add to or detract from the novel as a whole? If it is unnecessary to the novel's plot or structure, does it contribute in some way to the novel's themes or messages?

Is Anne a character who changes and develops, or does she remain stable throughout the novel? Does Wentworth change and develop? Which characters, if any, are led to revise their understandings of themselves and/or others?

Do Anne and Wentworth gain anything from waiting 8.5 years to marry, or has this wait been a waste? Would it have been better if Anne had not followed Lady Russell's initial advice?

Which character traits, and/or social values, does Austen hold up as most admirable? Which does she disparage? Who seems to serve as a role model for Anne?

In what ways is the novel critical of the aristocracy? Is the Navy being held up as a superior social model? If so, what values does the Navy represent?

Like most of Austen's novels, *Persuasion* covers the period of a woman's life when she transitions away from her childhood home and embarks on the process of establishing her adult home (by marrying). Does Austen make this period of life into the defining moment of a woman's story? If so, what might be the pro's and con's of this choice?

For Further Reading

If your group would like to add a novel, you might consider:

I. One of Austen's other novels (*Sense and Sensibility*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park,* or *Emma*). *Sense and Sensibility*, though not considered one of Austen's best-plotted novels, is a good complement to *Persuasion*. Some critics argue that *Persuasion* is Austen's revision of views expressed in *Sense and Sensibility*. The two novels present rather different views of the proper relationship between individual feeling and social propriety, and also of the ability of time alone to bring about a change of heart.

2. A novel by one of Austen's contemporaries (see pp 3-4, above). Fanny Burney's *Evelina* is especially engaging, and of manageable length.

3. A novel from C.S. Forster's "Horatio Hornblower" series (such as *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower*). Though written and published in the early twentieth century, Forster's books are about the British Navy during the Napoleonic era. This series has also been dramatized for television by A&E, and may be available on DVD.

4. *The Jane Austen Book Club*, a witty and well-crafted novel by Karen Joy Fowler (Penguin 2004), also available on DVD.

If your group would like to watch a DVD or Video: Film and television adaptations of Austen's novels abound. We especially recommend:

1. *Persuasion*, directed by Roger Michell (Columbia/Tristar 1995)
2. *Sense and Sensibility*, directed by Andrew Davies (BBC 2008)
3. *Sense and Sensibility*, directed by Ang Lee, with Kate Winslett and Emma Thompson. (Columbia/Mirage, 1996)
4. *Pride and Prejudice*, directed by Cyril Coke (BBC Video, 1990)
5. *Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice*, directed by Simon Langton, with Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle (A&E Home Video, 1995)

If your group would like to read interpretations of *Persuasion*, the Norton Critical Edition provides a selection of critical excerpts in the back. Amidst the universe of good Austen criticism, we particularly recommend:

1. *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels*, by Alistair Duckworth (Johns Hopkins UP, 1971). This is a classic scholarly work that interprets the novels in the context of social changes in Austen's time. Chapter 5, on *Persuasion*, can be read alone.

2. *Jane Austen: The Secret of Style*, by D. A. Miller (Princeton UP 2005). This is a short, provocative, creatively-written book by a prominent literary critic. It focuses on Austen's style—and style in Austen's novels—together with the unusual relationship Austen's writing style allows her to establish with her readers.

Other Recommended Secondary Sources

Biographies of Jane Austen:

1. *Jane Austen: Her Life*, by Park Honan (Ballantine 1989).
2. *The Life of Jane Austen*, by John Halperin (Johns Hopkins UP, 1984).
3. Austen purists disapprove of the recent film *Becoming Jane*, which is not based on biographical fact. It is, however, an entertaining film.

Historical Context Information:

1. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge UP, 1997).
2. *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist—The Facts of Daily Life in 19th-Century England*, by Daniel Pool (Simon & Schuster, 1993): a fun and informative book that can be used as an encyclopedia-style reference.
2. *Our Tempestuous Day: A History of Regency England*, by Carolly Erickson (Robson 1996): designed to read like fiction. Not so good for pinning down facts and historical details, but good at conveying the "spirit of the age."
3. *The Origins of Modern British Society,* by Harold Perkin (1975): a "thicker" history in every respect.
4. *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries : English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830*, by Marilyn Butler (1981): a readable and well researched discussion of Austen and her politics in the context of other eighteenth-century and Romantic-era writers.
5. *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815*, by Margarette Lincoln (2002), and/or *A Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars*, by Vincent J. Esposito (1999) : for anyone interested in pursuing the naval references in *Persuasion*.