THE GREAT COURSES®

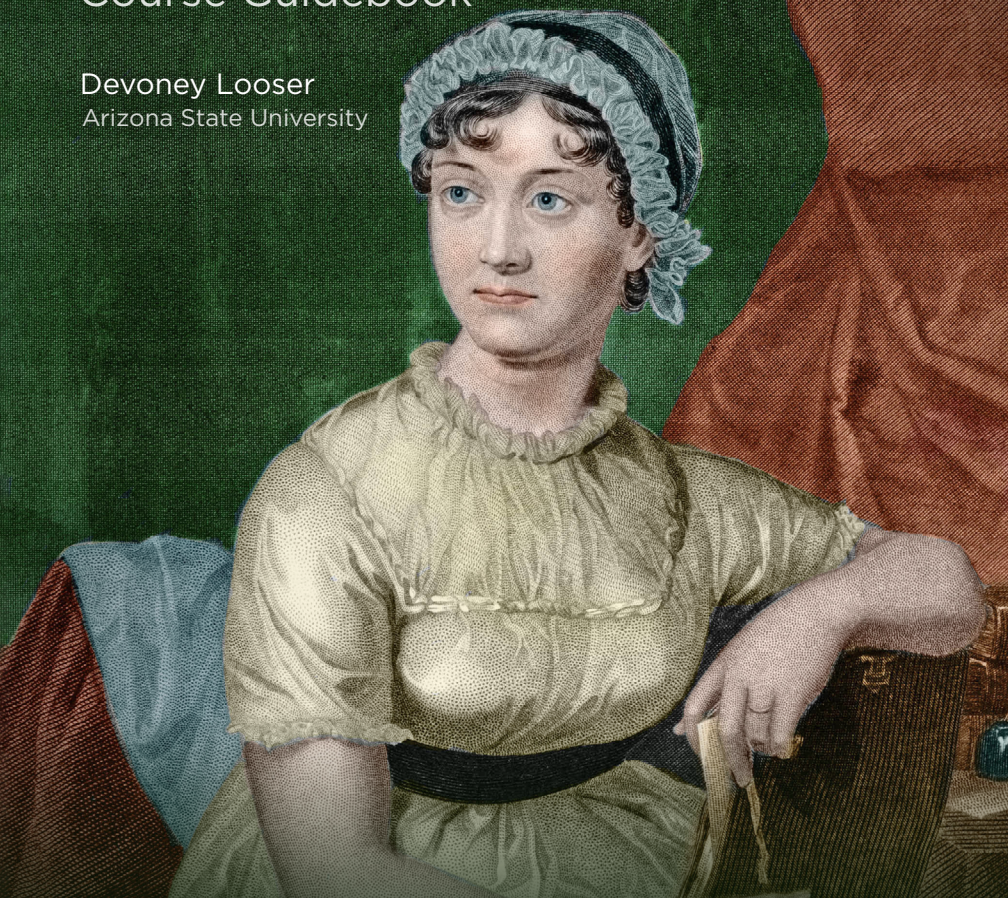
Topic
Literature & Language

Subtopic
Literature

The Life and Works of Jane Austen

Course Guidebook

Devoney Looser
Arizona State University



THE GREAT COURSES®

4840 Westfields Boulevard | Suite 500 | Chantilly, Virginia | 20151-2299
[PHONE] 1.800.832.2412 | [FAX] 703.378.3819 | [WEB] www.thegreatcourses.com

Devoney Looser

Foundation Professor of English

Arizona State University

Devoney Looser is a Foundation Professor of English at Arizona State University. She earned her PhD in English from Stony Brook University.

Professor Looser is the author or editor of nine books, including *The Daily Jane Austen: A Year of Quotes* and *The Making of Jane Austen*, which appeared on *Publishers Weekly*'s list of best summer books. Her essays have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *Salon, Slate*, the *TLS*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *The Washington Post*, and she has had the pleasure of discussing Austen on CNN. She was named a Guggenheim Fellow and a National Endowment for the Humanities Public Scholar in support of her book *Sister Novelists: Jane and Anna Maria Porter in the Age of Austen*. ■

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

GUIDES

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JANE AUSTEN

Jane Austen is remarkable for being one of the few classic novelists who is considered not only a literary genius but also a pop culture icon. To some, she's a master of irony and social criticism as well as a remarkable prose stylist. To others, Austen's greatest value is in her ability to tell enduring love stories with satisfying, happy endings. But the fact is, we don't need to choose between these points of view. It's entirely fair to say that Austen is all of these things.

In this course, we'll look at what makes Austen great and what makes her characters and stories so popular. We'll delve into the time period and historical contexts in which she wrote, making it possible for those who are new to the study of her novels to grasp and enjoy her fiction more fully. If you're already well versed in Austen's fiction and her world, then these lessons will give you opportunities to revisit your previous knowledge and assumptions and to expand your expertise in areas that might be less familiar or even unfamiliar.

The first two lessons serve as a dual introduction. One introduces Austen through her authorship, in literary and political history, defining and explaining key periodizing terms as well as her overarching achievements. The second introduces Austen through her remarkable life in Great Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It provides opportunities to consider how what she produced arose from who she was and how she lived.

Next, the course moves into a series of lessons on her earliest writings—her juvenilia—and each of her six major novels, in the order of their publication: *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*. We'll consider the novels' unforgettable characters, trenchant themes, opening lines, and famous quips. You'll emerge with the opportunity to resee everything from their catchy titles to their signature conclusions.

Then, the course moves into a series of lessons that illuminate the social and historical context in which her stories unfold and in which she herself lived, an era labeled the Romantic period. The lessons consider romance, courtship, marriage, families, money, rank, politics, labor, war, abolition, and revolution, and how all of these factors came into conversation and conflict, particularly for young people who were coming of age in an era of cataclysmic change. Two of the lessons look at how and why people of means were prepared for gender-codified roles—the recommended polite professions for men and the so-called female accomplishments for women.

The final series of lessons looks at what happened to Austen's writings and reputation in the years immediately and then long after her death in 1817. We'll examine how her family members set out to shape her literary reputation through biographical writings. Two lessons are devoted to previously unpublished and lesser-known writings that gradually came into print. Then we turn to Austen's family descendants, her growing reputation as Aunt Jane, and the creation of fan communities in which many have come to describe themselves as Janeites. The lessons in this segment of the course show, in fine and fascinating detail, how Austen's literary and popular reputation flourished and took hold in the years after her career was cut short by her death in middle age.

By the time you complete this course, you will know a gig from a barouche-landau and you'll know why it matters that Austen employs a phrase like "rational creatures" to describe women. You'll have the chance to decide whether you consider yourself an appreciator, a fan, or even a Janeite. ■

INFORMATION ON EDITIONS

Strong opinions exist among experts about which edition of Austen you should read. Scholars generally prefer what's called a standard edition, which means a text that is edited to the highest current standards of accuracy and judgment.

Most today agree that the standard edition of Austen's fiction is *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*. This eight-volume edition includes all of Austen's known writings, with the most reliable texts. The Cambridge Austen edition also includes authoritative introductions and extensive annotations (or notes) meant to deepen your reading.

Before the Cambridge edition began to appear, volume by volume, in the early 2000s, scholars used the six-volume Oxford University Press edition of Austen's works, initially edited by R. W. Chapman in 1923 and said to be one of the first such authoritative editions created for any novelist's body of work.

There are other excellent reading and student editions of Austen's fiction. Among them are those published by Penguin, W. W. Norton, Oxford University Press World's Classics, and Broadview Press. Also available are deluxe hardcover editions from Harvard University Press, which are both well illustrated and annotated.

If you choose to read Austen from freely available, out-of-copyright editions, be aware that most of those texts are taken from 19th-century copytexts or unverified, volunteer transcriptions. These versions may include errors. However, free editions may be the best choice for you as a reader, depending on your concerns about accuracy, depth, and cost.

If you want to learn more about the history of Austen editing and editions, and the histories of the physical books themselves, see Kathryn Sutherland's *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* and Janine Barchas's *The Lost Books of Jane Austen*.

INFORMATION ON BIOGRAPHIES

Biographies of Jane Austen abound. It seems as if a new book about her life appears almost as often as a new film or television adaptation of her stories. Most scholars agree that the best complete biography remains Claire Tomalin's *Jane Austen: A Life*. Some biographies take a particular angle on Austen's life. For instance, Jan Fergus's *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* focuses on Austen as an author, in her professional context. Paula Byrne's *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things* describes facets of Austen's life and writings through a selection of fascinating objects. There are dozens of other biographies, of differing lengths and concerns. If you're reading an Austen biography produced in the 19th or 20th century, then you might want to follow it up by reading Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite's *30 Great Myths About Jane Austen*.

ENTERING JANE AUSTEN'S WORLD

Lesson 1

Jane Austen is one of the world's most widely recognized authors. To understand Austen means knowing when she wrote—her place in history and literary history. It also means knowing the difference, then and now, between books that were called novels and romances. Finally, it means being able to confidently tackle her writings, sentence by sentence and chapter by chapter, not just novel by novel.

Austen's Historical Context

- This lesson begins with Jane Austen's historical context. Austen was born in 1775, just one year before the start of the American Revolution. She died in 1817, age 41. She began writing seriously in her teens in the 1790s, and she began to publish her novels in the 1810s.

- This period of years was a cataclysmic time politically. It was an era of revolutions—not only the American Revolution but also the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and what some have called the longest revolution: the revolution for women's rights.

- Austen is said to fall in two different literary periods. Some say Austen belongs to the 18th century. Her fiction's sensibilities have been called Augustan. That label linked 18th-century literary qualities with the Roman emperor Augustus. Calling 18th-century literature Augustan signaled its appreciation for the classical past. Austen's fiction was said to belong in that group of authors because she, too, exhibited a typically 18th-century classical appreciation for order, style, and satire.

- But the Augustan 18th century was said to have been supplanted in literary history by a new era, called the Romantic period. That period is usually said to begin in 1789—with the storming of the Bastille prison and the French Revolution—and to last until 1832. That was the year of the passage of the First Reform Act in Britain, which extended voting rights to a larger number of males.

- Chronologically, Austen belongs in a category with the literary Romantics. Yet for many years, she was seen as out of place in English Romanticism. That's because half a century ago, the Romantics were said to be made up of male poets. Austen's female-centered prose didn't fit the rubric.

- But today, the term *Romantic* is used far more capaciously. Most critics now see Austen's writings as sharing many of Romanticism's thematic and literary concerns, including a focus on the emotions and on the individual and the natural world. Austen also shares elements of the Romantic period's political shifts, characterized by a move toward greater liberty, equality, and fraternity. As a result, both the 18th century and the Romantic period now claim Austen for their own.

- Other historical labels have come into play as well. Some have described Austen as a Regency author. The Regency was a short period of nine years when the future King George IV was ruling as prince regent, and it coincides almost perfectly with the publication of Austen's novels. Austen, then, was a Regency author, as well as an 18th-century and a Romantic one.

- Some call Austen a Victorian novelist. That, however, is a chronologically inaccurate claim. Austen died in 1817. Queen Victoria was crowned in 1837 and reigned until 1901. That period—1837 to 1901—is the Victorian era.

Novels and Romances

- Despite English literature's long history of prose writing, there haven't always been novels. A tradition of English-language novels began to emerge in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Novels were by no means the most prevalent prose works. For example, there were roughly three times as many histories of England published across the 18th century as there were novels. It's estimated that 10,000 histories of England were published, compared to 3,000 novels.

- In the 18th century, not all prose fiction was automatically considered a novel. Some works of fiction were labeled romances or even histories. Today, one might hear people say that Austen was writing romances or that she was the first writer of romance fiction. Such claims aren't just misleading; they're wrong, at least in terms of what that word *romance* meant then.

- Throughout her career, Austen distanced herself from the prose subgenre that her contemporaries called romance. Each of the books she published during her lifetime was labeled with the subtitle *A Novel*. One example is *Sense and Sensibility: A Novel*. She was making a clear distinction of type.

- In her day, the word *romance* meant not just a story of love and manners. It also signified a kind of fiction that was fanciful and improbable. A romance work was usually set in the distant past, in a supposedly exotic location, or both. Good fought against evil, riches were lost and restored, and family members were dramatically torn apart.

- Identities were changed, hidden, and revealed. In the end, the good were rewarded, and evil was vanquished. Long-lost family members were reunited. Romances with these features had been popular for more than a century by the time Austen was born.

- Austen threw her lot in with earlier mid-18th-century writers who built up a new kind of fiction, which was called the novel. It used present-day settings and more probable characters and actions. The novel was even declared to be a new species of writing.

Austen's Predecessors

- Austen was following in the footsteps of two famous novelists, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. Richardson published his famous novels *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* as morality tales set in the present. Austen liked *Sir Charles Grandison* so much that she adapted its story for performance on the stage.

- Richardson's *Pamela* was a powerful influence on Austen, too. That novel was said to be made up of the actual letters of a servant girl, writing home to her family, reporting her master's nefarious attempts to seduce her.

- Pamela repeatedly refuses her master's sexual advances and proves her virtue. In the end, the master marries his virtuous servant, and the book was a bestseller in the 1740s. But Richardson's author-rival, Fielding, was actively writing in the 1740s, too. He set out to satirize Richardson's *Pamela*. One of Fielding's books was a spoof titled *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela*.

- Richardson and Fielding emerged as two of the most acclaimed fiction writers of the mid-18th century, 25 years before Austen

was born. Richardson left behind a legacy of probable, moralizing stories set in the present. Fielding created comic, racy sendups of moralizing formulas, full of imperfect human motivations, opportunism, and foibles. Austen would have read the works of both authors.

- Austen's family claimed she was influenced by Richardson rather than Fielding. But one doesn't have to read too far into her novels to see debts to both authors. Her stories are everyday and probable ones, like Richardson's. But her heroines aren't as faultless as his so often are. Austen shows us their faults, often through humor and satire, as Fielding did.

Austen's Style

- Austen changed the heroine. She showed her in a quest for growth and gave her psychological depth. She made her admirable but flawed. She let readers see how the heroine thought differently from those around her, especially the previous generation. Austen's heroines all eventually rebel or refuse to conform to social expectations.

- Today, labels like "romance novels" and "chick lit" are used to try to cordon off authors and readers by gender. They're used to demean fiction that's said to be not by or for men. But chick lit is a category that Austen wouldn't have recognized. She didn't understand herself to be writing only or even principally for women. Austen came from a family of novel readers. She takes pains to show male characters reading and loving novels, too.

- Austen's stories were both like and unlike the other novels of her day. Most focused on young heroes and heroines and the obstacles they faced in their families and in the wider world. But Austen was doing some things that were different, too.

- A recent critic, Ben Blatt, performed quantitative studies of Austen alongside other classic authors. He discovered that she's the "one writer" among notable greats who "never wrote a book" that used the pronoun *he* more often than *she*. Blatt's study gives numerical weight to the long-held feeling that her books, taken together, are up to something different in terms of how stories are told and whose stories are told. But that's different from saying who these stories are for.

- Austen's novels range well beyond romantic love. They may all end in marriage, but they grapple

with family conflict, economics, ethics, and morality as well as the ways that people are connected to each other and treat each other. Each novel combines these themes with irony, humor, and social criticism. Sometimes Austen's work manages to pack all of these things into a single, brilliant sentence.

- Classical Greek drama was said to be divided into tragedies and comedies. Tragedies centered on godlike heroes whose circumstances and character flaws transformed their life circumstances from good to bad. These plays ended with their disastrous deaths. Comedies, by contrast, centered on regular people whose circumstances went from bad to good. These plays ended in happy marriages.

- Austen's prose draws on classical dramatic elements, putting them in a new key. When we say that Austen was writing comic novels, we don't mean that every page of her prose is humor-filled or designed to provoke laughter. We mean she created fictional stories of everyday people. She was working within the comic genre, fulfilling readers' expectations, at least in the marital endings she created.

- In addition to being described as comic, Austen's books are sometimes called novels of manners. This label, too, is often misunderstood. A novel of manners doesn't necessarily teach the reader good manners. Rather, novels of manners investigate how people behave toward each other. They focus on customs, values, and traditions in social settings.

- Sometimes they're described as "small" novels, although that seems literally and figuratively belittling. Despite the fact that Austen's novels are painted on a fictional canvas she once described as "3 or 4 families in a country village," they've reached millions of readers over two centuries. That's the opposite of small.

- Her success came down to her both following and flouting literary tradition. When Austen started writing fiction in the 1790s, she was emulating but also rebelling against earlier works of fiction. She read widely and respected literary traditions. But she was also a playful, irreverent innovator. She pioneered new methods for combining point of view, characterization, morality, humor, and social criticism.

Annotated Suggested Reading

Copeland and McMaster, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*.

Davidson, *Reading Jane Austen*.

Jones, *How to Study a Jane Austen Novel*, 2nd ed.

Keymer, *Jane Austen*.

It's notoriously difficult to sum up Austen in a few minutes or a few pages. Successful efforts at introducing her in book form include Tom Keymer's *Jane Austen: Writing, Society, Politics*; Jenny Davidson's *Reading Jane Austen*; and Vivien Jones's *How to Study a Jane Austen Novel*. For an excellent collection of introductory, short essays, try *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways does Jane Austen's enjoying both critical acclaim and a wide readership make her novels either easier, or more difficult, to read and appreciate?
2. What are the differences between novels and romances, in Austen's day and in our own?

LIFE AND LETTERS: THE GENUINE AUSTEN

Lesson 2

Jane Austen's life is sometimes referred to as uneventful. It's sometimes referred to as a mystery. The fact that both of these things can be claimed should be taken as evidence of how fraught it is to try to describe her as a person. This lesson looks at what we do know about her life as well as certain myths.

Two overplayed, if factual, points are that she died young and she never married. It's true that Austen died in 1817, at the tragically early age of 41, and she hadn't married at the time of her death. But it's a bit unfortunate that these are the two details people emphasize, especially because they're often used to put a sad spin on her life story. The earliest biographies of Austen—especially those written by family members, decades after she died—offered spare, safe accounts of the author. Austen's life was, in fact, far more colorful and complicated.

Overview of the Austen Family

- Austen was born into a large family in a rural village called Steventon, in north Hampshire, England, on December 16, 1775. She was the seventh of what would turn out to be a family of eight children.
- Her father, George Austen, was a clergyman. He lived in the Steventon parsonage, where his position gave him tithes from parish households and some land to farm. He didn't own land and didn't stand to inherit it.
- The Reverend George Austen married Cassandra Leigh, a woman from a better-connected family than his own, although she did not bring a large fortune into the marriage. Both parents were related to the class of wealthy landowners, called the gentry.
- The Austens would have hoped that they and their children might profit from those family connections, economically and socially. We sometimes label people who are in the Austens' situation—related to wealthy landowners but not landowners themselves—as the pseudo-gentry or the low gentry. This group then was referred to as the middling class. Austen was born into the middling class. It was a background that shaped her.

The Siblings and an Aunt

- Being the seventh of eight children shaped her, too. Six of the siblings were boys. Austen had a close relationship to several of her brothers, but she was especially close to her only sister, Cassandra, born two years before Jane. Cassandra outlived Jane by 28 years. During their lives, they wrote letters to each other when they were separated, and much of what we know of Austen's life comes from her loving, humorous letters to her sister.
- Her second-oldest brother, George, didn't grow up with the rest of his siblings. Various pieces of evidence point to the likelihood that her brother George was mentally disabled. It was not uncommon for mentally disabled children then to be boarded out to caretaker families. The Austens paid another family to care for and raise young George, and it appears that he lived with them into adulthood.

- Jane's oldest brother, James, was a decade older, and he took advantage of the Austen family's connections to Oxford, went to university, and became a clergyman, like his father. James was also a writer and editor. Along with another Austen brother, James created, edited, and wrote the contents for a periodical in Oxford called *The Loiterer*. Some believe youngest sister Jane may even have written a piece for her brothers' magazine, signing it with the pseudonym Sophia Sentiment.

- Jane's third-oldest brother, Edward, experienced a stroke of economic good luck. A wealthy, childless couple, relatives of her father, took a shine to him as a boy. They ended up raising him as their own. Edward Austen eventually took the couple's surname, Knight, and inherited their properties. Edward Knight would end up becoming very rich. He played a crucial role in his sisters' and mother's later years, when he made available to them a cottage on one of his estates in Chawton, England.

- Jane was also close to her two naval brothers, Francis and Charles Austen. Both began careers in the Royal Navy at around age 12. However, the brother Jane was closest to—or at least the brother who had the closest ties to her writing career—was Henry Austen. Henry was, by all accounts, a charismatic, colorful man of many talents.

- Henry was a military officer, a banker, and then a clergyman. He was a writer, too, on *The Loiterer*. As a banker, Henry had either flawed skills, bad luck, or both. His bank—Austen, Maunde, and Tilson—went bankrupt in 1816, the year before Jane Austen died. When the bank went under, so did thousands of pounds of investment from other family members. After his bank failed, Henry turned to another new profession: clergyman.

- Henry's first wife, born Eliza Hancock and later Comtesse de Feuillide, was a cousin on his father's side. She was a widow who'd been married to a Frenchman, said to be a count, who was guillotined in the French Revolution. Eliza was the goddaughter—and the rumored, secret illegitimate daughter—of a controversial English statesman named Warren Hastings. Eliza named her only son from her first marriage Hastings. Her son seems to have had a disability and died young.

- But Eliza was apparently not weighed down by all of this tragedy and difficulty around her. She had a reputation as a flirtatious, colorful widow. It's no wonder that lively Henry Austen would be attracted to her. Jane, too, seems to have drawn on Eliza's talents and many attractions in creating her fiction's female characters. Some critics believe Eliza was a model for the vivacious flirt Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*.

- Austen had an aunt who was arrested, charged, and tried for shoplifting lace. She was acquitted. But that aunt, Mrs. Leigh-Perrot, was under detention for months as the accused in what became a celebrated trial. Had Austen's aunt been convicted rather than acquitted, the maximum sentence she would have faced was death. The Austen family was very invested in her case and its outcome.
- The aforementioned happenings are definitely colorful events. They should prove that Jane Austen witnessed, within her own family, a wide variety of human characters and experiences. The notion that Austen was sheltered from the world is completely overturned once one examines her family.

Cassandra and Jane

- Although Austen didn't write novels with long accounts of wars and battles, her life was touched by crime and by war. She had a wry sense of what it meant not to have to grieve after receiving news of casualties. As she wrote in a letter to Cassandra in 1811, "How horrible it is to have so many people killed!—And what a blessing that one cares for none of them!" Some read this line as proof of Austen's cruelty or callousness, and perhaps it is. But we might read it, too, as her drawing on comedy as a way to cope at a moment of knowing recognition of the horrors of loss.
- Her sister Cassandra understood loss firsthand. She had been engaged to marry a young man named Tom Fowle, a chaplain who traveled to the West Indies and died there of illness. Cassandra never became engaged again. Knowing this must add another layer to any joke between the sisters about death, horror, and blessings.
- Knowing how Cassandra met Tom Fowle adds yet another interesting wrinkle to the biography. Fowle had been a pupil in the Austens' home in Steventon. The Reverend George Austen, with such a large family, took in male students. For extra income, he ran a boarding school out of his home.
- Cassandra and Jane grew up in a household also filled with boys who weren't related to them—an unusual thing. The Austens' house was, in effect, a boys' school. Jane and Cassandra were briefly at boarding schools themselves. Biographers suspect they were sent away not out of a concern for their education but because the space they used at home may have been seen as more advantageously used by paying male pupils.

Austen's Singlehood

- It is clear that Jane Austen became widely read, surrounded by books, writers, brothers, male pupils, and a household filled with education and educational aspirations. She began writing comic pieces, mostly short fiction, in her teens.
- Where critics, biographers, and readers become more confused is in trying to figure out how Austen learned so much about courtship, romance, and love. For some reason, where Austen is concerned, there's an odd obsession with the idea that the romantic relationships in her novels must reflect some experiences she had or some great love lost.
- Biographers have often set out to find them. There are a few facts. Around 1795, she had a flirtation with a man named Tom Lefroy, an Irishman who was visiting his Hampshire relatives, the Austens' neighbors. Jane apparently took a liking to him, and he to her. Although some biographers have spun this episode with Lefroy into a great love lost, including the film *Becoming Jane*, it's largely speculation.
- It is known that Austen once received a proposal of marriage. It came in 1802, when she was 27, from a man named Harris Bigg-Wither. According to family accounts, Austen was staying at his family's home at Manydown. She first said yes. But then, the next morning, she changed her answer to a no.

Difficult and Obscure Years

- Jane's father died in 1805. Jane, Cassandra, and their widowed mother had some difficult years economically, relying on the help of several Austen brothers to meet their basic needs.
- We know little more about Austen's life from 1801 to 1805, the years when she lived in Bath, England, than the addresses at which she lived. One reason for that is because we have relatively few letters by Austen from this or indeed any time period. Just 161 letters are known to have survived, and they include very few intimate details.
- That number—161—might sound like a lot, but Austen likely wrote thousands of letters over the course of her life. They were not preserved. Family accounts report that sister and confidante Cassandra later destroyed most of Jane's letters, perhaps to preserve the family's privacy.

- Readers who love the novels are often disappointed in the letters. The letters don't tell drawn-out stories. They dart here and there—they rarely have a narrative arc—and they seem interested in minutiae that often disappoints those who come to Austen's fiction for weightier things.
- Austen's letters show an interest in fashion, shopping, and gossip. She gives occasional advice to her nieces and nephews. Her letters do, however, offer a glimpse into the everyday things she cared about. They also reveal her devastating wit and often macabre sense of humor.

Obscurity

- The myth of Austen's obscurity arose in part because Austen published her works anonymously. She published *Sense and Sensibility* with the tagline "By a Lady." After that, she published her books as "by the author of" her previous works. Approximately half of the other novelists of her time published anonymously, so she wasn't unusual in this choice.
- Austen understood the literary marketplace. Before she died, she had some sense that her novels were held in high regard. In the last six years of her life, she published four novels that went into second editions. Most of them received well-placed, positive reviews.
- She dedicated one of them, *Emma*, to the prince regent, at his request. That's not obscurity. If a member of the royal family asks for a dedication, that would signal to any author that she'd reached a certain level of acclaim.
- In other words, Austen knew at the end of her life that she was a moderately successful novelist. Her authorship was, by then, an open secret among her family and friends. The prince regent knew it, so how big a secret could it have been? That should put to rest the myth of her literary obscurity.

Annotated Suggested Reading

Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*.

Le Faye, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and Her Family*.

As of this course's production, the most updated and correct edition of Jane Austen's letters is the fourth edition of Deirdre Le Faye's *Jane Austen's Letters*. Le Faye has also compiled an incredible 796-page book, *A Chronology of Jane Austen and Her Family, 1600–2000*, the second edition of which came out in 2013. If you are looking for a judicious selection, then try the Oxford World's Classics edition of Jane Austen's *Selected Letters*, which features an introduction by Vivien Jones.

Questions to Consider

1. How do you think Austen's public reputation was shaped by her initial lack of a portrait and, after 1870, by the revised version of her face that was finally published?
2. What elements make a life "eventful"? What might be said to make Austen's life an eventful one?

JUVENILIA: AUSTEN'S RAUCOUS EARLY WORKS

Lesson 3

If one imagines Austen's fiction as prim, proper prose, oozing with romance, then nothing will overturn that stereotype more quickly than learning about the body of work known as her juvenilia. The term *juvenilia* refers to childhood or juvenile writings. Scholars have also called these works Austen's "teenage writings," although the concept of a teenager really didn't exist in her day. What we think of today as the hallmarks of a passage into an adult life—such as full-time work and getting married—might have started in the 18th century as early as age 12, 13, or 14. Full-time work began even earlier for working-class children. Remembering that fact can help us understand how it is that Austen could have written such sophisticated, comic things at that age. The historical and cultural differences don't, however, explain how she was able to do it so stunningly well.

"The Beautifull Cassandra"

- A notable example of Austen's juvenilia is "The Beautifull Cassandra," which is subtitled "A Novel in Twelve Chapters." In reality, it runs little more than 12 paragraphs. This humorously miniaturized story follows its protagonist, Cassandra, through seven hours of her life's adventures. Her birth is first described, in the most ridiculous way possible. She's called "noble" for being descended from a "near relation" of a Duchess's butler.

- Having dispensed in a sentence with the pretensions of a heroine's good birth and breeding, the story further flouts the conventions of romance. Austen's heroine falls immediately in love, not with a hero but "with an elegant Bonnet," which she steals from her mother's shop. Cassandra also takes part in gluttony and violence, and she ignores a young nobleman, contrary to expectations.

- In "The Beautifull Cassandra," the usual features of love stories are overturned. They've run amok. Each of the parts of a romance is introduced, but nothing is as it should be. This is typical of the raw energy and knowing, off-color comedy that Austen combines in her earliest writings.

Background on the Works

- Austen recopied the writings that make up her juvenilia into neat, finished versions called fair copies. They were recopied to be preserved and reread. Austen made corrections and changes to them.

- We don't know how many people read or heard them. We do know that she apparently didn't seek a mass audience for them. Most of the 27 separately titled pieces of the juvenilia weren't published until the 20th century, more than a century after her death. Some pieces are very short. For instance, the story "The Female Philosopher" is made up of just one fictional letter of a few hundred words.

- Taken together, the three volumes of juvenilia show us the earliest efforts of a master stylist. Austen knew the sort of fiction writing that was beginning to gain respect. It was written by authors such as Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith, Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and others. But she also knew the fiction writing that critics had consigned to the bottom of the barrel.

- She must have been a student of all kinds of fiction and prose writing, and she likely approached these texts with avidity, insight, and a spirit of playful fun. The juvenilia shows solid evidence that Austen grasped fictional conventions so well that she not only copied them but was able to craft incredibly perceptive send-ups of their tics and tropes. "The Beautifull Cassandra" is humorous short fiction, but it's much more than that, too.

- Austen's juvenilia consists of three notebooks, neatly organized and titled *Volume the First, Volume the Second*, and *Volume the Third*. She had arranged the works the same way that one complete novel would have been published in her day—in three volumes.

- The first volume is made up of her shortest, earliest works. It has 14 pieces, dramatic and fictional in form, thought to be written from 1787 to 1793, when the author was 11 or 12 to 18 years old. *Volume the Second* has nine pieces, including one longer story, "Love and Freindship," as well as the mock history titled "The History of England." These works are believed to have been written from 1790 to 1793, so when Austen would have been roughly 14 to 17.

- The last volume, *Volume the Third*, has two longer pieces, "Evelyn" and "Catharine, or the Bower," from around 1791–1792, when Austen was 16 or 17 years old. Altogether, the work is made up of around 74,000 words of explosive snark.

A Family Affair

- Austen may have collaborated with family on some of these works. Whether or not that's true, she seems to have had her family in mind as a first audience. We know from Austen's letters that her family read aloud to each other, for information and entertainment, so it's possible that her own writings were among those things chosen.

- We also know that her family sometimes staged private theatricals. They put on plays in their own home, as amateur productions. Austen's early dramatic works were probably acted out by family members. The juvenilia suggests that the Austen family knew how to laugh and have fun together.

Making Sense of the Juvenilia

- Austen's early writings weren't just about humor, however. They were about learning and sociality, too. The juvenilia provides evidence of her incredibly wide reading, her lively spirit of literary and social rebellion, and her unquestionable early genius. The texts repeatedly display a strong taste for female independence. Yet readers and critics have struggled to make sense of Austen's intentions in the juvenilia.

- For instance, take a line from the short piece "Henry and Eliza," written circa 1788–1789. It describes a mother with her children, living in impoverished circumstances.

- We're told that Eliza, who was once rich, has been imprisoned by an evil duchess, but she manages to escape with her children. She does so by throwing her clothes and her children out of a window and by selling her clothes. Then, Austen writes of this wronged mother, "she began to find herself rather hungry, and had reason to think, by their biting off two of her fingers, that her Children were much in the same situation."

- It's easy to read over that line and miss the punch line because Austen has cleverly buried it in the middle of the sentence, as if this behavior is perfectly normal. The mother, finding herself "rather" hungry, "has reason to think" that her children may be hungry too. It's on the basis of this evidence: their "biting off two of her fingers."

- This is comic cannibalism. Eliza's starving children are perfectly moderate as to the number of their mother's fingers—just two!—they take for food. But this section raises a question: What is Austen up to here, other than just being outrageous?

Parody, Burlesque, and Satire

- The bitten-off-fingers bit from "Henry and Eliza" presents the kind of conundrum we find throughout the juvenilia. The labels that scholars tussle over to describe Austen's work include *parody*, *burlesque*, and *satire*. The example from "Henry and Eliza" can shed some light on them.

- It's helpful to ask what Austen is poking fun at. In a typical 18th-century sentimental novel, when a down-on-her-luck mother found herself without food, she would enter into a dramatic quest to feed her children. She might beg or wander the countryside looking for berries.

She would definitely narrate her plight, repeating her tale of woe about her starving brood. Then, either a good-hearted passerby would give her some stale bread, or someone evil would respond heartlessly, allowing her to double down on her woe.

- In Austen's treatment of the subject of the victimized mother and her starving children, the mother doesn't notice that her children are hungry. This is despite her own hunger. She "has reason to think" that her children need food when she notices that they've bitten off two of her fingers. The bitten-off fingers are so offhandedly presented that it must be an exaggerated joke.
- Therefore, the story is clearly a parody. A parody imitates and exaggerates, usually with irony, for comic purposes. The story "Henry and Eliza" is also a more specific form of parody called a burlesque. That's because it takes on the material in a way that is coarser and broader in its humor. A burlesque takes something serious and treats it unseriously, or it takes something light and treats it with the utmost seriousness.
- Finally, we might ask whether this is a satire. A satire is a text that does its comic work not only to entertain or exaggerate but also to make people think, often for a political purpose. This part of "Henry and Eliza" fulfills that function: It prompts the reader to question assumptions about mothers as selfless caregivers.

"Love and Freindship" and "The History of England."

- This lesson concludes with a look at the two most famous pieces in the juvenilia: "Love and Freindship" and "The History of England." Note that in the former's title, "Freindship" is spelled with the letters *ei*. Critics debate whether this was an intentional misspelling, an accidental misspelling, or a legitimate alternate spelling. Each position has its advocates.
- "Love and Freindship" is a comic send-up of, as one might guess from the title, love and friendship. The story is made up of 14 letters. The letters describe the character Laura's adventures, and they are supposedly written for the benefit of Marianne, the daughter of the character Isabel. The supposed goal is to teach her how to live. In reality, the letters are anarchic, violent, and improbable in the extreme. They are also funny.

- Meanwhile, "The History of England" is a send-up of schoolroom histories. It identifies itself as written "by a partial prejudiced, and ignorant Historian" and boasts that it contains very few dates.

- Its summations of kings, queens, and their reigns is irreverent in every way. Here, for instance, is the historian on King Edward IV: "One of Edward's Mistresses was Jane Shore, who has had a play written about her, but it is tragedy and therefore not worth reading."

- A notable feature of this text is that it was produced in collaboration with Jane's sister Cassandra. Cassandra provided illustrated portrait medallions to accompany Jane's manuscript text.

Annotated Suggested Reading

Austen, *Jane Austen's Manuscript Works*.

——, *Teenage Writings*.

Individual texts from the *Juvenilia Press*.

Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts.

McMaster, *Jane Austen, Young Author*.

Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts is a freely available site with facsimiles and transcriptions of the three volumes of Austen's juvenilia. It is accessible here: https://janeausten.ac.uk/index.html.

If you prefer a print version of selections, there are two excellent choices. One is edited by Kathryn Sutherland and Freya Johnston: Jane Austen's *Teenage Writings* from Oxford World's Classics. The other also includes *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons*, *Sanditon*, and a judicious selection of the juvenilia. It is Broadview Press's *Jane Austen's Manuscript Works*, edited by Linda Bree, Peter Sabor, and Janet Todd.

Additionally, the *Juvenilia Press* has published excellent, separately introduced, and annotated editions of Austen's works. Their website is here: https://sam2.arts.unsw.edu.au/juvenilia/about/.

For a critical study of the juvenile writings, see Juliet McMaster's *Jane Austen, Young Author*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you see Austen's juvenilia as parody, burlesque, and/or satire?
2. How do you see the themes of the juvenilia in conversation with Austen's full-length novels?

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY: SISTERS UNITED

Lesson 4

Sense and Sensibility is arguably Austen's second-most recognized novel, after *Pride and Prejudice*. As comic novels with happy endings, they may share literary DNA, but they're not mirror images. All of the themes that readers of Austen's fiction expect to find are here: family conflicts, money problems, and thwarted courtships. But *Sense and Sensibility* is different in its minute examination of two captivating sisters and its deployment of a darker tone alongside its comedy.

Background on the Novel

- In the context of the book's title, the terms *sense* and *sensibility* are often misunderstood by readers. Some mistakenly think these terms are synonyms. Some mistakenly think they are opposites. Neither is the case.
- Then, as now, the word *sense* meant "reason," "rationality," and "wisdom." It signaled good sense or common sense. But in Austen's day, the word *sensibility* was different. It meant "sensitivity" or "emotional receptivity." Throughout the novel, Austen couples the word *sense* with ideas of goodness, honor, and duty. But the word *sensibility* is yoked to more complicated adjectives in the novel, like *potent*, *strong*, and *affectionate*.
- In Austen's novel, the word *sense* is most often associated with the older of the two heroines, Elinor Dashwood, described as a young woman who "possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment."
- The word *sensibility* is most often associated with the middle sister, Marianne Dashwood. It's said that her abilities were equal to Elinor's—that they were equally sensible and clever. However, Marianne is called "generous, amiable, interesting" and "everything but prudent."

A First for Austen

Sense and Sensibility, published in 1811, was Austen's first novel to see print. For that reason alone, it deserves a prominent place as a breakthrough moment in her career.

Plot Summary

- These differences have led some readers to see the novel in formulaic terms. Elinor equals sense. Marianne equals sensibility. In that reading, sense is said to provide patient, rational Elinor with her happy ending with the hero Edward Ferrars. Her challenge in the novel was to exercise her rationality and patience, especially after she learns that Edward, although he's shown an interest in her, is secretly engaged to another woman. Elinor learns of this engagement from that other woman herself—Lucy Steele.

- Despite being silently heartbroken, Elinor behaves coolly and with honor. She keeps Lucy's secret, despite her deep disappointment. At the end of the novel, the unworthy Lucy breaks her engagement to the worthy Edward. Edward and Elinor are free to marry.

- It's then and only then that Elinor's feelings for Edward are outwardly expressed. Elinor is famously so emotionally overwhelmed that she runs out of the room. She closes the door and "burst into tears of joy." This shows that Elinor feels very strongly. She just prefers, throughout the novel, not to display her deepest feelings openly to others.

- Her sister Marianne is very different. She believes that feelings must be expressed. She wears her heart on her sleeve as a principle and point of pride. She falls in love with the seemingly perfect Mr. Willoughby, a man who literally sweeps her off her feet. However, Willoughby is not all he seems.

- The problem is that Marianne is convinced people fall in love just once in their lives. It's an odd belief on her part because her mother was a second wife. But, as a true romantic with extreme sensibility, Marianne doesn't approve of what she calls "second attachments." She believes only in undying first loves.

- By the end of the novel, Marianne discovers that she has been too quick to offer Willoughby her heart. He turns out to be ruled by impulse, desire, and greed. He's not at all what Marianne's powers of sensibility and his displays of sensibility had first led her to believe he was.

- But Marianne finds a second love in Colonel Brandon, an older man in his late 30s who's also endured heartbreak. Marianne and Colonel Brandon are both each other's second loves.

This is important. The narrator tells us that Marianne, instead of "falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion" with Willoughby, learns that she might find happiness by submitting to new attachments, entering into new duties, and becoming the patronness of a village, as Colonel Brandon's wife.

Different Readings of the Novel

- Given these relationships and the ways in which they evolve, some have said that in this novel, sense is shown to be good, and sensibility is revealed as bad. This is a very tempting interpretation because it's compact and easily grasped. However, it is a limited way to understand a complicated novel.

- The novel suggests that one can be ruled too entirely by sense or too entirely by sensibility. One needs to moderate each. We can see this early in the novel, when Marianne sarcastically offers a mock-critique of herself to Elinor, after she perceives herself criticized. Marianne mockingly says, "I have been open and sincere where I ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful—had I talked only of the weather and the roads, and had I spoken only once in ten minutes, this reproach would have been spared."

- Interestingly, by the end of the novel, Marianne and the reader both realize that she has indeed been too open and sincere, too much at ease, too happy, and too frank. But she doesn't come to the conclusion that she ought to have been entirely reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful. She discovers a middle ground.

- The novel shows that sense and sensibility both have limits as modes of expression. Each Dashwood sister comes to appreciate the value and the limitations of her preferred trait. But it takes experience and growth for them to come to those similar and separate realizations.

- At the beginning, these temperamental differences are presented as a good-natured battle of personalities. We can see this competition at work in a conversation Elinor and Marianne have while walking on a gorgeous fall afternoon. Marianne makes poetic statements about how moved she is, thinking about the leaves falling off the trees at their former home.

- Elinor responds with a deadpan line: "It is not every one who has your passion for dead leaves." It's a funny joke, but it's also a serious criticism: Just how much sympathy do dead leaves deserve? Elinor's wisecrack implies that Marianne might consider directing her passionate concern and sympathy elsewhere than on falling leaves.

- But Marianne's reply implies that Elinor's lack of understanding and sensitivity is the greater problem. Marianne tells her sister, "No; my feelings are not often shared, not often understood. But sometimes they are." According to Marianne, Elinor is just like other insensitive people who don't grasp the value of nature and the life cycle.

The Novel in Context

- The conversation about leaves is asking us to take a side: sense or sensibility. However, as critics have noted, Austen's novel's title features the two words linked, even yoked, by the conjunction *and*. It's not a story of good versus bad. This is important because most of the novels of Austen's day were exactly that—stories of good versus bad.

- We can see that in their very titles. *Sense and Sensibility* was published alongside novels with titles such as *Riches and Poverty*, *Love and Madness*, and *Virtue and Vice*. Each is typical in having one clear positive and one negative word. These novels advertise themselves as black-and-white morality tales. The titles preview their contents: Achieve the desirable and avoid the danger.

- *Sense and Sensibility* is unusual in offering two terms that both have positive value, especially when joined and held in the right proportions.

Complexity and Triangles

- The novel's subtle treatment of life's gray-area complexities goes beyond its title to the novel's opening line. *Sense and Sensibility* begins: "The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex."

- The verb *settled* is crucial because it's placed in a way that's unsettling. The line reads "had long been settled." We're clued in that we're about to encounter something that had been true and is about to change. In the first chapter, we learn that some of those Sussex Dashwoods are being forced to resettle. The novel revolves around settling, shuffling, and resettling money, houses, and relationships.

- The first characters to be unsettled are four Dashwood women: Mrs. Dashwood, a second wife, and her three daughters: Elinor, Marianne, and the youngest daughter, Margaret. These four women are about to be turned out of their home at Norland Park because of two successive male deaths. Their great uncle, the owner of Norland Park, dies first. Then their father inherits the estate but dies just a year later.

- Upon his death, Mr. Dashwood's son by his late first wife, a young man named John Dashwood, inherits the estate. His son is set to inherit after him. This means the Dashwood women have no legal claim to the Norland estate. They will need to move.

- Half brother John Dashwood could have been generous with them. In fact, he promised he would be. But we're clued into this promise being an empty one by the narrator's description of John's character. It's subtle and damning. He's described as "not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted and rather selfish is to be ill-disposed." This is a brilliant and very Austenian line. The deadpan first statement is completely undercut by the clause that follows.

- Many of the narrator's sentences operate with this kind of dry-witted irony. This line is funny and revealing. It's also a piece of deep social criticism: Outsiders may suppose that a wealthy man like John Dashwood is respectable. He's competent and looks the part. But he has neither sense nor sensibility. And his wife, Fanny Ferrars Dashwood, is even worse. After setting up this family conflict, the story develops similar, further ones.

Tangled Webs

- *Sense and Sensibility* contains many sets of interconnected siblings. The family webs get very tangled. For instance, the brothers Edward and Robert Ferrars are at odds. Edward, the hero, is the more admirable of the two.

- Older brother Robert is described as a coxcomb—a vain man. He ends up marrying his brother Edward's former fiancée, Lucy Steele. This frees up Edward to marry the woman he really loves, Elinor Dashwood. But Robert seems to marry Lucy, at least in part, from the mistaken belief that he's showing off his power to his family.

- The Ferrars brothers' unfriendly relationship mirrors that of two other brothers: Colonel Brandon and his late brother. Austen isn't suggesting that sibling relationships are naturally strengthening or that they always work out well. She shows that siblings can be quite destructive, too.

- The sisters Lucy and Anne Steele are a complicated sister pair. They're in league with each other but also destructive of each other's happiness. Lucy is constantly frustrated by her older sister Anne's vulgarity and stupidity. And it's Anne's inability to keep a secret that pushes Lucy's life into a crisis.

- Anne reveals Lucy's secret engagement to Edward Ferrars's family because she's foolish enough to think it will do her sister good. Instead, it brings the engagement to a crisis and results in Edward being disinherited.

- Anne and Lucy Steele's sisterly relationship can be compared and contrasted to Elinor and Marianne's. Sensible Elinor keeps Lucy's secret. But Lucy's own sister Anne cannot.

- And, of course, in the end, Elinor does become Lucy's sister—that is, her sister-in-law. The two women marry the two Ferrars brothers, Edward and Robert, once Lucy transfers her affections from disinherited Edward to newly independently wealthy Robert.

- Additionally, in this novel, sibling pairs and romantic couples repeatedly find themselves in opposition and in challenging relationship triangles. The novel is full of twos that become threes.

Annotated Suggested Reading

Austen and Looser, ed., *Sense and Sensibility*.

Johnson, *Jane Austen*.

Many editions of *Sense and Sensibility* are prepared with a selection of essays to help illuminate the contents of the novel. The one this course's professor prepared for Penguin Deluxe Classics includes an introduction and seven contextual essays on the topics of inheritance, sisters, letter writing, gossip, seduction, illness, and pop culture. A magnificent critical study with an excellent section on each of Austen's novels is Claudia L. Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you make of the pairs and triples of siblings and lovers in *Sense and Sensibility*? How do they structure the plot or allow insight into the characters, separately and together?
2. Do you think *Sense and Sensibility* is more a novel of settling or unsettling, and why?

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: UNIVERSAL TRUTHS

Lesson 5

Jane Austen's second novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, is universally acknowledged as a great read. It's also thought of as a masterpiece. Thanks to film and television adaptations, *Pride and Prejudice* is often associated today with its tall, dark, and handsome hero, Mr. Darcy. But there's a far more compelling explanation for the original novel's longstanding popularity and acclaim. Its heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, almost jumps off the page as a three-dimensional person. Lizzy, as she's also called, has captivated audiences and made them laugh for nearly two centuries.

About Elizabeth

- Elizabeth is an unusual heroine—the product of happy imperfections. Lizzy is remarkable thanks to her fun-loving lack of interest in pleasing the powerful. She cheerfully flouts authority, and the audience is meant to like her the better for it.

- In *Pride and Prejudice*, Lizzy twice refuses good offers of marriage. She defies authority—directly, deftly, and with winking satire. Before she accepts the hand of Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth is rejected by him. Then she herself rejects him. We're made to feel with her at every step, thanks to the story's narration of her keen eye, clever observations, and sharp tongue.

- To understand Elizabeth's charms, it's important to understand her position in a large and unusual family. She's the second eldest of five daughters. The oldest sister, Jane, is the greatest beauty of the five and the sweetest tempered. The youngest sister, Lydia, is the most "good-humoured." The second-youngest, Kitty, follows Lydia in all things.

- The middle sister, Mary, wanted to be thought of as the most learned one. But as the narrator once tells us, "Mary wished to say something sensible, but knew not how." Although Mary often has her head in a book, she chooses terribly, preferring preachy, moralizing tomes, full of hidebound advice for women.

- This collection of personalities leaves witty Elizabeth in a difficult position. She's inscrutable to her flighty, shallow mother, although the alleged favorite of her capricious, sarcastic father. Elizabeth says flippant things, such as, "That would be the greatest misfortune of all! To find a man agreeable whom one is determined to hate! Do not wish me such an evil."

- This strong, sure facetiousness makes her an interesting guide. It sometimes leads *Pride and Prejudice* to be compared to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. But Austen's Elizabeth is actually clever and charming, not clever and shrewish. She also isn't tamed.

- Elizabeth was born into a ridiculous family. Her father chose to marry a silly woman because she was beautiful, and he has been living with the consequences of that shallow choice ever since. Elizabeth needs an ability to delight in anything ridiculous, because that's her daily reality.

The Story's Set-Up

- In this family of five daughters, there is no male heir to secure the Bennet family's land going forward. That's required in their case, thanks to something called an entail. It's a legal agreement that means their estate has been bound to be passed down in a specified, multigenerational way.

- In the Bennets' case, the entail says that the most closely related male of the next generation will inherit. That means that the family's estate, called Longbourn, will be passed down outside of the nuclear family after Mr. Bennet dies. Mr. Bennet has no son to serve as a male heir. This financial fact helps to explain some of Mrs. Bennet's obsession with her daughters marrying well.

- In the novel's first chapters, we find Mrs. Bennet desperate to marry off one of her daughters to their new, eligible bachelor neighbor, Mr. Bingley. Beautiful Jane seems immediately on a path to catching his eye.

- Mrs. Bennet next decides she wants to marry off the second eldest, Elizabeth, to the heir of Longbourn, cousin Mr. Collins. Mrs. Bennet is indiscriminate as to which daughter marries which man. She's just attempting to marry them all off, in age order.

- The problem is that Elizabeth cares very much which man she marries. She's grown up seeing what a mismatched couple looks like. Elizabeth refuses Mr. Collins's ludicrous and canned proposal of marriage. This refusal prompts her father's blessing, but it provokes her mother's ire.

- Circling around the plot during all of this activity is Mr. Bingley's wealthy, proud friend, Mr. Darcy. At a ball, Bingley, who is enjoying his dances with the beautiful Jane Bennet, encourages Darcy to dance with Elizabeth, who is waiting for a partner. But Elizabeth accidentally overhears Darcy refusing to ask her.

- In the novel, Elizabeth feels Darcy's slight. Going forward, she regularly makes sport of Mr. Darcy's haughty opinions. From there, *Pride and Prejudice* follows Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship from one misunderstanding to the next, with many twists and turns.

- Darcy makes mistakes, too. For much of the novel, he insists on approaching Elizabeth in a way that implicitly insults her and her family. When Darcy first proposes marriage, he does it in the most awkward, offensive way, and Elizabeth refuses, strongly.

- But both hero and heroine grow over the course of the novel. Elizabeth recognizes that her judgment has been too quick. She realizes that Darcy "was exactly the man who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her."

- Eventually, Elizabeth gets her second chance with Mr. Darcy. Unlike her father, Lizzy finds a spouse she can love and respect, and be loved and respected by. It's an unusual set of values for 1813. There was far less agreement then that equality in marriage, even if only of intelligence and character, was a desirable thing.

- They are also equal in their willingness to defy their families in marriage. Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins. Mr. Darcy doesn't marry the cousin that his wealthy aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, says was intended from his birth to become his future wife.

Interpreting the Story

- *Pride and Prejudice*, like *Sense and Sensibility* before it, is sometimes interpreted formulaically. Those who see a formula in the title say that Mr. Darcy needs to give up his pride, and Elizabeth needs to get over her prejudice. This is a limited reading.

- By the novel's end, Mr. Darcy transforms in Elizabeth's eyes from a haughty, snobbish killjoy into a lovable, generous hero. After several false starts and family misadventures, the couple overcomes obstacles to marry. Darcy and Elizabeth confront improper pride and partial prejudices, shown to be the results of half-accurate "first impressions."

Inventing Elizabeth

Austen was immensely proud of having invented Elizabeth. In a letter to her sister, Austen wrote, "I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like her at least I do not know."

- It is instead a story of proportion, of regulating proper and improper pride, and of recognizing warranted and unwarranted prejudgment. The novel asks us to think through what happens when first impressions are mistaken—not only first impressions of heroes, like Mr. Darcy, but first impressions of villains, like she had of the character Wickham.

- Also important is the financial angle of the novel. The aforementioned financial difficulties that the Bennet family finds itself struggling with through much of the novel are considerable. Mr. Bennet's estate, Longbourn, has been entailed according to the tradition of primogeniture. (Primogeniture is the English system of inheritance that kept the family property in one place—traditionally in male hands.)

- Their clergyman cousin, Mr. Collins, will inherit the Longbourn property on Mr. Bennet's death. Mr. Collins is also in want of a wife because he wants to please his powerful patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

- When Elizabeth refuses Mr. Collins's proposal, she in effect cuts off the option of her nuclear family remaining on the Longbourn estate after her father's death. By putting her own happiness first, she effectively ensures they will be forced out of their home at some future date. That's a very bitter pill for her mother to swallow.

- In the event that Mr. Bennet dies first, his wife and daughters will have only the lump sum of Mrs. Bennet's independent fortune to live on. Given what we're told about the family's finances, the Bennet women would have to live on a tenth of their current income and do so without a home. That's quite an economic comedown.

- It all turns out financially and happily, in the end, with Elizabeth and Darcy marrying, and previous objections overcome. But Austen's fiction also reflects the reality that marrying for money, presented as a family duty, was not a necessary evil but merely an evil, especially for women. It may not seem so amazing to us today—that a young woman should choose her own happiness over family duty. But this was unusual among the privileged classes in Austen's era.

Annotated Suggested Reading

Austen and Irvine, ed., *Pride and Prejudice.*

Bautz, *Jane Austen*.

Todd, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to "Pride and Prejudice."*

If you are looking for ways to deepen your knowledge of *Pride and Prejudice*, the *Cambridge Companion to "Pride and Prejudice"* (edited by Janet Todd) will allow you to do so in many directions. Annika Bautz's book *Jane Austen: "Sense and Sensibility"/"Pride and Prejudice"/"Emma"* also provides a clear, superb, and helpful overview of the critical responses to all three novels.

Questions to Consider

1. What makes Elizabeth Bennet an unusual heroine, and why do you think she has been so long beloved by readers?
2. How do you think we should interpret the novel's famous first line?

MANSFIELD PARK: SILENCE, PLACE, AND PRICE

Lesson 6

Fanny Price is the controversial heroine of Austen's third novel, *Mansfield Park*. She is an unusual, un-striking, and quiet heroine who is exceedingly timid and shy at age 10. She understandably cries at being moved out of her parents' home, even though it means being moved into a better one in the form of her aunt and uncle's mansion, which is the Mansfield Park of the novel's title.

Organizing a novel around an exceedingly shy heroine, with no striking beauty, was a risky departure for Austen. It did, however, allow her to set up a far different set of individual, family, and social problems.

The Book's Set-Up

- The name Mansfield Park refers not just to the mansion where the owner's family lived and where many employees and servants worked. It refers to an entire estate—including the land, tenants, church, and parsonage.

- The fictional Mansfield Park is situated in a real county, Northamptonshire, which is 60 miles north of London. Its largest city, Northampton, was a military outpost and a center for shoemaking in Austen's day. Skilled tradesmen far outnumbered domestic servants there, which meant the area had a growing middle class earlier than other places. That fact provides one economic backdrop for *Mansfield Park*'s story.

- The novel opens with a flashback to the moment in the past that put three sisters on very different economic paths. It begins:

  > About thirty years ago Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady, with all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income.

- This first line introduces the novel's key place and its owners, the Bertrams. Notice also that Sir Thomas Bertram is not described as handsome. Only his house is. This detail alone makes Miss Maria Ward's priorities perfectly clear. She has married for comfort and consequence, attracted most to his money. There's no mention either of Lady Bertram loving her husband or him loving her—only of her having the good luck to "captivate" a baronet.

- Next, the novel's narrator tells us about the fate of the other two Ward sisters. Ward is a name of significance, calling up the idea of dependence on others for financial protection.

- Although the Ward sisters aren't poor, they don't all marry with the same level of economic success. The eldest sister—called by tradition Miss Ward, without a first name, to indicate she's the oldest—marries less well than her captivating sister Maria, now Lady Bertram. The eldest Miss Ward marries a clergyman, Mr. Norris.

- Mr. Norris has his own good luck in marrying Miss Ward. His new brother-in-law, Sir Thomas Bertram, provides Mr. Norris with a regular income.

Sir Thomas has it in his power to give a clergyman a job for life—called a "living"—in the parish. Mr. and Mrs. Norris move into the parsonage near the great house.

- The third sister was the rebel. Miss Frances Ward married to disoblige her family, choosing a "lieutenant of marines, without education, fortune," or connections. He's a low-level military officer without any of the qualities necessary to rise through the ranks.
- Adding to his troubles, he has become disabled. He can't work in most middle-class trades. He has also shown to be a vulgar drunkard, disqualifying him from our easy pity.
- Miss Frances Ward's unsanctioned marriage severs her relationship with her family. During this estrangement, she has nine children. Lady Bertram has four. Mrs. Norris is childless. This difference also exacerbates the Prices' financial need. That's what prompts the family's reconciliation with wealthier relatives.

Adopting Fanny Price

- Mrs. Norris is shown to be a cruel, righteous busybody. She suggests that the Mansfield Park families should adopt one of the Prices' children to demonstrate their supposed charitableness.
- Fanny Price isn't brought into the Bertram family on advantageous terms. Sir Thomas at first thinks that Mrs. Norris, being childless, must be looking for a young female companion. However, Mrs. Norris later makes it clear that she wants no addition to her household. When niece Fanny arrives, Mrs. Norris says the girl should live in the great house, with her young cousins. Sir Thomas accedes to Mrs. Norris's wishes.

- Mrs. Norris also tells Sir Thomas exactly where in his own house he should put Fanny. She suggests the white attic, not far from his daughters, Maria and Julia Bertram, but also close by the housemaids. Fanny is identified by her place within this place. It's just one of many ways that she's marked out as different from her cousins—not quite a daughter and not quite a servant.

- Fanny is treated as a Cinderella figure—as a lesser stepsister. As the narrator tells us, "Nobody meant to be unkind, but nobody put themselves out of their way to secure her comfort." Fanny is not made to feel at home at Mansfield Park.

- Fanny tacitly accepts her position and does her work without complaint. However, shy, timid Fanny turns out to be the novel's moral compass. Still, what changes the course of her life is being brought to live in gentility at Mansfield Park.

New Events

- *Mansfield Park*'s plot repeats, in a new key, the events of its opening paragraph. In both, the next generation pays the price for the previous generation's mistakes. This is telegraphed, too, in the repeated female names used in the story. Lady Bertram's namesake daughter, Maria, is raised near Mrs. Price's namesake daughter, Fanny.

- But Maria, Julia, and Fanny marry very differently from the previous generation's three young women. Interestingly, all three, at some point, rebel against what's expected of them in marriage. It's significant that Fanny, like Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, repeatedly goes against what's expected of her.

- Fanny is not romantically interested in Mansfield Park's firstborn son and heir, Tom Bertram, who's shown to be a morally corrupted, selfish gambler. But Fanny does contribute to the family and the estate's moral health when she makes an endogamous marriage—that is, a marriage within the family—to her first cousin and first love, Edmund Bertram.

- He's the cousin who has been like a brother to her and who has been kind to her since she was that timid, shy girl of ten. Marrying one's first cousin was accepted and common in this era, especially among wealthy families.

Wealth consolidation was definitely part of what was happening in these endogamous marriages.

- Perhaps, as a result, not all readers find the Edmund-Fanny marriage a satisfying end to the story. Some say Edmund takes too long to recognize Fanny's worth. Others find Edmund an unsatisfying hero because he has been raised as a brother figure to Fanny but still becomes her husband.

Interpreting the Story

- *Mansfield Park* isn't a simple story of generational repetition or of rewriting the wrongs of the past. Lady Bertram's marriage for money might seem at least outwardly successful. But her namesake daughter, Maria, follows in her footsteps, marries for money, and creates a disaster. Maria marries the rich, stupid Mr. Rushworth.

- Maria eventually abandons her loveless marriage for the charming rake, Henry Crawford, Mary Crawford's brother. The public revelation of Maria's running off with Henry, reported as gossip in the newspaper, compels her father to remove her not only from Mansfield Park itself but from all polite society.

- In comparison, her sister Julia Bertram elopes with her brother Tom's friend, Mr. Yates, a young gentleman of respectable means but questionable character. That elopement at least ends in a proper marriage and causes only a "heavy aggravation." This is the middle-ground marriage, which sits between Fanny's dream-come-true and Maria's nightmare.

Loved and Disliked

Since its publication in 1814, Austen's third novel, *Mansfield Park*, has sparked debate and split audiences. Some readers consider *Mansfield Park* their absolute favorite Austen title. Others, however, just as vehemently name *Mansfield Park* as their least favorite of the six major novels.

- Henry Crawford, taking a break from his dalliances with Maria Bertram, turns his attention to Fanny and eventually proposes to her. Sir Thomas, her uncle and quasi-guardian, attempts to compel Fanny to accept Henry but gives up after Henry ruins his daughter Maria's reputation.
- Maria's ruination in turn helps to open her brother Edmund's eyes to the moral faults of both of the Crawford siblings. Edmund stops being captivated by Mary Crawford. He begins to notice his cousin Fanny, not as a sister-like cousin but as a potential wife. In marrying Edmund, destined for a clergyman,

Fanny will move into the precise situation that had been Mrs. Norris's, but with a better moral foundation. It's another next-generation repetition with a twist.

- Fanny will live an upper-middle-class life in Mansfield Park's parsonage. In turn, Aunt Norris is exiled to serve as a companion for her outcast niece, Maria Rushworth. In effect, the awful Mrs. Norris takes over Fanny's subservient role, as a companion to a morally corrupt daughter of the Bertrams. The second generation's outcomes make right some of the wrongs of the first, but only Fanny gets the terms of rebellion right. She acts morally by flouting corrupt authority.

Corruption, Debate, and Conclusion

- The corruption is simultaneously close up and far away, because Sir Thomas Bertram owns an estate in Antigua, a British colony in the West Indies. Early in the novel, he and his son Tom travel to Antigua to deal with financial mismanagement on the estate. This estate almost certainly would have been a sugar plantation run on slave labor. Although this isn't explicitly stated, Austen's early readers would have assumed that was the case.

- Readers have long been divided over this part of the plot. One critic famously suggests that Austen's mentioning their travel to Antigua without damning it outright means that she was a tacit supporter of colonial slavery. Others, however, have pointed to Sir Thomas's obvious faults and shortcomings as an implicit indictment of colonial slavery.

- Regardless, it's clear that *Mansfield Park* is neither blind to, nor silent on, the exploitative nature of labor. *Mansfield Park* is a novel about family conflict, greed, sex, and moral choice. It still prompts serious questions about power, work, and gender.

- The novel ends with the married hero and heroine, Edmund and Fanny, moving into the parsonage at Mansfield Park in order for him to become the parish clergyman. Here's the novel's final line:

> On that event they removed to Mansfield; and the Parsonage there, which, under each of its two former owners, Fanny had never been able to approach but with some painful sensation of restraint or alarm, soon grew as dear to her heart, and as thoroughly perfect in her eyes, as everything else within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park had long been.

- As readers, we, too, are left to contemplate the view and patronage of Mansfield Park from this new perch. Gone are some of the painful sensations, restraints, and alarms. But has Mansfield Park really been thoroughly perfected? Perhaps only if we see it through Fanny's eyes.

- Fanny's slow, timid rebellion brings about her personal happiness. It allies her to the worthiest member of the family, Edmund. And it grants her a new social and economic power.

Beyond the Ending

- Some who read *Mansfield Park* fantasize beyond its ending. They hope that Edmund, the second son, will eventually inherit the estate, after his ailing brother Tom, and that Fanny will eventually take Lady Bertram's place.

- Perhaps, if that fantasy future were to come to pass, Fanny would choose to ask further questions about the slave trade, colonialism, labor, class, kindness, and comfort. If so, she would then be far better situated to advance economic and social change within and beyond the confines of Mansfield Park, not from a place of timidity but from one of strength.

- The alternative is that Fanny, whether in the parsonage or the great house, is destined in our imaginations merely to settle into a comfortable life. In that case, she benefits from the tainted proceeds of a West Indian sugar plantation that draws its profits from slave labor.

Annotated Suggested Reading

Austen and Wiltshire, ed., *Mansfield Park*.

Byrne, *Belle*.

——, *The Real Jane Austen*.

Mansfield Park has proven a more difficult novel to appreciate and grasp than Austen's others. Many editions of the novel, including a version edited by John Wiltshire, come with an appendix containing the play *Lovers' Vows*. It's illuminating to compare *Lovers' Vows*—Elizabeth Inchbald's English-language adaptation of August von Kotzebue's original German play—with Austen's characters and plot.

To learn more about Lord Mansfield in the context of Mansfield Park, see the chapter on the topic in Paula Byrne's *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things*. See also Byrne's book *Belle: The True Story of Dido Belle*, written to accompany director Amma Asante's 2013 film *Belle*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the meaning of the name Mansfield and the importance of the fictional place being used as the title in *Mansfield Park?*
2. What would you do if you were in Fanny Price's place?

EMMA: THE PROPER USE OF POWER

Lesson 7

"Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her."

That is how Jane Austen's 1816 novel *Emma* begins. It is a work some consider to be her masterpiece because of its brilliancy of language, its vivid characterizations, and its complex narration. This lesson looks at the opening of *Emma* as an exploration of female economic and social power. It also delves into the powers of the heroine herself, comparing her to the other female characters who force her to confront the limits of her power.

Emma's Description

- Emma's social and economic powers derive from whose daughter she is. Her father, Mr. Woodhouse, is one of two prominent landowners in the village. But Emma's power also derives from the fact that she has no brothers. Her widower father has two adult daughters, and he shows no interest in remarrying to produce a son and heir. As a result, Emma will have an enormous fortune.

- Let's turn back to the novel's opening line. Emma is described with three adjectives, each one loaded with associative meaning: *handsome*, *clever*, and *rich*. *Handsome*, in the early 19th century, was a compliment that signaled a woman was striking and stately. Emma, in other words, is strongly attractive as a woman, not weakly, gently, or innocuously attractive.

- The word *clever* suggests that Emma has intellectual ability, but that it arises from craftiness, not from deep learning. The word *clever* doesn't necessarily imply brilliance or serious study. It's a narrower word.

- As for the third adjective, the narrator could have called Emma *wealthy* or, even more euphemistically, *fortunate*. The chosen adjective, *rich*, is a brash, negative word, without pleasant sugarcoating.

- In these three seemingly positive words—*handsome*, *clever*, and *rich*—Austen's narrator telegraphs Emma's supposed strengths and the supposed blessings of her existence. But these words, at the same time, signal her distinctive weaknesses.

The Narrators

- Emma, we're told, "had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her." Yet we're told next that her mother died when she was a little girl. Notice how unlikely a juxtaposition these two things are.

- These conflicting lines point to something that's apparent throughout the novel. There's a slippage between the omniscient, or all-knowing, narrator's third-person reporting of the story and the glimpses we get of events through the first-person perspective of Emma's own flawed, wishful thoughts. These are sometimes very hard to separate out, too, which is surely by design.

- Take this example: There's a section in which Emma, on observing her young friend, Harriet Smith, was, we're told, "not struck by any thing remarkably clever in Miss Smith's conversation, but she found her altogether very engaging." This is Emma's thought, reported by the narrator.

- But two sentences later, we're told, "The friends from whom [Harriet] had just parted, though very good sort of people, must be doing her harm." Consider that Harriet's friends "must be" doing her harm. Is this a thought that Emma is having, a declaration by the narrator, or both? It's an opinion, and it's a statement. It's difficult to assess whether it's a trustworthy piece of information.

- This difficulty is a result of Austen's brilliant use of something called free indirect discourse. In free indirect discourse, the omniscient narration also glides in and out of one character's consciousness.

- It can be tricky figuring out which information in the novel is coming from which perspective—the narrator's all-knowing guidance or Emma's partial conclusions. This conundrum of reading has led some to compare the novel to a puzzle, a riddle, or even a detective story.

A Reluctant Dedication

Just before *Emma* was published, Austen received an invitation to dedicate her next novel to the prince regent. It was the sort of invitation she couldn't refuse, even though Austen wasn't a fan of his. She even used the word *hate* in relation to him. But the prince regent must be obeyed.

Austen's dedication to him was as tepid as it could be. It was formulaic and cold. Austen wrote, "To his Royal Highness, the Prince Regent, this work is, by His Royal Highness's Permission, most Respectfully Dedicated by his Royal Highness's Dutiful and Obedient Humble Servant."

Emma's Mistake

- We learn in the first chapter that Emma thinks she's a good reader of people and situations and an excellent matchmaker. She revels in pulling strings behind the scenes to direct other people's love lives.
- In her own home, she's the benevolent puppet master of her loving, devoted, and ineffectual father. He's an inveterate hypochondriac with a raft of peculiar anxieties. Emma's mistake is in thinking her success in managing that unusual parent-child relationship means she has the ability to manage others' love lives.
- For example, Emma begins the novel feeling a sense of loss and triumph. Her longtime live-in governess, Miss Taylor, has just married. Having become Mrs. Weston, she's moved to the nearby home of her husband, a land-owning widower. It's an advantageous marriage.
- Emma credits herself with having brought about Miss Taylor's marriage to Mr. Weston. Emma claims that she foresaw the couple's suitability and had a hand in throwing them in each other's way. She claims that she'd "planned" the marriage for four years—which would make Emma just 16 at the dawn of her plan.
- From the first, the hero Mr. Knightley says that Emma's matchmaking abilities are manufactured in her own head. He thinks the Taylor-Weston match was a lucky guess. He's especially skeptical of Emma's wish to want to continue exercising her supposed giftedness at matchmaking by finding a wife for clergyman Mr. Elton. Mr. Knightley turns out to be right about Mr. Elton.

Harriet Smith

- Emma famously ignores Mr. Knightley's advice. As part of her plan to find a wife for Mr. Elton, Emma befriends a pretty young girl, Harriet Smith. Harriet is presented from the first as a plaything for Emma—almost a human pet. Harriet is pretty but not clever.
- Harriet is an illegitimate daughter—a girl not born into lawful wedlock. Harriet herself doesn't know who her parents are, although someone pays for her to attend a local girls' boarding school and to stay on there afterward.

- A half-knowledge of Harriet's circumstances leads Emma to fantasize that her friend's unknown father must be wealthy and well-born. Once again, Emma is wrong. We learn, in the end, that Harriet is the illegitimate daughter of a successful tradesman. He has little wealth and less social status.
- When Emma wants things to be true, she imagines that they are true. Then she congratulates herself for her foresight and for being right. She's described, early on in the novel, as an "imaginist." Emma, as an imaginist, sets out to polish Harriet, groom her for marriage, and throw her in Mr. Elton's way, to give Harriet the fairy-tale future she imagines for her.

Mrs. Elton

- Mr. Elton mistakenly believes that Emma is interested in being his wife, not in securing Harriet for the role. That misunderstanding—which stems directly from Emma's own meddling—ultimately leads Mr. Elton to hunt for a wealthy young woman to become Mrs. Elton. He makes fast work of it, finds Miss Augusta Hawkins, and makes her his wife.
- Mrs. Elton is Emma's competition in haughty riches. Like Emma, Mrs. Elton is overly sure of herself, has money, and fancies herself clever. Emma finds Mrs. Elton, if not foolish, then arrogant and ignorant.
- As readers, we have to agree with Emma's assessment, because this is what the narrator has shown us of Mrs. Elton's behavior, too. She's obnoxious and cruel. What we might not be so quick to see from the description told from Emma's perspective is just how much these criticisms apply to Emma herself, too, especially these phrases like "well satisfied with herself."
- However, unlike Mrs. Elton, Emma does have a genuine desire to make others' lives better. In the end, Emma can recognize pain and pleasure in others. She desires and develops empathy. Mrs. Elton cannot and will not. Molding others to her own will is her principal goal.

Competition

- Because both women are rich, and interested in exerting control through wealth and position, Mrs. Elton and Emma end up in competition. We're told that "Mrs. Elton took a great fancy to Jane Fairfax; and from the first. Not merely when a state of warfare with one young lady might be supposed to recommend the other, but from the very first."
- If Emma has her protégé and plaything in Harriet Smith, then Mrs. Elton must have one for herself, too. She chooses Jane Fairfax. The description of Mrs. Elton's motivations and exertions is both Emma-like and disgustingly different from Emma.
- Harriet is weak and moldable, and Emma wants her to find a good husband. Jane Fairfax, on the other hand, is intelligent

and self-possessed, and Mrs. Elton wants to find her a job as a governess. Emma envisions an economic rise for Harriet. But Mrs. Elton is engineering an economic fall for Jane.

- Emma believes she has found an advantageous marriage for her former governess. Mrs. Elton, however, wants to put Jane in a line of work that Jane herself controversially compares to a kind of female slavery.
- Because of Mrs. Elton's manipulations, Emma is forced to recognize that she might have befriended the worthy Jane, not the weak Harriet. Emma might have sought out a friend who was her equal, even her superior, in talents and intellect. Emma didn't want to, it seems, because being around Jane made Emma feel less talented and less intelligent. Her own insecurities lead her to dismiss Jane as a possible friend.

Miss Bates

- At the end of the novel, Jane becomes the wife of an eligible young man named Frank Churchill, rather than taking up a career as a governess. Emma then recognizes how she's wronged Jane. Emma's own insecurities led her to avoid helping Jane, despite her being worthy and in need of friendship and support.
- The last woman set up as a foil to Emma is perhaps the neediest of them all: the middle-aged spinster Miss Bates. Miss Bates started out life with education and prospects, but she has fallen far economically, due to deaths in the family and due to her never marrying. Miss Bates serves as both Emma's and Harriet's nightmare vision of their possible futures. Yet while Harriet wants to get married so as not to turn into a Miss Bates, Emma rejects the idea of marriage.
- Interestingly, Emma's objections to marriage are economic. Without love, Emma says, she would be a fool to change her situation. She says she doesn't have a lack of fortune, employment, or consequence.
- The difference between Emma and Miss Bates, Emma says, is money. As she tells Harriet, "A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid! the proper sport of boys and girls." However, Emma goes on, "a single woman, of good fortune, is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as any body else."

- Like many of the things Emma says, this is at least partly wishful thinking. Emma is a single woman of fortune, but she proves herself not as respectable, sensible, or pleasant as everyone else. She deviates most egregiously from these qualities with her insult to Miss Bates in the climactic scene at Box Hill.

- Mr. Knightley steps in to show Emma the harm and hurt she has caused. He delivers a life-changing lecture to Emma. He says Miss Bates is "poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed!" Others, Mr. Knightley points out, will be guided by Emma's treatment of this vulnerable woman.

Conclusion

- Mr. Knightley—Emma's social and economic equal, and a man who believes in faith, truth, and justice—is willing to help her discover how to be more faithful, true, and just. This moment leads to Emma's realizing her own misuse of her power as well as that no one must love Mr. Knightley but herself. He declares that he loves her in return.

- Theirs is a May-December romance. Mr. Knightley has known Emma since she was a child, which some readers today find unsettling, if not distasteful. Some critics think that in giving herself over to Mr. Knightley's criticisms and truths, Emma also gives over her strong voice and significant power to him in marriage. She subjects herself to his vision and his will.

- The novel doesn't entirely settle this question of equality and power in marriage. But it does tell us that Mr. Knightley is willing to take an unusual step with Emma. After marriage, we're told, Mr. Knightley moves temporarily into her house, called Hartfield, with her father. This is so that Emma doesn't cause her anxious father further distress. Mr. Knightley gives up his comfort and a bit of his power so that Emma can continue to cater to her needy but worthy parent.

- Regardless of how you read its ending, *Emma* is a novel about power—especially female social power, benevolent patronage, and female companionship. It concludes in this way, with Emma and Mr. Knightley's

marriage: "the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union."

- We might ask, once again, whether this line is meant to be read from Emma's wishful perspective or from that of the all-knowing narrator. In either case, it's an optimistic, hope-filled conclusion.

Annotated Suggested Reading

Austen and Justice, ed., *Emma*.

Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*.

Sabor, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to "Emma."*

Cambridge University Press has produced a marvelous collection of introductory essays in its *Cambridge Companion to "Emma"* (edited by Peter Sabor). The Norton Critical Edition of the novel *Emma*, fourth edition, is excellent, with a helpful selection of additional texts, both contexts and criticism. (The book's editor, George L. Justice, is the husband of this course's instructor.) Another book of Austen criticism with a superb section on *Emma* is Anthony Mandal's *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*: *The Determined Author*.

Questions to Consider

1. How do you think we're meant to read those three adjectives in relation to Emma: *handsome*, *clever*, and *rich*? How do they compare and contrast with the adjectives used to describe Harriet, Jane, and Mrs. Elton?
2. What does "the duty of woman by woman" mean to you? Do you think it had similar or different meanings (or both) in Austen's day?

NORTHANGER ABBEY: DEFENDING THE NOVEL

Lesson 8

Gothic fiction, known for ancient castles and ghostly sounds, consists of suspense-filled stories that were immensely popular in the late 18th century. This was precisely the era in which the young Jane Austen was reading voraciously—and when she first began writing fiction as a teenager. It's no wonder that the pervasive Gothic stories of her youth would later inform the plot of one of her novels: *Northanger Abbey*, a comic send-up of the suspense-filled works of Gothic fiction in vogue in the politically volatile 1790s. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen makes fun of readers who take the Gothic too seriously, but she also celebrates those who read the genre intelligently.

Overview of the Novel

- *Northanger Abbey* begins this way:

  > No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and disposition, were all equally against her.

- Note how the heroine is immediately marked out by the narrator as different. Catherine, we're told, goes against stereotype. For one, she's unusual in having both a father and a mother who are caring. Many heroines in Gothic novels are orphans. It quickly signals their vulnerability. But Austen's Catherine doesn't start out in a structurally helpless category.

- Catherine is an unlikely heroine, too, because her looks go against the fictional norm. Most heroines in Gothic novels were stunningly beautiful, virtuous, dutiful, accomplished, and modest. They were perfect women stuck in perilous circumstances. But Catherine, at the beginning of the novel, is plain, thin, and awkward.

- At 15, she begins to mature and becomes "almost pretty." From age 15 to 17, she immerses herself in the fantasy world of Gothic novels and becomes obsessed with them. Even though the odds are against it, Catherine decides to be "in training for a heroine."

- Austen's novel invites us to laugh at and to see ourselves in Catherine's foibles and imperfections. By reading the novel, we might grow not only to like her, despite her faults, but perhaps to grow wiser, too, as she does.

- If Catherine is an atypical heroine, then *Northanger Abbey* is an equally atypical novel. Its narrator begins by telling us what its heroine is and is not and why the adventures that befall her are important. The narrator goes on to tell us what the genre of the novel is and is not and why reading matters.

- By the end, we've learned how Catherine has failed and succeeded. She has failed because she's not living in the thrilling Gothic story she improbably anticipates. Yet her failure is a success, because she ends up securing the loving husband of her choice anyway, after some misunderstandings and obstacles.

Catherine's Challenges

- Catherine's biggest problems arise from being quixotic. She's a character drawn in the mold of the hero of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, the brilliant Spanish novel of the early 17th century. Don Quixote famously mistook windmills for imaginary enemies. He tried to rescue women who didn't need rescuing. Don Quixote mistakes the formulas of romance for the rules of real life.

- Catherine Morland is a female Quixote. She internalizes the formulas of Gothic fiction. She mistakes them for probable models of reality, and she misapplies them to the everyday world.

- For instance, when Catherine meets a young woman just her age on her first trip to Bath, she believes that the two of them must immediately become each other's trusted confidantes. That's precisely what would happen in a typical Gothic novel. As a result, Catherine consistently misreads the motivations of her fast friend, Isabella Thorpe, who turns out to be a very false friend.

- In a Gothic novel, just as the first young female a heroine meets might become her best friend and sidekick, the first eligible young man she meets might become her future husband, after they overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. *Northanger Abbey* isn't only a parody of the Gothic, because its story employs many Gothic elements in a new key.

- The first young man Catherine meets does turn out to be her hero: the witty, sarcastic, and novel-loving Henry Tilney. The couple's obstacle to love proves to be not a villainous criminal or a supernatural force, as one would expect to see in a Gothic romance, but instead proves to be the hero's brash, materialistic father, General Tilney.

- It's the second young woman Catherine meets, Henry's sister Eleanor Tilney, who turns out to be her true female friend. Austen makes the true friend, Eleanor, and the false friend, Isabella Thorpe, into foils for each other. They have different motives but also very different tastes in reading. Eleanor loves "real solemn" histories and looks deeply into them. Isabella voraciously reads "horrid" Gothic novels but only skims their surfaces for sensational details.

Examining Gothic Fiction

- One of the first things that bonds false friend Isabella to Catherine is their mutual love of Gothic fiction. The most famous Gothic novelist of the time was Ann Radcliffe. Her bestselling title from 1794, *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* is mentioned 18 times in *Northanger Abbey*. Catherine is positively steeped in the world of Radcliffe's fiction. Radcliffe was seen as the most accomplished of the authors of these frightfully fun and fashionable books, known for their suspense-filled, melodramatic plots.

- In Radcliffe's novel, every supposed supernatural event turns out to be an explainable natural occurrence. Not all novels did this. Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, from 1796, includes frightening visits by the dead to the living, nuns and priests in sexual relationships, and actual pacts with the devil. Radcliffe's novels were tame by comparison.

Defending Gothic Fiction

- The racier Gothic novels gave the genre as a whole a bad name. As a result, many parents worried about their children reading them. Catherine's inability to tear herself away from a Gothic novel is exactly what some adults feared would happen to the young.

- Critics tended to look down their noses at Gothic novels as inferior literature, describing them as harmful and addictive. Gothic romances were said to be trashy books beloved by foolish girls.

- *Northanger Abbey* actually makes light of both sides of the conflict. The novel's narrator lightly ridicules trendy, addicted readers. It heavily criticizes the snobbish, fear-mongering critics. *Northanger Abbey* also overturns the notion that these are women's books. Henry tells Catherine that men enjoy a good novel, too, even a good Radcliffe novel.

- That's why *Northanger Abbey*—among all of the other things it is—must be described as a novel that defends novels. It makes fun of Catherine's inability to put down *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, but it advocates for the value of reading fiction. It asks us to think about how, why, and what we read. Mistaking novels for real life is a problem, as Catherine's example shows. But the story also shows that there are good reasons to read novels and good outcomes from it, too.

- Austen's position on novels is made clear in chapter five of *Northanger Abbey*. In chapter five, the story shifts temporarily from telling us about characters and events to a digressive lecture about books. This begins after a description of Catherine and Isabella reading novels together. The narrator's voice breaks in, in an aside to the reader, to stand up for the two characters' reading material.

- Austen's narrator defends novels as works "in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed." The novels the narrator says ought to be the most valued are those with probable circumstances, natural characters, and conversations that readers still care about. Some Gothic romances did that, but there were also excellent novels of manners with those features. The narrator mentions the titles of three of them: *Cecilia, Camilla*, and *Belinda*.

- The first two titles, *Cecilia* and *Camilla,* are books by Frances Burney. The last, *Belinda*, is by Maria Edgeworth. They were famous novelists. Austen admired them. But neither Burney nor Edgeworth was willing to call her works of fiction a novel. Burney called one of hers a work. Edgeworth referred to *Belinda* as a moral tale.

- Austen, in describing *Cecilia, Camilla*, and *Belinda* as excellent novels, is not only praising but gently chiding both of these authors for refusing to use the label of novel. Austen's narrator is implying that the least they can do is to call their works of prose fiction novels, which would help the entire genre rise.
- Austen's story suggests there are better and worse novels and better and worse readers. Fiction fails its readers when it's improbable, unnatural, unoriginal, and boring. It succeeds when it avoids those artistic traps. Austen both criticizes and advocates for recognizing and recording in prose what we might call "the Gothic of everyday life."

Annotated Suggested Reading

Austen and Grogan, ed., *Northanger Abbey* (second edition, appendices A–J).

Valancourt Books editions of the seven "horrid novels": *Castle of Wolfenbach*; *Clermont*; *The Mysterious Warning*; *The Necromancer, or The Tale of the Black Forest*; *The Midnight Bell*; *The Orphan of the Rhine*; and *Horrid Mysteries*.

Readers have long found it fun to read the seven "horrid novels" that Catherine and Isabella read together, as mentioned in *Northanger Abbey*'s sixth chapter. Valancourt Books has republished all of them in useful, readable editions with introductions and annotations. It's also possible to download freely available original editions of most of them and to read them in the format that Catherine and Isabella themselves might have.

Questions to Consider

1. What were the conventions of 18th-century Gothic romance, and how does *Northanger Abbey* use and refuse them?
2. Based on *Northanger Abbey*'s fifth chapter, why does the genre of the novel need defending, and on what basis is that defense made?

PERSUASION: A SECOND BLOOM

Lesson 9

In Jane Austen's novel *Persuasion*, the heroine Anne Elliot utters the following lines:

> The case is so different, and my age is so different. If I was wrong in yielding to persuasion once, remember that it was to persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk.

These words might be said to crystallize the themes of Austen's short and passionate novel, *Persuasion*, the last published of her six major works. It's a story about age, safety, risk, and its title word: persuasion. This lesson considers the novel's deep focus on age and its saturation in the era's dangerous world events.

Background on *Persuasion*

- *Persuasion*'s story is anchored to real-life political events, including the specific dangers and the unsentimental, everyday aspects of Britain's war with Napoleonic France. Of course, *Persuasion* includes Austen's signature love story and requisite happy ending, along with trenchant social criticism, delicious irony, and comic minor characters. But the novel begins with a man and his disappearing domestic wealth.

- That man is the father of the heroine. His name is Sir Walter Elliot. He's introduced as a vain spendthrift widower with this line:

  > Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage.

- The narrator's descriptions absolutely eviscerate him for his love of status, telegraphed by this love for a single book, which describes heritage and lineage. His love isn't even for the book as a whole but for just one page of it—the only page that mentions his own name.

- A baronet is on the lowest rung of the ladder of the nobility. Sir Walter is not a member of the aristocracy. He is, however, just above knights, which are not hereditary titles. Knights are named, not born. Yet both knights and baronets are referred to with the same honorific address: "Sir." It's being born a baronet—not anything Sir Walter did that was honorable—that allows him the right to be called "Sir."

The Family

- Sir Walter's favorite page of the Baronetage reads in part, "Walter Elliot, born March 1, 1760, married, July 15, 1784, Elizabeth." The page goes on to indicate that Sir Walter's wife Elizabeth died in 1800, after giving birth to their four children. The eldest child was a daughter, named Elizabeth like her mother. Next was a daughter, Anne, followed by a stillborn son. The last child was another daughter, Mary.

- The stillborn son is a telling and sad detail. It reveals that Sir Walter had, and lost, a male heir. This would have been the child who inherited his property. When the novel opens, he hasn't remarried. After his death, unless he has a son in old age, his property will go to an Elliot cousin, William Walter Elliot, Esquire.

Precarious Finances

- Matters are in a precarious financial situation for Sir Walter. He has been a terrible manager of his estate, Kellynch Hall, and is in danger of losing it. His lawyer, Mr. Shepherd, and the lawyer's daughter, the widowed Mrs. Clay, try gently to communicate his dire economic predicament to him.

- Among his family members, Sir Walter's middle daughter Anne understands first that they are going to have to leave their estate temporarily—to rent it out, live more cheaply, and pay off their debts, in the hope that they might one day be able to afford moving back in. One might think that Anne would be lauded by her family for persuading her father into seeing reason. But her vain father and her equally vain older sister, Elizabeth, treat Anne shabbily.

Over-Persuasion

- Sir Walter is persuaded to rent out his estate by his lawyer, by Anne, and by others. That's a good persuasion. But soon after that, we learn that Anne herself was once influenced in her life choices by an act of what the novel calls over-persuasion.

- Almost eight years earlier, Anne had fallen in love with a military man of no title and no fortune, Captain Frederick Wentworth. He proposed, and she wanted to marry him. But Anne was persuaded, by her father and by her confidante and neighbor, Lady Russell, to reject Captain Wentworth. She hadn't fallen in love again since.

- As the novel opens, Anne is thrust into circumstances where she will be forced to meet Wentworth once again. In the intervening years, he has gone to war and has returned with a fortune, gained from prize money made by capturing enemy ships. He has come into wealth, just as her own father has lost it.

- In a coincidence, Anne's home, Kellynch Hall, is going to be rented out to relatives of Captain Wentworth's. His brother-in-law, Admiral Croft, is returning home from the war with new wealth himself, and he is looking for a place to live. His wife, Mrs. Croft, is Captain Wentworth's sister. However, because Anne is nobody, no one even remembers her former connection to Wentworth. No one notices. No one cares. She suffers in silence.

- The novel works out the relationships that are reestablished in this new set of circumstances. Captain Wentworth is thrown in with attractive, lively young women, and he lets it be known that he wants a wife. Anne is made to watch all of this, because these younger women are the sisters-in-law of her married sister, Mary Musgrove.
- Another man comes back onto the scene, too: the male heir of Kellynch Hall, cousin William Walter Elliot. He'd once rejected the chance to court the eldest sister, Elizabeth Elliot, and now, to everyone's surprise, he shows a romantic interest in Anne. Captain Wentworth and Anne are both compelled to observe the objects of their long-ago affection as they court and are courted by others.

The Passage of Time

- The passage of nearly eight years is incredibly important to the setup of the novel. These years were formative to Anne as an individual. They were also cataclysmic in the context of world events, with Britain at war with Napoleonic France. There have been casualties and threats of invasion.
- By contrast, at Kellynch, Anne's day-to-day life has been much the same during those years. But it must now change dramatically, because her father has run the family's finances into the ground by his extravagant overspending.
- Anne is in a socially fragile position that's very different from those of other Austen heroines, like Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, or Fanny Price. Anne is 27 years old when the novel opens. This is nowhere near an age that was considered old, even in the 1810s.
- But Anne qualifies as older in comparison to typical unmarried heroines in novels of manners or in a bildungsroman—a novel of development or a coming of age story. Most heroines in such stories are on the threshold of adulthood, perhaps 17 to 20 years old. Anne is by comparison far more experienced. She's also at a precipitous life moment. The early 30s were then thought to mark the end of a window of likely marriageability and perceived desirability for females.
- Throughout, *Persuasion* is a novel squarely focused on age and aging. The narrator doesn't shy away

from describing the physical and emotional effects of aging on the three Elliot sisters. Anne's older sister, Elizabeth, is attractive and selfish. She's aware, however, that her powers are waning.

- The younger sister, Mary Musgrove, is peevish and selfish. She's the only sister who has married and who has children. In terms of birth order, it's a reversal of what we'd expect for sisters, marriage, and aging. Her loudness attracts some attention but little sympathy.
- The three sisters' widower father, Sir Walter Elliot, is obsessed with aging and looks. He is exceptionally vain and is in denial that he's aging. Yet he criticizes the appearance of others almost as a sport.
- The novel is rife, too, with missing and inadequate mothers. None of the three daughters is aging into the adult position she inhabits with a good female role model or with much happiness. Anne is the only one doing it with any grace at all.

Historical Details

- *Persuasion* looks backward and forward through very specific historical details. The novel is set in an identifiable moment in the recent past, one defined by war. *Persuasion* contains characters who have seen battles and survived them as well as those at home who suffered absence and loss.

- The novel is often deliberately unsentimental. It considers all sorts of wartime deaths, especially those we don't tend to think about. One character, a brother-in-law of Mary Musgrove, was serving in the navy when he became ill. He was left behind on shore and didn't recover, dying in Gibraltar.

- His mother openly grieves his loss. However, this sailor, Dick Musgrove, is referred to by the narrator as a man who, when he was alive, nobody had cared for. This is the opposite of celebrating the war dead.

- There's an additional layer here that the novel's first readers would have understood. Gibraltar, a British possession near the southern tip of Spain, was a place of refuge and trade for British ships. Not only had this sailor died of illness rather than in battle; he had died under protection and shielded from harm. It's a surprising, senseless wartime casualty.

- However, it may seem odd that in *Persuasion*, the words *Napoleon* and *France* never appear. The word *French* is used twice, and only once in the context of wartime. But every reader of *Persuasion* would have known the war she was describing was with Napoleonic France. This raises a question: Why not hammer home those details by explicitly naming them?

- One possibility is that the emphasis in *Persuasion* is placed on the fictional characters of the story to highlight the effects of surviving war on everyday lives, especially women's lives. We can see that through the character of Mrs. Croft, the wife of Admiral Croft and sister of Captain Wentworth.

- *Persuasion* includes many lines that are now read as feminist or proto-feminist, including Mrs. Croft's pointed remarks about the need to see women as "rational creatures." This phrase is echoed from the era's feminist treatises, such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* from 1792. Mrs. Croft scolds her brother Frederick with this line: "I hate to hear you talking so like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days."

Publishing *Persuasion*

Persuasion was written in 1816. It first appeared in print in December 1817, just five months after Austen's death. It was published in a set and sold along with *Northanger Abbey*.

Temporary Peace

- The year 1814 is significant to understanding the novel. In setting *Persuasion* in that year, Austen places the story in a temporary moment of peacetime that would have been laden with meaning for her first readers. For a short time, in 1814, it had appeared that war with France had ended. Napoleon had seemingly been defeated. He had abdicated. He was exiled to the island of Elba.
- That peacetime was short-lived. In February 1815, Napoleon escaped from Elba. War with Britain and Europe recommenced. Napoleon would then be defeated again at the Battle of Waterloo, in June 1815. When Austen wrote *Persuasion*, in 1816, Napoleon had been exiled a second time, this time permanently.
- All of this meant that readers of *Persuasion* knew that the peace in Austen's novel's pages—the triumph, memory, and retrospection, at what seemed like an end to hostilities—was only going to turn out to be temporary.

Conclusion

- The final chapters of the novel are especially significant. Captain Wentworth and Anne Elliot, after considering other potential romantic partners, find themselves still in love with each other. Obstacles of their own and others' doing are removed. When Wentworth overhears Anne describing women's constancy in relation to men's, he takes it as a sign of her constancy of feelings for him.
- He takes a risk and delivers her a secret letter, telling her his feelings and eventually saying, "I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own than

when you almost broke it, eight years and a half ago." Anne reads his letter with "overpowering happiness."

- After they reunite, they mull over what might have been. As they look back and forward simultaneously, at personal and national events, they make plans to marry. The last paragraph gives us a sense of their happy present and hoped-for future. The narrator tells us that, for Anne, "the dread of a future war [was] all that could dim her sunshine."
- This dread was warranted. Readers of *Persuasion* would know that Napoleon would shortly be escaping from Elba. Readers would be made to imagine that Anne and Frederick were actually about to be dragged back into a dreadful near future of war.

Annotated Suggested Reading

Austen and Spacks, ed., *Persuasion*.

Harris, *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression*.

Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*.

Northanger Abbey and *Persuasion* were first published together as a set, but most people now read them separately, in stand-alone editions. For a book-length treatment of the novel, from multiple perspectives, read Jocelyn Harris's *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression: Jane Austen's "Persuasion."* For an excellent chapter on *Persuasion* (and all of the major works), see Peter Knox-Shaw's *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*.

Questions to Consider

1. Critics have long called *Persuasion* Austen's "autumnal novel," connecting that with Anne Elliot's "bloom." How do you think seasons of the year help us, or hamper us, in reading this novel?
2. How does knowing more about the Napoleonic wars shape or shift interpretations of this novel, especially in its commentary on, and characters connected to, the Royal Navy?

REGENCY ROMANCE AND COURTSHIP

Lesson 10

This lesson looks at how romance and courtship worked among people of means in Jane Austen's day. It unpacks the ways in which young people of means joined the social circles of adulthood and were supposed to interact with potential future mates. It also shows some examples of how these rules play out—or are broken—in Austen's novels.

Coming Out

- For a female from a "good family," the step into young adulthood was called coming out. A young woman might come out between the ages of 15 and 18, with 16 perhaps the norm. But it wasn't done on the basis of age alone. Coming out was a social formality that signaled that a daughter's parents decided she was ready to be courted and was marriageable.
- She could start to attend social events like assemblies and balls. These were costly events, with some requiring tickets or subscriptions. All such events required fashionable clothing. Proper introductions, too, were needed. The whole process could be rather time consuming.
- Parents were often quite calculating about how many daughters were out at once. The ideal would have been for each daughter to come out and be married off in age order. The family could focus on settling each daughter, or set of daughters close in age, before turning to the next one or next group.
- In *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bennets followed no such pattern, perhaps because Mrs. Bennet enjoyed the parade of her five daughters as a social spectacle or because she was desperate to marry any of them off, regardless of the order.
- Being out meant that a young woman was romantically approachable and was, to some degree, matured, polished, and accomplished. There was a noticeable difference in her dress and conversation, or so says *Mansfield Park*'s Mary Crawford to Edmund Bertram. Mary sees the difference this way: "A girl not out has always the same sort of dress: a close bonnet, for instance; looks very demure, and never says a word."
- There was less parade or fuss made about young men being out or not out. One reason for the difference is that bachelors of means were likely to have already spent time away from their homes, either at school or university or on a study abroad trip called the grand tour.

Meeting Others

- Once a young woman was out, she and her family sought opportunities to meet other young people. It was expected that a young woman would eventually leave her parents' home for her husband's.

- In between those two homes, she might stay with family or friends during the "season" in London or in a spa town, such as Bath. Bath was considered a marriage market, where young people could meet each other with ease.
- But the best place to meet other young people was in local gatherings in mixed company with conversation, music, and dancing, especially at evening gatherings or balls. Dancing was the most popular form of recreation, but a ball might also include card playing, tea, and late-night supper. Dancing was viewed, too, as valuable exercise, especially for women, who had few outlets for it.
- For wealthy families, a ball might be thrown in honor of a young lady's coming out. That's what we see in *Mansfield Park*, when Sir Thomas Bertram hosts a dance that is, in effect, designed to draw attention to his niece Fanny's now being at a marriageable point in her life.

Dancing

- In advance of a ball, Fanny, like other girls of her age and class, would have likely received some instruction from a dancing master. He would have taught the steps, as well as the etiquette, of dancing. Particular types of dances went in and out of fashion, from formal French minuets to slightly less intimidating cotillions and quadrilles.
- The most important were the country dances, because they were considered the least demanding type, in terms of skill. Country dances involved the couples holding hands, an arm's length apart. They required forward steps, hops, and spring steps, in various chain figures.
- Despite their reputation as easy dances, country dance patterns could be quite complicated, because one needed to know at all times where one's hands, feet, and eyes should go. Even coming and going from the event had its rules. There were bows and curtsies to be learned. Ladies needed to know when to take a gentleman's hand and when to take his arm.
- This brings up an important point: Even if waltzes were seen as going a little too far, dances of all kinds allowed for sanctioned touching between unmarried members of the opposite sex. Physical contact wasn't acceptable in other circumstances.

- Dancing was also a visual spectacle of seeing and being seen, not just by your partner but by everyone in attendance. There was an emphasis on a woman's need for graceful movement at all times, not only with well-placed feet, but with expressive arms, light steps, and erect carriage.

- Dances were not only about courtship. They were about reputation and display more generally, too. There were issues of rank to be considered and followed. Socially powerful couples were allowed to lead the set, at the front or head of the group of couples that assembled for a particular dance. In a minuet, the most highly ranked couple might begin by having the dance floor to themselves for a time, as all others in attendance watched. Country dancing was less formal but still had its status-oriented placements and traditions.

Balls in Austen's Work

- In any sort of dancing at a ball, to join the set required that one have a willing partner. Adults who were out of the marriage marketplace themselves may have tried to help the unmarried find suitable partners. They might offer introductions or suggest partners.

- In *Northanger Abbey*, Mrs. Allen regrets that she doesn't know anyone to introduce Catherine to. As she tells the young heroine, "I wish I had a large acquaintance here with all my heart, and then I should get you a partner."

- Perhaps the most famous instance of this in Austen's novels happens early in *Pride and Prejudice*, when Sir William Lucas tries to help the young people find dancing partners. He attempts to convince Mr. Darcy to dance and then cajoles him into asking Elizabeth Bennet. The narrator calls Sir William's own notion of his behavior an attempt to do "a very gallant thing." The problem is that neither Elizabeth nor Darcy welcomes Sir William's interference.

- It was considered impolite for a woman to dance more than two dances with the same man at a ball. This showed too much of a preference for him. Yet this two-dance maximum rule is one we see frequently broken in the balls Austen depicts in her novels, perhaps never more outrageously than by Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*.

- Isabella knows what she is doing is wrong when she dances repeatedly with James Morland. She even refers to her own doing so as "quite shocking," but then she blames it all on her partner. Any reader then would have understood that the refusal was up to Isabella.
- Turning down men's impolite requests was seen as women's role. It was clearly not a fair situation, especially if the man in question was repeatedly deceitful, manipulative, or immoral. Men were given a wide berth for risky and reckless behavior. Women were not.

Social Calls

- If a man wanted to continue the acquaintance with someone he'd met socially—for instance, at a ball—then he would take steps to be introduced further into her family. He might "call on" her, either alone or with a member of his own family.
- The choice to continue the acquaintance was the male suitor's. A lady wasn't supposed to call on a single man, although her family could call on his family. However, because a lady could call on another lady, it was good luck and very convenient if a bachelor had a sister with whom to strike up a friendship.
- The rules for social calls among middle-class and elite families could be as intricate as the rules for dancing. To call on someone meant to make a brief visit, perhaps for 20 minutes. Calls then, too, had etiquette as intricate as dance steps. You might arrive at the home of an acquaintance, give your name, and ask whether the person you wanted to see were in or out. One might be admitted to a room, if the family were said to be in and able to receive you. If the person or family were said to be out, however, the suitor would depart, perhaps leaving a calling card.

Visits

- Married women were often the ones in charge of initiating and keeping up visits. Visits begat other visits, because they needed to be returned. Visits were made for courtship purposes, but they also happened at milestone events, such as welcoming new neighbors or congratulating the newly married. They could be very short—as little as 15 minutes.
- A household's servant or servants were often the ones managing these interactions. If a household were middle class or above, it had at least one servant. The servants were instructed to tell visitors whether the family was "at home."
- If a family were declared "not at home," that didn't necessarily mean that they were physically away from the house. "Not at home" meant they were not receiving visitors, or maybe just a particular visitor, at that moment. When a visitor was told the family was "not at home," this was also known as "being denied."

- Although being denied wasn't necessarily happy news for the person who received the denial, it wasn't considered rude. Only families that imagined themselves very closely connected might be surprised at receiving a denial when someone was actually home. Then they might suspect that they'd offended their acquaintance in some way.

- This is what happens to *Northanger Abbey*'s Catherine Morland when she goes to visit Eleanor Tilney. The servant tells Catherine that Eleanor is not at home. But as Catherine walks away, she sees Eleanor leaving the house. Catherine is anxious about whether she has offended her friend.

- If a male suitor called on the family of a woman he wanted to court, and he was then admitted for a visit, he would be joined by the young woman herself and also by a chaperone. This was usually either a married woman or an older, unmarried or widowed one. It was the chaperone's job to make sure that the suitor was never alone with the young woman. If the couple's intimacy advanced, the two of them might take a walk together or even a day excursion, but only with a chaperone present or in a group.

- This is one reason why in *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor is shocked that her sister Marianne goes unaccompanied with Willoughby in his curricle—an open-air carriage—to tour the estate at Allenham. The visit is improper for several reasons, as Elinor points out. But the very first reason is that Marianne has traveled alone with him.

Testing and Breaking Rules

- Austen's novels continually investigate moments in which the rules of romance, courtship, and social behavior are tested or broken. This is the crux of a novel of manners.

- Sometimes the consequences for rule breaking are shown to be minimal, such as when Marianne goes off alone with Willoughby in the curricle. The only negative consequence at that moment is gossip.

- However, at other times in Austen's fiction, flouting the rules does result in loss of reputation or romantic opportunity. In *Northanger Abbey*, the engaged Isabella Thorpe sees a chance for a better catch. She tries to exchange her fiancé for another man. She manages it poorly and loses both.

- A cunning woman might get away with it. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Lucy Steele successfully navigates trading one fiancé for another and pays no long-term price for it. It would have been far more common in a novel in this era for a woman who broke the rules of courtship, like Lucy did, to be more severely punished by the story's end. The men might or might not be, but the woman would be.
- However, in Austen's novels, most of the men and women who break social rules emerge, like Lucy Steele, relatively unscathed. They don't die, or end up in prison or without economic resources. Instead, they may end up living lives at one remove from the polite characters.

Suggested Reading

Fullerton, *A Dance with Jane Austen*.

Raff, *Jane Austen's Erotic Advice*.

Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*.

Questions to Consider

1. How do the phrases "advantage of choice" and "power of refusal" capture, or fail to capture, gendered patterns of dancing, courtship, or marriage in Austen's novels?
2. What does Austen show might happen to characters (or readers) who stray from the ideals or break the rules of romance and courtship? How and why does that matter?

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN AUSTEN'S ERA

Lesson 11

This lesson looks beneath the surface of Jane Austen's novels to examine how they navigate the inner workings of marriage. It does so with a focus on the institution's written and unwritten rules and laws as well as on the impact of marriage on economically privileged families, especially landowning families.

Background on Marriages: Family Involvement

- In Austen's era, marriages were rarely arranged, at least in the strictest sense of the word *arrangement*. Families rarely chose specific spouses for their children. However, few marriages then were entirely free of family arrangement, for multiple reasons.

- One reason was the importance of doing one's duty by the family. Because marriage was seen as a tool for linking prosperous families and consolidating present and future land and wealth, its negotiations and outcomes usually involved the family as a whole, and even people beyond it.

- By tradition, fathers were asked by would-be grooms for permission to marry their daughters. That wasn't just patriarchal politeness. Both sets of parents were likely to be needed to sign off on any plan for marriage, especially if money were to change hands, as it certainly would have for families of means.

- Unless a young man were financially independent, he would have sought permission to marry from his own parents, too. If he didn't, he might jeopardize their financial support. A young man who was of age—that is, over 21—could conceivably choose to marry first and ask his family for forgiveness later. But this was taking a significant risk.

- It's for this reason that we see admirable characters in Austen's novels seeking parental permission in the courtship process. Those characters who flout the process and don't do their duty to consult their elders face difficulties and harm. For example, take Lydia Bennet's eloping in *Pride and Prejudice* and Colonel Brandon's ward Eliza running away in *Sense and Sensibility*.

- There are exceptions, though. In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry Tilney seems likely to have secretly courted Catherine Morland by letter, against his father's wishes, toward the end of the novel. But even this rebel couple doesn't try to resume their official courtship or to marry without parental approval.

- When parents tried to steer their children toward a prospective spouse with a certain level of status or wealth, it wasn't just to control their lives. It was with the recognition that others in the family might be affected by that marriage.

- A financially advantageous marriage might protect an entire family from discomfort, financial ruin, or imprisonment for debt. If one son or daughter married into a wealthy family, it might produce advantages that would flow out to many. For example, take *Mansfield Park*'s Sir Thomas Bertram. He ends up helping many members of his wife's extended family, in ways large and small.
- In *Emma*, when the orphaned Jane Fairfax marries Frank Churchill, she escapes a life of insecurity and drudgery as a governess. Jane hasn't chosen Frank out of greed. But unlike Emma Woodhouse, Jane stands to gain everything from such an advantageous marriage—fortune, employment, and consequence. So, too, do her surviving family members.

Ideals in Flux

- A complicating factor was that ideals of marriage in relation to family duty were then in flux. In the 1790s, debating societies held public arguments to consider which was the greater evil: marrying for love without money or marrying for money without love. This was a culture that couldn't decide which scenario was worse. The clear message was that it was nice if you had both love and money, but if you had to do without one or the other, you might make do without love.
- Literature may have paved the way for gradual real-life changes. Austen's fiction took a liberal or reformist perspective toward traditional marriage in the middling classes and above. Her novels promote small changes by placing the emotional and intellectual desires of the individual, especially women, above the financial and status-oriented needs of the family.
- Although Austen doesn't recommend doing away with the institution of marriage, her novels expose the built-in unfairness for women in matters of courtship and matrimony. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's conversations about marriage with her practical friend Charlotte Lucas get at the heart of the conflict.
- Charlotte believes that "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance" and that "it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life." Elizabeth disagrees and at first even believes that Charlotte must be joking.

- But Charlotte shows herself willing to accept the very suitor that Elizabeth vehemently rejects: Mr. Collins. Charlotte recognizes that Mr. Collins's company is irksome. But we're told that, for Charlotte, "marriage had always been her object" as "the only provision for well-educated young women of small fortune." For Charlotte, security is the reason for marriage. For Elizabeth, happiness is.

- Elizabeth refuses to do what many readers then would have seen as her duty: marry to secure her family's financial future. It helps very much that Elizabeth had her father's approval for her refusing Mr. Collins. She didn't have to go against both of her parents' wishes—just her mother's. Her father, too, supports individual female happiness over family comfort, at least in Elizabeth's case.

Laws and Institutions

- Next, this lesson turns to take a look into the era's laws and practices. When a couple became engaged, that was considered a man's binding promise to a woman and her family. Should a man back out of an engagement, then he could be sued by her family for breach of promise of marriage.

- Fiction like Austen's may have been ahead of real life in its depictions of possibilities in marriage. Austen's fiction suggests that individual choice and romantic happiness ought to win out over economics and family pressures. However, in each of her novels, the money conveniently falls into place for couples who are brought together by love. Any family recriminations conveniently fall away, too.

- The idea behind a breach of promise of marriage suit was that a man who had jilted a woman had damaged not just the woman's but the family's and father's financial prospects. Her chances of finding another husband were lessened by the suitor's rejection.

- Knowing this context might add a little wrinkle to Edward Ferrars's keeping his engagement to Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility*. His ending the engagement might have resulted in her family bringing a breach of promise of marriage suit against him.

- Such lawsuits were no doubt far more rare than actual broken engagements. Lawsuits were expensive, and a reputation-conscious family might prefer to sweep a broken engagement under the rug.

- Even for the more mundane things like marriage settlements, which we might think of as proto–prenuptial agreements, lawyers were regularly involved. The family of the bride offered, or negotiated, a sum of money that she would bring into the marriage, called a dower, dowry, or bride price.

- Lawyers might help draw up contracts stipulating matters like widow's jointures and pin money. Widow's jointures were separate financial settlements for wives, which were to be paid should their husbands die first.

- Pin money was a wife's annual spending allowance. It was a small amount set aside so that it would be under her control to spend as she'd like after the marriage. Pin money had to be declared in the marriage contract because otherwise, the wife's property became, by law, the property of her husband.

- Married women could not own separate property in Britain until late in the 19th century. Single women and widows could own property, but married women could not. All of the bride's previous property became her husband's. So, too, did anything that came to her during the marriage, even her own earnings, as unusual as those would have been for a middle-class woman or above.

- The expectation was that a wife did not need to work outside the home or perhaps beyond the family business. A privileged wife's "employment" was supposed to be managing her husband's household and any servants they might have, raising their children, and doing works of charity, including ministering to the community's poor.

Legal Strictures and Workarounds

- No matter which class a person came from, 18th-century marriage brought with it a set of legal strictures. Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act, also known as the Marriage Act of 1753, tried to curb the practice of clandestine and irregular marriages. Its rationale was ostensibly to protect wealthy young women. The act sought to do away with fortune-hunting men manipulating, or even kidnapping, young heiresses in order to marry them for their money.

- After 1753, these runaway marriages became illegal. The act also stipulated that all marriages needed to be announced publicly through so-called banns. Banns, too, were seen as protecting wealthy families and vulnerable girls from predatory men.

- Banns were oral statements of an engagement, read aloud in the church service in the parish in the weeks before the intended wedding. The clergyman would ask if anyone in the parish knew a reason why the couple should not marry.

- Thanks to Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act, English marriages were supposed to be performed during the day, by a regular clergyman, in a church or chapel, and then recorded in parish registers. Most importantly, the act required parental permission to marry for anyone under age 21. It gave families far more control over young couples.

- There were legal ways around Lord Harwicke's rules. One way was used by the extremely wealthy—marriage by special license, which gave couples the right to marry as they chose, without banns. Another way to get around the law was for a couple from England to elope to Scotland and get married according to its comparatively looser laws.

- Divorce was made possible by King Henry VIII, under his 1534 establishment of the Church of England, which he formed, in part, because the Catholic Church didn't allow him to divorce. Thereafter, powerful, wealthy Englishmen could bring suit to divorce their wives, if they could prove a cause, such as adultery. But wives couldn't divorce husbands for that reason. The double standard was cruel.

- It was possible for a wife to sue for divorce if she could prove adultery and physical cruelty. This, too, was very rare. A separation was more feasible. A wife was unlikely to have the independent financial means to sue for divorce or the power to win one.

Weddings

- As for weddings themselves, the ceremonies were far less grand than we've been led to think. Most film versions of Austen's stories overdo them for dramatic purposes.
- Weddings then were generally intimate, modest events, regardless of how much wealth the couple had. When, in *Emma*, Emma and Mr. Knightley are married in front of a "small band" of friends, that's typical. Large, expensive weddings with white dresses didn't become popular until later in the 19th century, well after Austen's death. The focus in her day wasn't on the wedding day or even on any honeymoon trip. It was on making a lifelong and stable economic and intimate alliance.

Suggested Reading

Jones, *Jane Austen & Marriage*.

Stone, *Road to Divorce*.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways was, or is, marriage a "business" in Austen's fiction or beyond it?
2. What do you think Austen's fiction seeks to communicate about "traditional marriage" in her own day? How have traditions of marriage continued and changed in 200 years, and how do you think novels like Austen's contributed to those continuities and changes?

MONEY, INHERITANCE, AND ALL THEY ENTAIL

Lesson 12

To understand Jane Austen's novels, it's important not only to learn about courtship, love, and marriage, but to grasp the finer points about its economics as well as what all of the numbers and denominations of money meant in real terms, then and today. This lesson looks first at English currency and at amounts of money, in the lump sum and by the year. It considers inheritance and wealth. Then, it turns to Austen's attitudes toward class, wealth, and poverty.

English Currency

- The monetary system then wasn't yet organized by tens. In the early 19th century, there were 20 shillings to a pound. Each shilling was then further divided into 12 pence. This meant that there were 240 pence to a pound. Even one pound then was a lot of money. We can see this in the typical wages of the working class.

- A shilling was commonly talked of as a week's wages. The salary of a domestic servant might be as little as 5 or 10 pounds a year. This was in addition to being provided room and board and the occasional castoff piece of clothing. Those things were worth a lot, especially if a person had no other means of getting food, clothing, or shelter. But this indicates that a single-digit number of pounds was the yearly salary of the majority of the English population then.

- Even among privileged people who could afford to be served, a pound wasn't an insignificant amount of money. The middling classes, too, might measure every expenditure in pennies and shillings rather than by pounds.

- For those of the greatest levels of wealth, the pound and the guinea were the more commonly spoken of units. A guinea is a now-defunct form of currency. In Austen's day, a guinea was valued at 21 shillings.

- Guineas were used most often in describing, at first, the price of horses. That extra shilling between the pound and the guinea sometimes went to pay something similar to a commission for an auctioneer. Eventually, guineas came to be used more widely not just in horse sales but to describe the price of luxury goods.

- We can see this in *Emma*, when Emma suggests the newly arrived Frank Churchill will make himself popular if he spends some money at a shop in the village of Highbury. She suggests that he buy gloves at half a guinea. Emma's suggestion, which Frank takes, might be compared to the current adage to "buy local."

- Britain then was an industrializing economy. Consumer goods were becoming more likely to be mass produced, due to changes in labor and manufacturing. In Austen's day, that shift was underway, but acquiring goods required a far higher percentage of one's income than now. There were fewer goods, and it took far more to make them.

- For a person to have a change of clothing was a rarity. To own a book was unusual. To buy a new pair of gloves on a whim, as Frank does, was to flaunt incredible purchasing power.

Economic Designations

- Austen's fiction offers little direct insight into the lives of servants, who are rarely given lines of dialogue. An exception to this is Pemberley's housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds, in *Pride and Prejudice*. She offers significant information to Elizabeth about her master's generosity and reputation. She's also a high-status and better-paid servant.

- But most of Austen's characters are best classified as belonging to the so-called middling classes of society. Only a handful of Austen's characters are very rich.

- Landowners in Austen's time were a very small proportion of the English population. The country was home then to some 10 million people and approximately 2 million households. Most people belonged to the laboring or working classes—largely an uneducated group. It's often estimated that half of the population was unable to read and write.

- The number who had great wealth was small. One critic has estimated that just 40,000 English families out of that population of 10 million were worth more than 850 pounds a year. They alone could own a large home, keep a carriage and horses, and hire a household full of servants.

- Not all these wealthiest families belonged to the nobility—the titled class. Only a fraction belonged to the aristocracy or royal family. The word often used to refer to the entire set of the era's 40,000 families is *gentry*. That word designates a landowning class of gentlemen, ranked just below the nobility in status, although they could vary widely in actual wealth.

- Such landowning families had an average of seven children who might survive to adulthood. Only one of these children could inherit the family estate. This situation created challenges. It meant that to support themselves, the bulk of the family's male offspring would eventually need a profession, or an advantageous marriage, or both.

- The females, who weren't supposed to work for a living to maintain their genteel status in the world, needed either an advantageous marriage or a dutiful, generous brother. Austen's fiction was especially attuned to the lives of these women—educated, privileged, and yet often completely economically dependent on men.

Austen's Heroines

- With the exception of Emma Woodhouse, Austen's heroines are shown to be experiencing even greater economic precarity than their structural dependency would suggest. Her heroines either never were in, or were about to fall from, the gentry or landowning class.

- Many of her heroines face the threat of a significantly downwardly mobile future. This would be a frightening prospect for anyone. But these heroines come into adulthood knowing that they'll have little to no control over their own financial destinies, beyond marrying well.

- This includes *Mansfield Park*'s Fanny Price, the daughter of a naval midshipman. It includes *Northanger Abbey*'s Catherine Morland, the daughter of a clergyman. It includes *Sense and Sensibility*'s Dashwood sisters, thrown into distress by the death of their father and selfishness of their half brother and his wife. It even includes *Pride and Prejudice*'s Bennet sisters. Although they are raised in gentry security and comfort, they know it will last only as long as their father lives, because of the entail on his estate.

Wealth Transfers

- The building block for the ideal life in Austen's day was a single man in possession of a good fortune. By tradition, such a fortunate single man was the beneficiary of an arrangement called primogeniture. In economic terms, primogeniture signifies that the eldest son is, by default, his father's heir at law—the one who will inherit property.

- Wealth transfers didn't always go as planned. That firstborn son might die before his father, in which case his wealth would probably go to the next eldest. However, imagine that there weren't any surviving sons or weren't any sons born at all. In such a case, some estates would have attached to them the stipulation that the next most closely related male heir would inherit.

- An entail lays out that legal understanding for generations to come. However, keep in mind that primogeniture was tradition, not law. It served as the default arrangement in the absence of a will, but it was not the imperative. A landowning family wasn't legally obligated to choose male heirs unless a previous generation had tied its hands with its stipulations.

- Emma Woodhouse is an heiress, for example, because the estate belonging to her family, Hartfield, isn't secured legally to a male heir. Women could be heiresses. A family might even declare that, if its female heiress married, her husband had to take her last name.

- *Emma*'s Frank Churchill was in a similar but not identical situation; he was presumably born with the name Frank Weston but took his wealthy aunt's surname. Jane Austen's own brother, Edward Austen, changed his name to Edward Knight for this exact reason. He was made the heir of the childless Knight couple who adopted him.

- However, in real life, such situations were rare. A stipulation would more likely be made that an estate must be passed down through a related male—that, in effect, the family property couldn't be inherited by a woman. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Norland, the Dashwood estate, is secured by its owner to his live-in nephew, Mr. Dashwood, and after that, to his eldest son, John Dashwood. After that, it is secured to his charming little son. To sum up, one elderly man set out to stipulate, at his death, the next three generations of male heirs of the estate.

- This arrangement freezes out the Dashwood daughters and any other potential future sons of their father, Mr. Dashwood. This was an especially important consideration, at a time with many unexpected deaths and the potential for remarriages.

- Entails were legal devices meant to tie the hands of the person who next inherited the estate. But even entails could be broken. As with seeking a divorce, setting out to break an entail required finding a cause, using one's wealth and influence, and seeking the intervention of Parliament. Few had the necessary means for success.

Wealth, Class, and Poverty

- An elite attitude of the time linked the amount of money a person had at his or her disposal to personal virtue. According to this thinking, the rich deserved to be rich, and the poor deserved to be poor, because the rich were imagined to be more honorable, better people. To be poor meant being seen by many privileged people as, by nature, deficient in virtue. This is absurdly tautological.

- Importantly, Austen's novels do not endorse this common attitude toward the laboring or middle classes,

or even toward the working classes or the poor. Instead, her novels present values and assumptions that call into question received wisdom about the connection between money, character, and virtue.

- Austen's fiction, although it doesn't give servants much of a voice, doesn't build in contempt for them either. We can see this through the ways Austen has her admirable and loathsome monied characters treat the poor.

- Austen's wealthiest heroine, Emma Woodhouse, is said to pay charitable visits to a poor, sick family outside the village of Highbury. This is an example of a real-life practice. At this time, the support and relief of the poor was done via the parish Poor Law system.

- Parishes, and the newly emerging workhouses, set out to provide for the needs of approximately 1 million people in England who were aged, infirm, or unable to work. Emma is probably giving money or food to those as yet unprovided for by the parish. That doesn't tell us about her attitudes toward poverty, but it does tell us that she understands charitable practices.

- Importantly, Austen's most economically defeated minor characters are shown to be perfectly virtuous, useful, and good, like the widowed Mrs. Smith in *Persuasion*. When Sir Walter insults her as a nobody, he is meant to be understood by the reader as horrifying and ridiculous.

- Austen's unsympathetic characters have unenlightened views about the relationship between character and wealth. In *Pride and Prejudice*, we're told that the snobbish Caroline Bingley and her sister would have had difficulty believing that Elizabeth Bennet's uncle, Mr. Gardiner, could live "by trade, and within view of his own warehouses," yet still be "well-bred and agreeable."

- To describe someone as simultaneously "in trade" and "well-bred," as Austen's narrative does here, is seeking to expand the standard definition of what constitutes good breeding. The novel gives the idea of good breeding a more open definition, one that might go beyond inherited wealth and birth in determining what was polite and good.

- It is unsurprising that Austen's fiction would question elite attitudes about the alleged connections among goodness, moral worth, equality, and wealth. She herself wasn't raised with riches. One critic famously referred to Austen's family as "pseudo-gentry" because they belonged to the "nonlanded professionals of the rural elite."

- Members of the pseudo-gentry demonstrated their position not by titles or estates—they didn't have them—but by income, goods, and connections. The women of this class fell, rose, or maintained their positions largely through marriage.
- Few educated women then had regular, independent incomes from their own labor. Even Austen could not have supported herself entirely with the amount of money she made publishing her writings in the last decade of her life. Still, she was very happy to have made money from her writings.

Suggested Reading

Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.

Hume, "Money in Jane Austen."

Todd, ed., *Jane Austen in Context*.

Questions to Consider

1. Austen's philosophies of class, economics, and money are much debated. Based on what you've learned, do you see more of a ratification or a skepticism of her era's economic practices and values in her novels?
2. How do you calculate a lump sum of wealth into a likely amount of income per year in Austen's era?

CLASS AND COURTESY IN REGENCY SOCIETY

Lesson 13

In *Pride and Prejudice*, heroine Elizabeth Bennet declares to Lady Catherine de Bourgh that Mr. Darcy is a gentleman and that she, Elizabeth, is a gentleman's daughter. Because of that, Elizabeth says, "so far we are equal." Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Darcy's aunt, scoffs at Elizabeth's claim of equality. She tells Elizabeth:

> True. You are a gentleman's daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition.

Lady Catherine is a terrible snob. But in the early 19th-century world, she's also speaking a truth. Elizabeth's social class didn't just depend on her father, his land ownership, and other issues of wealth. It depended on the status of the entirety of her family—their collective "condition," as Lady Catherine puts it, referring to what today we would call their social class. This lesson investigates the intricacies of early 19th-century family and connections.

Hierarchies and Royalty

- At the top of the hierarchy were those with inherited titles. The major categories that organized the upper echelons of Britain's social hierarchy in this era were royalty, aristocracy, nobility, and gentry. These were not synonymous.
- The term *royalty* signals the royal family, meaning the reigning monarch and his or her immediate family, children, and grandchildren. Before 2015, in Great Britain, royal male children took precedence over females in the line of succession to the throne. But in the absence of a royal male heir, a royal female heir could reign as queen, as often happened in the past.
- In the years during which Austen's novels were published, Britain's prince regent was Prince George Augustus Frederick, eldest child of King George III and Queen Charlotte. The prince regent gives his name to the period: the Regency.
- Being a regent means ruling in the stead of an absent or incapacitated monarch. Britain's King George III was declared mentally incapacitated. His son, the prince of Wales, took over as regent from 1811 to 1820. Then, after King George III died in 1820, the prince regent ascended to the throne to become King George IV.
- Other than one compulsory, quasi-dedication to the prince regent, prefixed to *Emma*, Austen's published novels make scant reference to royalty. They feature no royal characters at all.
- The next rung on the ladder below royalty is the aristocracy. Austen's fiction is incredibly thin on the ground there as well. Her novels make few mentions of aristocrats. They feature no major aristocratic characters.
- The term *aristocracy* refers to the highly stratified group of people with inherited titles that are attached to and passed down along with landed estates. The highest level of aristocratic titles are dukes and duchesses, who are just below the royal family in rank.
- Below dukes and duchesses in status is the category of marquess and marchioness. Just below that is the rank of earl and the countess. Under that is the viscount and viscountess, and then the baron and baroness. All of the people who hold these titles are referred to by address as "Lord" and "Lady."
- Fictional members of the aristocracy appear only on the fringes of Austen's fiction. The lesser or lower nobility sits just below the aristocracy.

It includes two groups of the titled. One is the men who inherited the title of baronet. The other is those who earned the title knight through some service to the crown. The titled people whom Austen regularly deals with in her fiction are almost entirely from this group of the lesser nobility.

Snobbery at Work

- The title of baronet was first devised in the year 1611 as a way to raise money for the crown. A baronetcy could be bought. As a result, the title of baronet might be looked down on by those who came into grander hereditary titles by birth, rather than by purchasing them.
- We can see this kind of snobbery at work in *Persuasion*. Sir Walter Elliot, a baronet, might be looked down on by the titled in ranks above him. His baronetcy would have been purchased by an ancestor.
- Sir Walter, however, looks down on those below him. He dismisses his neighbor, the widowed Lady Russell, as having married "only a knight," a man who was just one step below him on the social ladder. Even finer distinctions of class snobbery are there to consider. Sir Walter's daughter, Mary Musgrove, criticizes those who hold newer baronetcies.
- Sir Walter Elliot and Mary Musgrove are among the least likeable characters in *Persuasion*. This is evidence that Austen's fiction is especially critical of characters who look down on others through fine distinctions of social class, rather than on character, behavior, education, accomplishment, and other sorts of earned merit.

- *Mansfield Park*, too, implicitly finds fault with the lesser nobility. The baronet Sir Thomas Bertram owns Mansfield Park and also owns land abroad, in the West Indies, which adds to his fortune. The Bertrams' property in Antigua was likely made up of sugar plantations that profited from and exploited the labor of enslaved people.

- At home in England, Sir Thomas is hardly a paragon of virtue or effective parenting either. Austen's fiction often makes its highest status characters its most problematic.

Knights

- On the next rung below baronet were knights. A knighthood was an honor given by a sovereign in return for services rendered to the crown. It was a way to confer privilege and to socially elevate someone who was not otherwise born to a title. A knighthood is a lifetime honor that can't be passed down to one's children.

- The most notable knight in Austen's fiction may be *Pride and Prejudice*'s Sir William Lucas, the genial neighbor of the Bennets and father to Charlotte Lucas. The narrator continuously pokes fun at harmless Sir William for the pride he takes in having been made a knight. He was a successful tradesman and small-town mayor who was given a knighthood in recognition of an address he made to the king.

The Gentry

- The bulk of Austen's fictional characters sit below the lesser nobility. Some of them are quite wealthy. However, their class status falls below that of royalty, aristocracy, or nobility, and, for most, below the lesser nobility, regardless of their wealth. Most of Austen's characters fall within this category styled the gentry, signifying a landowning but untitled class.

- The gentry in early 19th-century England consisted of approximately 30,000 families. In Austen's novels, the families in this category include the Woodhouses and the Knightleys of *Emma*, General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, John and Fanny Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, and Mr. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*.

- The gentry class was made up of, in effect, landlords. If their estates were well managed, their families would have been able to live off of the proceeds and rents of their land rather than engaging in labor or trade themselves. Their land would have made money for them. Many hired estate managers.

- Gentry families were seen as communally and socially responsible and important. They were often considered the leaders and most powerful members of their communities. In that sense, they had duties, of a kind. Some oversaw legal aspects of the community, as magistrates or judges. Mr. Knightley, for instance, serves as a county magistrate.

- Some of the gentry devised or oversaw charitable schemes. These were expected forms of giving back to the community, as a landowner, but they were not compulsory.

The Quasi-Gentry and People in Trade

- Below the gentry in rank were the younger sons and daughters of the gentry. They had to earn their living by work or through advantageous marriages. Because of their proximity to the gentry, people in this group are sometimes referred to as the quasi- or pseudo-gentry.

- The next rung lower on the ladder of social class was made up of those in trade. People who were in "the trades" ran businesses that made and sold goods and services, like furniture and clothing. Many also employed skilled laborers from the working class.

- Anyone who made a living in trade—no matter how much money they made—was likely to be looked down on by the traditional elite. It was considered an unrefined way of making a living.

- On the rung of the social ladder below those in trade were those who worked for people in the professions, such as clerks, governesses, and tutors. They could come from high-status families, perhaps down on their luck, or from lower-status families, managing to climb up the social ladder. They had to have somehow gained an education. They often had a liminal position in a household or organization—not quite a servant, but not quite an equal.

The Working Class

- All of the groups considered to this point constituted the educated classes—the middle classes and above. Whether a person was educated in this era stemmed from who one's parents were to an even greater extent than it does today.
- Below the elite and the middling classes in rank were what we'd now call the working or laboring class, such as tenant farmers, like Robert Martin in *Emma*. It included servants, such as Mrs. Reynolds, Mr. Darcy's housekeeper in *Pride and Prejudice*. But those two characters were at the more privileged end of the working classes. They would have been able to read, write, and keep accounts. It was possible, although not likely, that they could rise higher through merit or marriage.
- Few among the working class had the benefit of an education. Approximately half were thought to be illiterate, unable to read or write or both. Austen's fiction occasionally mentions the presence of servants, but she rarely gives them names or lines of dialogue.

The View of Austen's Novels

- There was some mobility in personal or family wealth in this period, but there was very little social class mobility available to an individual. A tradesman could gain a knighthood or purchase a baronetcy, hoping to gain status and respect. As Austen's fiction shows, however, such moves usually didn't impress those of the higher ranks.
- In practice, status and wealth then were imagined as largely separate, although they certainly intermingled and sometimes even desperately sought each other out. Upwardly mobile families enjoyed new wealth gained through war and commercial opportunities, often made possible by exploiting others through imperialism and colonialism.
- It's meaningful that Austen's fiction is often as dismissive of the newly rich as she is of the old nobility. In *Emma*, Mr. Elton's bride, the heiress Augusta Hawkins, is a case in point. She has a significant fortune, but she's shown to be vulgar and bossy.
- Social class during this era was presented as a birthright—even as something preordained by God. One's birth was thought to determine one's place in the natural order of things.

- In many ways, Austen's fiction rails against the strict determinism of rank and its supposed connection to worthiness. Her novels most often reveal members of the nobility to be faulty leaders. They dispense bad and self-serving advice or no advice at all. In her novels, the elite rarely lead the rest of the community by good and proper example, as they were supposed to do.

- At the same time, Austen's fiction shows the middling classes to have a higher claim to social worth than was generally thought. For example, *Persuasion*'s Colonel Wentworth is an honorable, self-made man, born without rank or fortune. He's also true to his name: He went out into the world and proved his worth.

- He enjoys a military rank, but he made a fortune in wartime. He marries Anne Elliot, the caring and selfless middle daughter of a selfish baronet. The baronet, Sir Walter Elliot, is shown to be nearly worthless. The novel's outcome turns the tables on the period's presumed hierarchies of rank. Austen seems to be advocating for reforms in how rank was valued—or overvalued—in her culture.

Suggested Reading

Johnson, ed., *Issues of Class in Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice."*

Mahony, *Wealth or Poverty: Jane Austen's Novels Explored.*

Questions to Consider

1. What does it mean to say that Austen came from the pseudo-gentry or low gentry?
2. Sir Walter Elliot's favorite book is the Baronetage. What is a baronet, and why is that category, and rank and title in general, significant to the novel *Persuasion*?

BRITISH LIFE IN REVOLUTIONARY TIMES

Lesson 14

The late 18th century witnessed two revolutions. First, there was the American War of Independence, lasting from 1775 to 1783 and leading to the former colonies' independence from British rule. The Americans fought against the British with the support of the French monarchy.

Then France had its own revolution, which solidified in 1789, followed by tumultuous years that gradually dismantled the monarchy and the church. But unlike the United States, a new democratic French state never quite stabilized. Napoleon Bonaparte rose to power as a dictator, then declared himself an emperor.

The last decades of the 18th century and those of the early 19th century were among the most transformative in Western history. This period of great progress and great chaos also lines up almost perfectly with Jane Austen's life.

Background on the French Revolution

- To understand Austen's attitudes toward rank, class, and wealth, it's important to grasp the outlines of the French Revolution and its calls for fraternity, liberty, and equality. It's also crucial to grasp the Terror of the 1790s, in which mass guillotining became a part of public life.

- During Austen's young adulthood, Britain watched the events happening in France closely. Many wondered if French revolutionary ideals and fervor would cross the channel that separates the two countries and, if so, whether violence would follow. The British government eventually enacted restrictions on its own population as it prepared for a possible invasion that never came to its own shores.

- The French Revolution is often seen as beginning on July 14, 1789, when a group of activists stormed the Bastille prison, releasing a small number of prisoners but, more importantly, seeking the ammunition held there. But complete histories of the French Revolution usually begin far earlier than this date in order to describe decades of political conflict and accumulating war debt that led to the revolution.

- The French monarch, King Louis XVI, was jockeying for power with his country's nobility, the bourgeoisie (the middle class), and the petit bourgeoisie—those in the professions and trades as well as skilled artisans.

- The French population was under a system called the ancien régime. It was divided into three estates. The First Estate was the clergy. The Second Estate was the nobility. The Third Estate was made up of commoners. The king wasn't seen as part of any estate.

Austen's Times

Austen, born in 1775, was just an infant when Great Britain went to war with the American colonies. Then, as she came of age, Britain was pulled into war with a transformed France. When Austen died in 1817, it was just two years after Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo and exile to St. Helena. Austen lived in a country that was at war across almost all of her 41 years.

- The First and Second Estates bore little of the tax burden, which was increasingly viewed as unfair by the Third Estate. Its commoners made up of the majority of the population.

Matters Escalate

- The situation became explosive when taxes on things such as salt came to be more widely viewed as unfairly applied, especially to the poor. The average worker was already spending half of his daily earnings to buy bread, but prices shot up higher after grain crops failed in 1788–1789.

- Even among those with wealth and power, suspicion was growing among the factions. It was rumored that King Louis XVI was raising an army to overthrow the National Assembly, as it sought to extend its own powers.

- As the year 1789 unfolded, powerful orators from various factions were encouraging people to organize against the crown, the army, and the state. New municipal governments and municipal militias were forming. It was politically very unstable, as these new groups were looking for grain and weapons.

"Let Them Eat Cake"

Queen Marie Antionette probably never said that line that's attributed to her, "Let them eat cake," when she learned about the difficulties of the people getting bread to eat. But it was widely believed that neither the crown nor the government cared that its people were going hungry.

- Newly formed groups raided an arsenal and took its muskets. A search for arms and ammunition is said to have led them to the stores at the Bastille, an old Parisian fortress that had long served as a prison, although it actually held very few prisoners at the time. When the Bastille fell, on July 14, 1789, it was celebrated as a milestone moment for the powers assembling against the monarchy and the First and Second Estates.

- The young Jane Austen began writing around this time, producing short works of fiction, drama, and history. Her comic play *The Visit*, probably written in the year 1789, contains content that points to a young author who was familiar with conversations about generations, traditions, nepotism, shortages, sharing, tyranny, and liberty.

The Old Order Falls

- By late 1789, there was a sense in France that the ancien régime had fallen. The notion that the king ruled by divine right—by God's will—had been weakened. New ideas about the rights of man were taking hold. There were calls advocating for greater social, moral, and economic equality, especially among the commoners, the Third Estate.

- The National Assembly drew up a declaration of rights, thanks to the leadership of the Marquis de Lafayette, known even then as a hero of the American War of Independence. But when the assembly sought to dismantle the feudal system, the First and Second Estates, the tithes of the clergy, and the rights of the nobility, the king refused to approve it.

- Eventually, angry crowds, demonstrating about a lack of food and the price of food, marched to King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette's lavish palace at Versailles, southwest of Paris. The crowd forcibly removed the royal couple to the Tuileries Palace in Paris in October 1789.

- Powerful individuals and newly formed groups began to jockey for power and authority. Monarchists, including most of the nobility and the clergy, clashed with moderates and revolutionaries. Some moderates, like those in the Jacobin Club, began to affiliate with revolutionaries. The working classes—described as sansculottes, because the men wore long pants rather than those cut off at the knee—were newly politically energized.

- Britain was watching all of this unfold as the news arrived from abroad. Some observed the events with enthusiasm and some with fear. Just where the Austen family would have sided at this confusing time is difficult to pin down. What's clear is that King Louis XVI was by no means a family favorite.

- In February 1789, Jane Austen's brothers published in their periodical, *The Loiterer*, a fictional news update from several months in the future, the month of May, in Paris. In it, King Louis XVI writes what's humorously labeled a "most gracious reply to the humble petition of his Parliament." He's given this line of fictional dialogue: "I am determined to make you, and all France, know that I will be master—for I hate to be a tyrant by halves." According to some members of the Austen family, the king of France was fully tyrannical.

The Early 1790s

- The situation in France was unstable. Power was up for grabs in every social class, and it wasn't a good time to play the tyrant. The king, queen, and their children tried to flee the country, disguised as servants, in what is known as the Flight to Varennes, on June 20, 1791. The king's plan was to reconsolidate his power in his wife's native Austria.
- His attempt to flee the country failed. He was returned to Paris by the national guard. A crowd gathered. When it wouldn't disperse, the guardsmen were ordered to fire. Fifty demonstrators were killed. These deaths further split loyalties.
- As the king's power and popularity weakened, other leaders emerged. These included Maximilien Robespierre, of a political party called the Mountain, and Jean-Paul Marat, the idol of the sansculottes.
- In August of 1792, the king and queen were imprisoned. In September 1792, the National Convention declared France to be a republic and abolished the monarchy. Louis XVI was brought to trial, with proof that he'd tried to conspire with other countries against the revolution and to reestablish tyranny.
- Despite a number of split votes, Louis XVI was sentenced to death and executed by decapitation on January 21, 1793, using a guillotine. Nine months later, Marie Antoinette was tried, convicted of treason, and also guillotined, on October 16, 1793.

The Reign of Terror

- In 1793 and 1794, France endured a period sometimes called the Reign of Terror. Newly empowered rulers sought to find and punish anyone who had allegedly supported the old regime. Committees and tribunals formed and considered charges against those who were branded as enemies of the new state.

Mary Wollstonecraft

A revolutionary English writer who may have influenced Austen was Mary Wollstonecraft. She notably wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* in 1790 and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. She was a powerful advocate for educational and social equality, especially for women.

- There was a sense in France that everything had been reset. The new revolutionary calendar restarted from year one. It renamed the months of the year according to the seasons.

- New festivals were put in place to de-Christianize the country, as the Catholic Church, too, was viewed as tyrannical. Yet the system was not atheist. In the place of the Catholic God, the new order declared the Cult of the Supreme Being.

- The use of the guillotine became almost commonplace during the Reign of Terror. In the end, at least 17,000 people were tried and executed. Not everyone got a trial, whether fair or not. It's estimated that as many as 40,000 people were put to death.

- One source concludes that only 15 percent of that number were clergy and nobility. The rest were from the bourgeoisie, the petit bourgeoisie, the laborers, and the peasants—the classes that had initially banded together to seek political and social change. Robespierre himself, responsible for overseeing so many of the executions, was executed in 1794.

- By the end of the Reign of Terror in France, Jane Austen—still living with her parents in Steventon, England—was in her late teens. She had already written three volumes worth of work—her juvenilia.

- Unfortunately, no letters by Austen survive from these years. The first surviving correspondence from her hand dates to 1796. One of the things it describes is her brother Henry's service in the Oxfordshire militia. Militias were a part-time national guard, charged with securing the country in case of invasion by the French. They were also charged with putting down any civilian unrest, as British radicals were prohibited from rousing the masses to anti-government action.

War against France

- Across the decade of the 1790s, France was not only embroiled in struggles among its own people but was also at war with much of Europe. The feared French invasion of England never came, though.

- Later in the decade, a young French military commander named Napoleon emerged. He succeeded in leading the French to overpower Italy. He moved forces into central Europe, Turkey, and, for a time, Egypt.

- Under his leadership, France left revolutionary ideals of a republic behind for a dictatorship. Napoleon, a successful general, came to power and stayed there for 15 years. Eventually, the British had the greatest success in fighting him and the French forces back. Even without an invasion, British families lost fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers to its wars against France.

Eliza and the Count

- Jane Austen's first cousin Eliza had married a Frenchman in 1781. He was a count, the Comte de Feuillide. The count and his wife traveled back and forth from England to France over the course of the next decade, separately and together. Eliza sometimes stayed with the Austens at Steventon, and she became close to the sisters Jane and Cassandra. Jane even dedicated one of the most important works of her juvenilia, "Love and Freindship," to her worldly cousin Eliza.

- Over the next several years, Eliza and her husband the count tried to navigate the cataclysmic changes in his home country. The count was in England when he learned that his property in France would be forfeited to the nation unless he returned. He left his wife and their son behind in England and traveled home. It was an unfortunate decision.

- A surviving letter from Eliza describes what she's learned about the conditions her husband witnessed. She tells her English correspondents that the horrifying reports they receive about France are not exaggerated. The count had wanted to return to England, but he found it was impossible to get away. He was tried and executed by guillotine in 1794. His death tells us that Austen would have understood perfectly well that revolutions and wars could devastate families.

Tragedy in Austen's Fiction

- Austen puts tragedy and war deaths into her fiction, too. In her novel *Emma*, the orphan Jane Fairfax is said to have lost her father in wartime. That father, Lieutenant Fairfax, was serving in an infantry regiment when he died in action abroad. Every reader would have understood that Lieutenant Fairfax was a casualty of the war in a battle with French forces. In the novel, Jane Fairfax's mother is said to have died after her husband, of consumption and grief.

- The Austen novel that's most directly structured by the Napoleonic wars is *Persuasion*. Its hero, Frederick Wentworth, first proposed marriage to its protagonist Anne Elliot in 1806. Anne's family pressured—or rather, persuaded—Anne to reject him because of his lack of fortune. Then he went off to war against Napoleon, where he rose through the ranks of the Royal Navy.

- Captain Wentworth became wealthy in war, amassing 20,000 pounds in what was called "prize money." Prize money was a kind of naval bonus pay that was awarded, in percentages based on rank, to a crew that successfully captured an enemy ship.

- Even the end of that novel is structured by war, as we saw previously. *Persuasion* is set in 1814, when it seemed Napoleon had been defeated at last. But what Austen knew, writing *Persuasion*, was that Napoleon would soon escape from his exile on the island of Elba.

Suggested Reading

Cowie and Doyle, *The French Revolution*.

Le Faye, *Jane Austen's "Outlandish Cousin."*

Roberts, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*.

Questions to Consider

1. Who was Mary Wollstonecraft, and how might her revolutionary philosophies of women and education have made an impact on Austen's fiction?
2. Austen once made a joke about adding a chapter on Napoleon Bonaparte to *Pride and Prejudice*. She didn't, of course. Why, or how, does that matter?

CLERKS, CLERGY, AND OTHER MEN'S PROFESSIONS

Lesson 15

Men in the early 19th century were defined not only by their wealth and class background but also by what they did—or didn't—do for a living. This lesson takes a look at Jane Austen's men and the professions, especially the clergy, the law, the military, and medicine.

Pursuing Leisure

- In Austen's era, to be able to afford not to work and have a life of leisure pursuits was the absolute ideal. Younger sons of the gentry didn't expect to inherit property because of the tradition of primogeniture. Yet the average British middle-class families in the year 1800 had between six and seven children.

- In the wealthiest landholding gentry families, all of the children could be made financially independent. But for the rest, younger sons would need to work for a living. It was expected that they'd take respectable jobs that kept up the extended family's status and appearances. Men's professions were a financial necessity, but, as far as social status went, they were more like a necessary evil.

- Some younger men married wealthy women instead, as is the case with *Sense and Sensibility*'s Willoughby and his debt-clearing marriage to Miss Sophia Grey. But it was generally expected that younger sons would find a profession.

- Younger sons were in search of very particular, acceptable sorts of careers. There was a distinction between work and professions: Work might be financially lucrative, but professions were imagined as higher-status life paths.

- They required more education and involved advancement. The most socially desirable professions for men then fell into four categories, in this order of perceived status, from higher to lower: the church, the military, the law, and medicine.

- Securing a place in one of these professions wasn't easy, and it wasn't based only on merit. It required money and connections. Positions were regularly filled via favors that we might now consider nepotism. There were systems for the outright purchase of many kinds of positions, which we might see as organized bribes. Few then looked askance at these systems and processes.

- The amount of work required in each of these professions varied widely. The word *sinecure* is regularly used to describe elite men's jobs during this era. A sinecure is a position with a regular salary but without many, or sometimes any, responsibilities.

- Choosing a career may now seem a process of matching one's talents to a calling or vocation. That attitude was far less common then. A good illustration of this is in Edward Ferrars's commentary in *Sense and Sensibility*.

- In a conversation with Mrs. Dashwood, Edward reveals how much pressure he has faced not to work and how miserable it has made him. He says having no profession has made him an "idle, helpless being." He blames his family for this situation.

The Clergy

- Readers are meant to sympathize with Edward's enforced idleness. We're meant to approve later, too, of his career choice in finally becoming a clergyman.
- Austen's novels feature a few clergymen heroes, like *Sense and Sensibility*'s Edward, *Northanger Abbey*'s Henry Tilney, and *Mansfield Park*'s Edmund Bertram. Several of the novels feature some who are less heroic. Clergymen are complicated figures in Austen's fiction.
- Joining the church could result in either an active or an idle life in the 19th century. Many clergymen approached their posts like sinecures. Perhaps that's why Austen treats some of her clergymen with so little sympathy. *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr. Collins and *Emma*'s Mr. Elton are men of the cloth, but they're both obsequious, ambitious, and borderline villainous men.

The Military

- After the clergy, the second-most acceptable high-status profession for genteel men was the military. In the novels, Austen's military characters are rarely described in active duty, except if they serve in the militia, which was like a regional national guard.
- Most of Austen's military men are officers in the upper ranks of the military. These include generals and colonels in the army; admirals, vice admirals, and rear admirals in the navy; and lower ranks such as majors, captains, and lieutenants.

Prize Money

Both the army and navy had systems of prize money—that is, rewards for victories.

- A career in the army had many challenges, even beyond the risks in wartime. The hierarchy was rigid. It was not impossible for an enlisted soldier to move up to officer ranks, especially if he were capable and literate, but it was rare. Estimates are that perhaps only 10 percent of officers had once been enlisted men. Most of the rest of the officers bought their way in through some form of patronage.

- For a lower-ranking army officer's commission, no military training was required. An officer then received a salary based on rank, at full pay while on duty. He received a half-pay salary when not on active duty. Because of the cost of entering this career, commissioned army officers were largely drawn from the upper classes.

- The navy required more training, but its practices made it easier for men to rise by merit. We can see this in the early careers of Austen's two naval brothers, Charles and Francis. Three decades after Austen's death, Charles became a rear admiral, and Francis, remarkably, became admiral of the fleet.

- Naval life was also different because it might include a few women. We see this in *Persuasion* when Admiral Croft's wife, Mrs. Croft, describes what it's like to live on board ship with her husband. This wasn't an anomaly but a regular practice among officers in charge of ships.

- Austen's attitudes toward the military, as with the clergy, were not uncomplicated. In *Persuasion*, when Anne Elliot marries Captain Wentworth, we're told that she gloried in being a sailor's wife. It seems something the reader is expected to endorse.

- Yet not all naval men are admirable in Austen. In *Mansfield Park*, flirtatious Mary Crawford's uncle, an admiral, is morally dissolute and has taken a mistress under his own roof. Austen's fiction also features villains who hail from the army.

The Law

- After the clergy and the military, the next possible genteel profession for a young man would have been the law. Austen's fiction has few admirable lawyers. *Pride and Prejudice*'s Wickham flirted with becoming a lawyer but had been too idle and dissipated to study. The Bennet family is said to have an uncle and a brother-in-law who were attorneys, a fact that doesn't serve to raise their social status with the snooty Miss Bingley.

- *Persuasion*'s William Elliot is a lawyer who gave up the practice when he married a wealthy woman. In *Emma*, heroine Emma Woodhouse refers to William Coxe as a "pert young lawyer," ruling him out as a possible suitor for Harriet Smith.

- We aren't privy to a great deal of information about Austen's personal opinions on lawyers, but the fact that we see comparatively little of them as characters in her novels suggests she may have viewed them as less desirable or marriageable as a professional class than clergymen and military officers. Austen's most prominent character who is a lawyer is probably in *Emma*. Mr. Knightley's brother John is a London lawyer.

Medicine

- Medicine was the last profession that a man of genteel background but limited finances might consider. Its lower status than the aforementioned professions stemmed from the necessity of being in close physical proximity to patients.

- Medical professionals then were almost exclusively male, with the exception of midwives, and were divided into physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries. They didn't yet have a standard basis of training. Some medical men had university degrees, and others learned their trade through an apprenticeship.

- The most respected kind of medical man was a physician. These educated doctors had university degrees, were usually found in cities, and could charge a lot for their services. They may have had very little clinical experience with patients, although that varied, too. They were learned researchers and rare experts, with knowledge of Latin and Greek. Some of them were more likely to write books than see regular patients.

- Austen knew one such man, Dr. Charles Haden. He was one of the early adopters of the use of the stethoscope and had studied medicine in Paris.

- Outside of a city, the medical men most likely to be found in a village were surgeons or apothecaries. Apothecaries and surgeons were generally educated in apprenticeships rather than at university.

- An apothecary was like today's pharmacist, selling treatments and medicines. A surgeon was a lower-status practitioner than a physician. Surgeons were caricatured as butchers. Sometimes they served, too, as dentists, pulling teeth. In previous centuries, surgeons were also the town barbers.

- In practice, the line between surgeon and apothecary was fuzzy. For instance, in *Sense and Sensibility*, it's the apothecary Mr. Harris who treats Marianne's fever and manages a cure. In *Emma*, the hypochondriacal Mr. Woodhouse gets medical advice from an apothecary, Mr. Perry, who is described as an intelligent, gentleman-like man.

Conclusion

- Men from genteel families, especially younger sons, faced a more limited range of life choices than we might expect, despite their many privileges. That's because, beyond professions in the church, military, law, or medicine, well-born men had few other polite options.

- Many of these professions were almost closed shops. They were limited by the institutions they served—the church or the military. Alternatively, they were limited by the number of wealthy people able to pay well for their services, as with law and medicine.

- But for gentry families looking to maintain economic and social status, it was seen as an imperative for their young men to land in one of these acceptable professions. Of course, landowning—and not working for pay, beyond owning an estate—was the most genteel option. But Austen's fiction suggests that idle gentility and perfect happiness did not necessarily line up.

Suggested Reading

Clery, *Jane Austen*.

Collins, *Jane Austen and the Clergy*.

Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy*.

Questions to Consider

1. What were the four professions thought most suitable for privileged men to enter in Austen's day? What was the order of their desirability, and what do you think that order reveals?
2. Austen was the daughter of a clergyman. In what ways do her novels depict the clergy, positively and negatively, and what do you think that means?

THE ACCOMPLISHED WOMAN

Lesson 16

One of the most memorable conversations in *Pride and Prejudice* occurs early in the novel, in a debate between Mr. Darcy, Miss Bingley, and Elizabeth Bennet. They argue over the ideal woman's talents and skills, then called "female accomplishments."

This lesson looks at what early 19th-century Britain called the "accomplished woman." It considers what parents and male suitors wanted girls to learn as well as the era's rising call for women's rights, which advocated for taking a new approach to female education.

Preparing Daughters

- A family of means would have sought to have its daughters become proficient in music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages. The point, however, was absolutely not to make her into a public performer or a renowned artist.
- The idea was to take a young girl and polish her into an ornament of her sex. The comparison to an object here isn't incidental. The goal was to make a girl attractive and skilled enough for private display by the time she grew into a young woman. She was encouraged to share these talents in private gatherings, once she "came out," meaning once her parents were ready for her to be noticed as a potential wife.

Areas of Skill

- Music was important. The piano and the harp were popular musical instruments for young women to play. They might perform for friends, family, and prospective suitors. Men were allowed to stare at women when they played music. We get a sense of that in *Mansfield Park*, when Mary Crawford plays the harp.

- Music was a way to pass the time among the leisured classes, although not necessarily as a lifelong vocation or art form. This is shown in *Emma*, when Mrs. Elton proposes to Emma Woodhouse that they create a women's musical club to stay in practice. Mrs. Elton suggests it because, as she notes, married women are "but too apt to give up music."
- Dancing and drawing might be similarly described. Once a woman had secured a husband, she didn't necessarily need to keep fresh skills in these areas, either. To some, that was because her knowledge of drawing and dancing would have already served its purpose. Accomplishments were seen as bonus feminine enhancements.

- Importantly, some elements of female education were more academic in scope. Studying the modern languages—meaning French, Italian, Spanish, and German—might be understood as the weightiest undertaking.

- These were the languages of music and opera, of art, and of literature, so they had benefits to women in those areas, too. But modern languages were seen as adding to a young woman's fashionability. Language skills could prove useful throughout a lifetime, during foreign travels, when hosting foreign visitors, or merely in reading popular books from another country.

Educational Inequities

- During Austen's lifetime, there were educational inequities of many kinds. Literacy itself separated the rich from the poor. Beyond that difference, knowledge of Latin and Greek separated the very well educated from the merely literate.

- Women, it was believed, didn't need to be very well educated. Instruction for females in Latin and Greek was rare. This effectively walled off girls and women from the highest levels of conversation in philosophical, historical, and scientific matters, which required Latin.

- The modern languages are differentiated from the classical languages: Latin and Greek. Men's higher learning in this era was still very much dominated by instruction in classical languages. During that time, higher learning was exclusively for males. No women were admitted to universities until the late 19th century.

The Bluestockings

A famous circle of 18th-century learned women called the Bluestockings embraced higher learning despite the social cost. Most of them were insulated by their economic privilege.

One, Elizabeth Carter, was incredibly gifted in the classical languages and became a poet and translator. It's not incidental to her story that she never married. To some ways of thinking then, she pushed herself out of the marriage market once she became a better classicist than most men.

- In unusually forward-thinking families, a very small number of girls learned classical languages anyway. But when a girl was taught Latin and Greek, it was a clear sign that she had moved out of what was thought to be conventionally feminine.

Other Subjects

- England's history was a subject regularly taught to girls. A working knowledge of the past was believed to be desirable, as was a knowledge of geography. So, too, was a familiarity with the Bible, for daily devotions and practice. Austen herself wrote prayers that remained unpublished in her lifetime.
- Other subjects in which privileged girls were instructed included writing and arithmetic. It was widely accepted that girls of means needed to understand rudimentary math in order to someday manage a household and keep or read account books. They needed to read and write well to communicate by letter.
- The overarching point of a privileged girl's education was gaining basic, polite knowledge to attract and then become useful to a husband. But it was not considered desirable for her to equal or to exceed him. This is why it's remarkable that *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr. Darcy most admires a woman who has improved her mind through extensive reading. From this opinion, and from his choice of Elizabeth, we might gather that he's not afraid of having a smart wife.

Conduct Books

- Even parents with some resources faced choices and challenges in making decisions about their children's education. One way they would have been able to weigh their options was through the advice provided in the era's conduct books.
- Conduct books were a kind of self-help book, offering practical ideas and moralizing wisdom. Some books of this type laid out quite clearly their opinions of the proper steps to take to educate a girl.

Routes to Education

There were several acceptable avenues for a girl to obtain an education and become accomplished. Schools were one route. Austen herself attended two girls' schools and appears to have enjoyed the experience.

If money were abundant, a family would hire a governess in combination with private tutors. And parent-led teaching or self-study were also options.

- One such book, quoted by bookish Mary Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, was *Sermons to Young Women* by James Fordyce. It advised girls in how to dress modestly; cultivate female reserve, meekness, and virtue; learn the arts of friendship and conversation; and acquire domestic, elegant, and intellectual accomplishments.
- Anything that women learn, Fordyce says, should be done in order to make themselves agreeable and useful to men. It wasn't only about making women ornaments but making them useful and polite ornaments. The fact that Jane Austen has the faux intellectual Mary Bennet repeat things she has read in *Sermons to Young Women* may now seem an even funnier joke.

Pushing for Reform

- One of the most powerful advocates for the need to reform women's education in the late 18th century was feminist philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft. Her 1792 book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* rails against the idea that middle-class women be educated with the goal of turning into pleasing ornaments.
- Wollstonecraft advocates for a system of national education. She argues against boarding schools and education in homes, instead advocating for children being allowed to spend their time on terms of equality with other children.

- She wants to expand who gets an education. There is a moral element to this for her as well. She believes virtue will never prevail in society unless the virtues of both sexes are founded on reason.

- As Wollstonecraft puts it, "It is not for the benefit of society that a few brilliant men should be brought forward at the expence of the multitude." Wollstonecraft advocates for boys and girls to be educated together. She argues that women will never fulfill the peculiar duties of their sex until "they become enlightened citizens, till they become free, by being enabled to earn their own subsistence, independent of men."

- She argues that this economic independence and inculcation of reason will improve society—and marriage, too. Wollstonecraft concludes, "marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions." She doesn't mean helpmates, playthings, or ornaments. She means intellectually equal companions.

- There were only a handful of people in the late 18th century supporting coeducation or national day schools. Changes in schools came slowly. But Wollstonecraft's ideas almost immediately contributed to changing what the ideal accomplished woman might look like.

- Austen's views didn't replicate all of Wollstonecraft's ideas, but Austen's fiction implicitly advocates for girls and boys to get similar educations in virtue and reason. Nowhere is Austen's view of the shortcomings of the prevailing model of the accomplished woman laid out more clearly than in her last, unfinished work, *Sanditon*.

- Austen's description of the two Miss Beauforts is absolutely cutting. The narrator tells us that the Beaufort sisters use their many accomplishments only to attract men or to look wealthier than they are. That's called an ignorant act by the narrator. The Miss Beauforts, it's said, were "some of the first in every change of fashion. And the object of all was to captivate some man of much better fortune than their own."

- This picture of the Miss Beauforts provides us with a sad portrait of shallow women—educated, but into the wrong values. It's the opposite of the intelligent heroines we've come to know best in Austen's fiction.

Suggested Reading

Kaplan, *Jane Austen among Women*.

Valenze, *The First Industrial Woman*.

Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*.

Questions to Consider

1. What were the chief female accomplishments, and how did women gain them?
2. What does Austen's attitude seem to be toward fashionable accomplishments for women, based on what we see in her fiction?

LUXURY, FASHION, AND LABOR IN THE REGENCY

Lesson 17

This lesson focuses on the finer points of Regency fashion, taking it seriously but not too seriously. A working knowledge of 19th-century fashion deepens any reading of Jane Austen's books. Austen's distinctions of dress and accessories point both to Austen's fine eye for fashion and to her skeptical view. Her fiction shows a particular skepticism toward excess, luxury products, and the emerging trappings of consumer culture.

Background on Fashion in Austen's Fiction

- In Austen's fiction, characters who take a great interest in dress and fashion are often subject to mockery and criticism. For example, *Persuasion* describes this empty-headed, trend-conscious type as "a mere pretty, silly, expensive, fashionable woman" with "nothing to report but of lace and finery."

- However, Austen was not against fashion. We know from her letters that she had an extensive, personal interest in clothing. In 1798, she described the delightful circumstance of purchasing a new muslin gown.

- Most people in Austen's time—except for the fabulously rich—had relatively few pieces of clothing. A middle-class woman would have owned a few dresses and a modest number of pieces of nightwear and underclothing.

- Clothing was not, by and large, mass produced. Increasingly, garments called ready-made clothing were available for sale, but garments were traditionally made to a person's specific measurements and precise specifications. Clothing was created by dressmakers, called mantua makers. Some made house calls to take measurements for wealthy customers.

- Clothing might also be sewn at home, by a family itself or with the help of servants, if it had hired them. To make a garment at home, cloth needed to be purchased. That, too, was expensive.

- Cloth was so dear a thing that pieces of it were regularly repurposed. Alterations were made to follow the changing fashions, transforming old cloth from one kind of a garment into another. For instance, dresses might be imagined in three parts—bodice, skirt, and sleeves, with each part being changeable.

- As these examples suggest, fabric was longer lasting and durable. Even when cloth began to wear out, it might be turned. By making the back-facing side into the front-facing side, an old piece of cloth might now seem new.

- A piece of clothing might also be transformed from one person's garment into another's. For example, children's clothing might be made from a mother's old coat.

Changing Fashions

- Fashion changed profoundly over the course of Austen's life. Mid-18th-century wealthy women's dresses were small and tight above the waist and enormous and wide below it, creating an almost furniture-like look. Some dresses were so wide that women would need to turn to the side to pass through a doorway.

- By the time Austen was a young woman, this had become an old-fashioned look. The trend was for loose-fitting garments in new fabrics. Hems came up a little to reveal shoes and ankles. Popular empire-waist gowns sat high on the body, accentuating the bust. Below that, they were light, diaphanous shifts.

- These dresses, often made of muslin, or lightweight cotton, allowed for greater freedom of movement. Notably, this was at a time in which the world was witnessing political revolutions and calls for new rights and freedoms from and for many marginalized groups.

- Although women's dress at this time stressed simplicity, it wasn't exactly simple. Garments still had layers and intricacies. Underclothing consisted of a linen chemise, and owning a number of these was the norm. Once, Jane Austen bought six of them ready-made.

- Petticoats, a sort of underskirt, might be worn beneath a dress, although sometimes they're described as a main garment. Stays or corsets were still worn over the chemise for shaping the torso and chest. Stockings went up to the knee, held in place by garters. Over these things went dresses, coats, jackets, and other garments.

- In Austen's youth, a vogue for Grecian or neoclassical looks took hold, and it long remained popular. Women copied the looks of statues from antiquity. The color white became fashionable, as dresses started to be made in lighter weight fabrics that were easier to wash.

Learning about Change

Women would learn about regularly changing fashions by word of mouth, from people they knew who traveled to commercial centers in cities, and from monthly publications like *The Lady's Magazine*, which included fashion plates that showed off the latest styles.

Wearing white also signaled a woman had the means to have her dress washed, so it was another sign of wealth and privilege.

- Evening dresses were for show. They began to feature short sleeves to show off the upper arms. Gloves were worn, almost up to the elbows. A dress might be covered by a pelisse, a draped over-layer that clasped in the front. There were various types of jackets, too.

Hats, Bonnets, and Footwear

- Hats and bonnets were purchased from the milliner but often further decorated and individualized at home, perhaps using ribbons. In *Northanger Abbey*, the superficial Isabella Thorpe admires a fashionable bonnet with a ribbon in a trendy red color called coquelicot. Bonnets could feature veils as well. Turbans and feathers worn on the head were also in high fashion.

- To make older headwear look new, it might also be decorated with flowers or even fruits. In her letters, Austen pokes a bit of fun at the idea of putting fruit on a hat. She writes to her sister, "I cannot help thinking that it is more natural to have flowers grow out of the head than fruit."

- Hats weren't just for formal occasions. Nightcaps were worn with nightgowns. During the daytime, too, head coverings were the norm for women in their 20s and older, even indoors. A lady's cap was a sign of age and modesty.

- Footwear was important, too. Slippers and ankle boots were popular and colorful. They could be ready-made or made to order from a shoemaker. Footwear was designed for indoor or outdoor use, with ankle boots the likeliest outdoor choice. Boots varied in their level of hardiness. Some were made of a sturdy cotton material.

- Emma Watson from Austen's unfinished novel *The Watsons* prefers half boots, but she says, "unless they are so stout as to injure their beauty, they are not fit for country walking." Delicate footwear could be chosen by wealthy people who had access to carriages, with servants to deliver them from door to door. In this era, more attention had turned to women's feet and ankles, shoes, and stockings, because higher dress hems began to show them off.

Color

- The meaning and fashion of colors, expressed in dyes and hues, changed over time. Some blue dyes, like indigo, were considered exotic imports. It's important to note that they were derived from colonial and slave labor, which makes their history in fashion a troubling one.

- In Austen's fiction, colors are significant. Purple stands out. *Northanger Abbey*'s hateful Isabella Thorpe tells heroine Catherine Morland, "I wear nothing but purple now; I know I look hideous in it, but no matter—it is your dear brother's favourite colour." The obnoxious Mrs. Elton, in *Emma*, is said to have had a reticule, or small purse, in purple and gold.
- Fashionable colors came and went, like a jonquil yellow or a pinkish puce. The exception was black, consistently worn then as an obligatory sign of mourning. Clothes were sometimes dyed black after a death to produce garments that would signal a family's being in mourning. Dyes varied in quality.

Shopping

- Shops were prevalent in London or Bath but not as much in smaller towns. In *Emma*'s fictional village of Highbury, one shop—Ford's—serves as the village's principal woolen-draper, linen-draper, and haberdasher all in one. When *Emma*'s Frank Churchill buys a pair of gloves at Ford's, he shows himself not to be a fashion snob.
- Shopping sometimes occurred on proxy, when someone else went to a center of commerce. A trusted person might go on a commission—that is, purchasing an item on another's behalf. At popular shops, the wait times could be quite long.
- The most famous scene of Austen's characters being forced to wait a long time in a shop may be in *Sense and Sensibility*, when Elinor and Marianne watch a man take an enormous amount of time to buy a toothpick case. The customer who forces them to wait so long to be served turns out to be Robert Ferrars, the hero Edward's brother.

Austen's Jewelry

A piece of jewelry with Austen's own hair set into it survives. Other jewelry said to have once belonged to her survives, too: a topaz cross from her brother and a turquoise ring, which American pop singer Kelly Clarkson once famously attempted to buy for a quarter of a million dollars. In the end, the purchase was nixed due to export control regulations.

Men's Fashions

- Men's fashions were changing in this era, too. Knee breeches, worn with boots, were giving way to full-length trousers. Pants might be light colored, with coats in dark colors. Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy both wear blue coats. Shirts were made of linen, usually in white. Cravats—pieces of cloth, usually of muslin—were tied around the neck.
- In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne judges Willoughby attractive because he wears a dashing shooting jacket. But she finds Colonel Brandon old-looking because he wears a flannel waistcoat, designed to keep the body warm. Marianne assumes from his waistcoat that the colonel must have rheumatism.

Drabness, Vividness, and Hidden Connections

- Today, our sense of what the fashions of Austen's day looked like tend to be heavily shaped by television and film. Such visual versions of Austen's stories vary widely in costuming aims and budgets as well as in historical accuracy. Some depict the Regency world as if it were impossibly spotless, colorful, and neat. Others show it as entirely drab, consisting only of muddy browns and dirty grays.
- The reality of daily life then would have involved confronting both extremes, from vivid to drab. The privileged could do more to avoid the muck, especially by hiring others to help them steer clear of it.
- *Northanger Abbey*'s fashion-conscious and fastidious Mrs. Allen gives us a hint of this when she complains about riding in open carriages, which were, like today's

convertibles, open to the air. Mrs. Allen says, "A clean gown is not five minutes wear in them. You are splashed getting in and getting out; and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction."

- Today's film and television versions of Austen's stories rarely give a sense of the banality of this kind of fashion disaster. Yet in that era, streets and roads were made of dirt, and, after it rained, of mud. Horses kicked up dirt and mud. In cities, streets were places where sewage drained.

- To protect their feet, people might wear wooden and iron overshoes called pattens. By the time Austen was an adult, pattens were mostly associated with the working class.

- Film and television versions of Austen also tend to disregard washerwomen who were hired to clean dirty clothing for the better off. Austen does give an occasional nod to their labor, however.

- In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland finds a laundry bill in a trunk, when she's expecting to discover a mysterious old manuscript. This is comedy, but it also shows us that luxury, fashion, and labor, despite their often hidden connections, were necessarily intertwined.

Suggested Reading

Byrde, *Jane Austen Fashion*.

Davidson, *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen*.

Miller, *Jane Austen, or, The Secret of Style*.

Questions to Consider

1. Austen's favorite color was said to be blue. What details from the history of politics and fashion make that speculation meaningful?
2. What is a toothpick case, and how does it play a role in *Sense and Sensibility*?

TRAVEL AND LEISURE IN THE GEORGIAN ERA

Lesson 18

This lesson looks at some of the forms of travel and leisure that fill the pages of Jane Austen's fiction. It considers the major modes of transportation, the etiquette of social visits, the common hobbies and sports, and two of the most approved leisure activities of the day: dancing and card games. Keep in mind that then, as now, one's available number of leisure hours derived from economic privilege. Austen understood that.

Major Modes of Transportation

- Having access to a horse or a carriage indicated a certain level of wealth and activity, but which kinds, and in what condition, carried further meanings. When, in *Mansfield Park*, the Bertram children worry about how Sir Thomas would react if a scratch were put in the varnish of his carriage, that's a telling detail. His is new, perfect, and perfectly cared for, showing off his wealth and his fastidiousness.

- For most people then, owning one carriage and even one horse was financially out of reach. A good carriage horse might cost £100. A hack could be purchased for £25. People of more modest means still might be able to afford a donkey at a cost of £3. After that, though, there came the expense of food, shelter, care, and accessories for the horse or donkey.

- That's one reason why *Sense and Sensibility*'s Elinor Dashwood tells her sister Marianne that she can't accept even the gift of a horse from Willoughby. First, the Dashwoods have nowhere to keep a horse. But second, they don't have enough money to maintain it.

- Horses and carriages signified wealth. There were different types of carriages. The most common types of carriage in Austen's novels are gigs and curricles.

- A gig was a light, two-wheeled carriage, pulled by one horse. It was designed for a driver and a passenger. Curricles were faster and more powerful, because they were pulled by two horses. They were also more fashionable. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Willoughby takes Marianne for an illicit private drive in his curricle. Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* has a curricle, as does Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*.

- A chaise was, like the gig and curricle, an open-air vehicle, but it was larger and had four wheels. It was understood to be a pleasure vehicle, used for sightseeing. Other smaller vehicles included the buggy and cart. A buggy was light and designed for one passenger. It was considered cheap and unfashionable. Carts had two wheels, were pulled by one horse, and were used for farming and trade.

- If one couldn't afford a vehicle, there were still other ways to get from one place to another. For traveling long distances, on regular routes, stagecoaches were used. In Austen's raucous juvenilia, there's a female character whose father is a Scottish stagecoach driver. He'd be expected to drive a regular route, stopping at designated stations or "posts," where tired horses would be replaced with fresh, rested ones.

Carriage Speed

The speed of a horse-drawn carriage was said to be about 11 miles an hour, but eight miles an hour was more typical when the carriage was heavy or the terrain was rough.

- For shorter distances, there were vehicles designated as hackney. The word *hackney* is a general term for a rental or a vehicle for hire. Hackney coaches were often the cast-off, used vehicles of the wealthy, so they had worn, unattractive interiors. They were looked down on by the elite as grungy or dirty.

- Slightly more genteel (and more expensive) was the post-chaise. Painted yellow, it was a mode of rental transport that had evolved from postal carriages and postal routes. These vehicles were like taxis, with a driver for hire.

- When, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Lydia and Wickham elope together, they begin in a more fashionable post-chaise. Then they transfer to a shabbier hackney coach. Readers would have understood this as a figurative sign of Lydia's downward spiral.

- The word *carriage* is a general term for a horse-drawn vehicle. But the grandest carriages were coaches, which were covered vehicles that carried four people inside and had windows. Coaches could be grand and showy.

- A barouche was a type of coach with a collapsible hood, like a convertible. A coach called a landau had a two-part hood, in which either the front or the back could be raised.

- A barouche-landau had two seats that faced each other, with a middle-opening top that could fold back in either direction. When, in *Emma*, Mrs. Elton repeatedly talks about her sister and brother-in-laws's barouche-landau, readers ought to understand that she's name-dropping.

Leisure Activities

- In the city, there were nights at the theater, concerts, exhibitions, circuses, carnivals, and early amusement parks. More illicit forms of leisure activity included gambling, drinking, and visiting prostitutes. We're never taken directly into such scenes of vice in Austen's fiction, although they are alluded to.

- Austen's directly narrated leisure activities are the polite ones. Prominent among them are visits. Visits then operated according to a very specific set of rules. Morning visits and evening parties were the most common types, occurring among people who had already been introduced to each other as acquaintances.

- In the country, visits might be more spontaneous, as people were well known to each other. In town, prearrangement was more common. Morning visits were coded as feminine.

Destinations

Destination travel had noticeable trends. London had its so-called season, which lasted from November to May. Fashionable people wanted to be in London during those months. Outside of those months, the wealthy retreated to their homes in the country. Another destination was Bath, the famous spa town, which was both a medical tourism destination and a singles meet-up city. When *Emma*'s Mr. Elton wants to find a bride quickly, he goes to Bath and returns home married in a matter of weeks.

Rules of Visits

- Once a visit was made by one party to another, a return visit was required. Visits were expected and codified in ways that tried to ensure maintaining a connection. They were an obligation, regularly made and returned.

- Anyone new to the neighborhood had to be visited, especially a new bride or groom. But visits weren't always made with direct personal contact. Calling cards were a way to announce one's

arrival and one's intention to begin or renew a round of obligatory visits between households.

- In *Sense and Sensibility*, when Elinor and Marianne Dashwood come to London, they "chiefly spent" the first morning there "leaving cards at the houses of [their host] Mrs. Jennings's acquaintance." Few would have welcomed her into their drawing rooms. Instead, she had merely left a calling card with the household's servants.
- Recipients of these cards were expected to make a short return visit, which might take only a matter of minutes. Alternatively, acquaintances might do what Mrs. Jennings did and leave a card. That counted as returning a visit.
- Visits could be refused by people who were inside the house. Servants were told to declare the household "not at home." That meant that residents were not receiving visitors. Everyone accepted the terminology.

Behavior at Balls and Dances

- Balls and dances could be ticketed and therefore more or less public, or they could be private, invitation-only events. Their etiquette varied. An assembly ball was a ticketed ball, with strangers in attendance. A private ball was more like a formal dance party with one's friends and neighbors.
- A ball could be quite long and physically grueling, involving long periods of dancing. It was not uncommon for these events to last all night. They were much anticipated gatherings and had very specific preparations, expectations, customs, and structures.
- As Austen famously tells us in *Northanger Abbey*, women at dances had power—the power of refusal. Men asked for a dance, and women said yes or no. But if a woman turned down a particular man's invitation to dance, then it was understood she would take no further partners that night. It certainly put pressure on her to say yes, even to a man she didn't want to dance with.
- Dances were people-watching extravaganzas. Some were there to observe. Observation was seen as the primary role of those beyond middle age.
- Most of the dances in Austen's novels are English country dances. These dances featured lines of partners. Certain kinds of dances and dancing went in and out of fashion.

- In her letters, Austen mentions having danced in her own youth at a French-style cotillion, which was like a square dance. Another kind of dance was the Boulanger, often the last dance of the evening, with a simple series of movements by dancers in a circle. The waltz was known in England in Austen's late life but not yet much danced.

Other Leisure Activities

- Other leisure activities of the middle and upper classes included hunting, horseback riding, playing cards, and gambling. A person might also read for pleasure, in a private library or a circulating library. But reading wasn't only a solitary activity. It was also done aloud, in pairs and groups.

- In *Sense and Sensibility*, hunting is a favored activity among the men. Sir John Middleton, Mrs. Dashwood's cousin, is described as a "sportsman" who did little else other than hunt and shoot. It's not said in praise of him. Sir John is genial, but this narrowness makes him ridiculous.

- Not every leisure activity in Austen's fiction must be read as a defining element of one's character, but she rarely includes any throwaway details. We see this especially in her card-playing scenes. The most admirable characters in Austen's novels have little time for cards. They see it as a substitute for good conversation or for more improving activities, like reading.

- However, Austen doesn't seem to have been against card playing. In her own life, she seems to have had favorite card games. But in her novels, a character's love for card playing is not usually a sign of a life that's heading in the right direction. One example is *Mansfield Park*'s Tom Bertram, who loses a devastating amount of money gambling.

- Which card game one preferred carried meaning, much in the way we now understand the stereotypical difference between people who prefer poker or bridge. Early on in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet jokes that her sister Jane and Mr. Bingley have known each other such a short time that one of the few things they know about each other is that they both like the card game vingt-un better than they do commerce.

- Vingt-un was like blackjack. Commerce was more like poker. Meaningfully, this couple prefers

the simpler card game, vingt-un, which has fewer rules and is based on good luck. Neither of them likes commerce, a more complicated, cutthroat card game of skill.

- In *Mansfield Park*, the canny Mary Crawford plays a rousing card game called speculation. Speculation was a fashionable and acceptable game, with only a little gambling involved, using chips. Mary Crawford plays speculation with abandon, taking risks that don't pay off. She gains a short-term victory that prevents her securing a long-term one. It encapsulates Mary's approach to life.

Suggested Reading

Selwyn, *Jane Austen and Leisure*.

Todd, ed., *Jane Austen in Context*.

Wilson, *Literature and Dance in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.

Questions to Consider

1. Now that you know a gig from a barouche-landau, what insights might you gain about Austen's characters from the vehicles they drive or how they treat their carriages?
2. Now that you know the difference between vingt-un and commerce, what do the card games that Austen's characters prefer, or the way they play those games, reveal?

HEALTH AND WELLNESS IN AUSTEN'S ENGLAND

Lesson 19

This lesson looks at how Jane Austen's fiction treats health and illness as well as the challenges she and her family members faced. These challenges may have shaped her insights into hearts, minds, and bodies.

Health in the Early 19th Century

- Good health and good health care make possible a good life and especially a long life. Austen understood that as well as anyone. If anything, however, this was a lesson that was even more pointed in the early 19th century, when illnesses leading to death—especially among infants, children, and childbearing women—were so tragically frequent.
- One statistic suggests that the life expectancy in this era was in the late 40s. This doesn't mean that most people lived only into their 40s, although, of course, this was the fate of Austen herself, who died at 41.
- Many people lived far beyond their 40s, but calculations of life expectancy come from averages. If we factor out childhood deaths, then the life expectancy numbers change dramatically for this period. People who made it into adulthood had a good likelihood of living to what was then considered old age, beginning in one's 60s.
- At the same time, childhood illness ravaged families. Wars killed young men. And in this era, it's estimated that for every 1,000 live births, there were 5 to 10 maternal deaths. This means that death from the complications of childbirth was 100 times more likely then than now. Each woman might bear seven or more children, so they did not have good odds.

Common Illnesses

- It's important to understand the common types of illness, in fiction and in life, known to the early 19th century. Consumption, for example, is an umbrella name for illnesses in which the body wasted away. One form of illness that was labeled consumption is what we'd now call tuberculosis.
- Other types of serious illness in Austen's fiction include fever or typhus, which is what Marianne Dashwood is suspected to have had when she takes ill in *Sense and Sensibility*. Among the other characters in the novel, there was a fear that whatever Marianne had might be contagious. The greatest worry among those characters was that Marianne's fever could have been the very serious type, a "putrid fever."
- Putrid fever was believed to be highly contagious. It's probable that what people then called putrid fever is what we now call typhus.

Its symptoms are a headache, fever, and pink spots everywhere, except the face. People then were rightly afraid of putrid fever.

- Austen knew firsthand the dangers of putrid fever. When she and her sister were girls, they contracted putrid fever at their boarding school. The woman who ran the school didn't inform the parents about the outbreak, but the Austen girls' cousin, Jane Cooper, in school with them, informed her mother by letter. The three girls were then snatched out of the school by Mrs. Cooper.

- All three girls survived, although Austen was said to have been close to death. Mrs. Cooper caught it herself, likely from them. Shortly after, she died of putrid fever, at age 47. Knowing all of this might change our sense of how Austen narrates fevers. She must have known from experience what it felt like to have a serious one. She certainly knew how deadly they could be.

- Austen's fiction features more mild illnesses, too. Gout is a good example in that category. It was said to come from excessive eating and alcohol consumption, a condition of the wealthy. Gout comes from elevated levels of uric acid crystallizing in the joints. It still exists, although now, we'd call it joint pain or arthritis.

Mr. Woodhouse, Valetudinarian

In the novel *Emma*, heroine Emma Woodhouse's father is described in the very first chapter as "having been a valetudinarian all his life." He has always been "without activity of mind or body." Additionally, he is described as "a much older man in ways than in years."

This is the sole use of the word *valetudinarian* in Austen's published fiction, which makes it notable. The word *valetudinarian*, when applied to Mr. Woodhouse, means an invalid—a person in weak health. But the word suggests more than that. The secondary meaning of the word is someone "constantly concerned with his own ailments."

Medical Wares

- In Austen's day, there was no oversight at all for the medical profession or its wares. Every sort of remedy could be had through what we'd call folk medicine and home recipes. New products were also available for sale. Some were billed as having miraculous properties.
- Some wares were sold under brand names. In *Persuasion*, Sir Walter Elliot recommends that the widow, Mrs. Clay, should try Gowland's lotion on her freckles. He finds them unattractive. Gowland's lotion is said to have cleared up Mrs. Clay's freckles, according to Sir Walter. But his daughter Anne saw no change at all. This may suggest Austen's own skepticism toward miracle products and cures.
- Gowland's lotion was an actual brand, invented in 1740. It had made its creator, John Gowland, very rich. The lotion was a concoction of almonds, sugar, and mercuric chloride, derived from sulfuric acid. With these corrosive ingredients, it may even have removed the top layer of the skin.
- Many medicines then included the deadly ingredient of mercury. This included products now called makeup, which was then called paint. Some of these things were classed not as beauty products but as medicines. They were dispensed or prescribed by the day's medical professionals.

The Medical Profession

- As mentioned in a previous lesson, in Austen's time, medical professionals were divided into physicians, apothecaries, and surgeons, each of which had separate skillsets and varying social status. Apothecaries were more like pharmacists, prescribing and administering medicines.
- Surgeons did things like cutting, setting broken bones, pulling, and working with sharp objects, in ways that might or might not entail much finesse. Although surgeon and apothecary sound like very different jobs, the line between them could be quite fuzzy.
- Physicians were the most educated medical men. They tended to be found in cities and could charge a lot for their services. Most had attended medical schooling of some kind. English physicians had a wide variety

of experiences in training, with an equally wide variety of quality of instruction.

- For people who needed medical care while living outside of a city, options were few and perhaps far away. In Austen's *Sanditon*, there's no doctor at all in the newly established seaside resort.

- A surgeon is important to the action in *Persuasion*, in the seaside town of Lyme Regis, when Louisa Musgrove hits her head. It happens after her failed jump on a set of stairs. She was trying to jump into Captain Wentworth's arms, but she didn't make it. Heroine Anne Elliot is the first to cry, "A surgeon!" The surgeon who arrives is characterized as effective in his treatment of the injured Louisa.

- Apothecaries tend to have slightly larger roles in Austen's fiction. They are more often named characters. In *Sense and Sensibility*, it's an apothecary, Mr. Harris, who treats Marianne's fever. He oversees her eventual cure. In *Emma*, the heroine's hypochondriac father, Mr. Woodhouse, gets his medical advice from an apothecary, Mr. Perry.

- Austen's medical men rarely play more than an incidental role in the stories. Perhaps that's because, although Austen had six brothers, none of them went into a medical field. Her extended family doesn't seem to have had many medical professionals either.

Illness in the Austen Family

- Austen's personal contact with medical men likely happened most often during her own or others' illnesses. It's also likely that she herself would have served as a nurse or companion to family members when they were ill. That was simply expected.

- Mrs. Austen, Jane's mother, seems to have had her share of aches, pains, and complaints. And in a large family, it would have been very rare to escape having to deal with illness, injury, and death.

- Perhaps that's why so many of Austen's female characters, especially unmarried sisters and aunts, are shown regularly performing the function of amateur nurse. In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot nurses her needy, complaint-filled sister, Mary Musgrove.

- The term *nurse* could refer to someone who was little more than a helper, particularly a babysitter for children. But the word had more specific meanings, too. The widow Mrs. Smith, Anne Elliot's friend in *Persuasion*, was once a more desperate invalid. After catching cold on a journey, she suffered from severe and constant pain. She is said to have needed a "regular nurse" but couldn't afford to hire one. Eventually, she finds in her landlady's sister a woman who is called a "nurse by profession." In other words, she is a hired caregiver.

Jane Austen's Illness

- Austen was no stranger to illness and death by her 41st year. A dozen years before that, she had witnessed one of her life's most profound losses. Her father, the Reverend George Austen, died at age 73, after what is said to have been a short illness.

- Jane Austen was the first of the Austen siblings to die, after a long illness. Many have tried to diagnose the cause of her death. In 1964, a physician named Sir Zachary Cope offered his own theory: that she had died of a rare condition, which was later given the name Addison's disease. Addison's is a disease of adrenal insufficiency.

- Another possible diagnosis for Austen's fatal last illness is cancer, perhaps Hodgkin's disease or lymphoma. The scholar Annette Upfal, who has researched Austen's last years and medical treatment, prefers a diagnosis of lymphoma. But, as she points out, both Addison's Disease and lymphoma were "unidentified and untreatable in Austen's lifetime." The outcome, as she puts it, was "always fatal."

- We don't know as much as we'd like to know about Austen's last years. That's because after her death, a large number of her letters are believed to have been destroyed by her sister Cassandra.

- However, we do know that she was certainly ill and acknowledged being so. Until her last few months, Jane's case was thought to have been treatable. It was believed she would recover. Many biographers suggest that Austen's final illness—the one that would prove fatal—first took hold at the beginning of 1816, a year and a half before she died.

- A few others, including Upfal, revise that date of illness back even further. It's possible that Austen's health problems emerged as early

as 1813, when she began to have trouble with conjunctivitis, an eye problem. Upfal also theorizes that Austen had lifelong immune problems. All of this is conjecture based on letters from Austen and others.

- By spring 1817, Austen's condition, whatever it was, was worsening. She writes in May of an "attack of [her] sad complaint" seizing her. She describes having fever, weakness, and languor. She was being kept in bed, with removals only to a sofa. Soon, the local apothecary was not able to cope with her case.

- "Better advice was called in," as Jane puts it in a letter to her niece. She said the nearest very good advice about her case was to be found in Winchester, the next largest town to Chawton. A Winchester surgeon treated her, at least partially successfully. At this time, it was decided that Jane Austen would not go to London in order, as she says, to "put myself into the hands of some Physician as I should otherwise have done."

- She moved into a home on 8 College Street, Winchester, to be treated there by the surgeon, Mr. Lyford. But her symptoms didn't go away. Fevers continued, as did weakness. As her brother James wrote to his son, "Mr. Lyford has candidly told us that her case is desperate."

- Austen managed to hang on to life until mid-July. Family members recorded her cheerfulness and sweetness of temper during her final days. However, it's important to recognize that everyone thought it was imperative to die a "good death" then, to show oneself to be ready and willing to enter a heavenly afterlife. It seems unlikely that at every moment Jane's condition was calm, cheerful, and pain-free.

- It is true, however, that the day before she died, she was well enough to write a short, comic poem about Saint Swithin's Day, which falls on July 15. Jane dictated the poem to her sister Cassandra, who had been her companion and nurse.

- The short poem is in the voice of a dead saint, Saint Swithin. It's incredible that Austen wrote comic verse, as if by a saint from the heavens, as her final act as an author. She died on July 18, 1817, and was buried shortly after in Winchester Cathedral.

Suggested Reading

Lane, *A Charming Place*.

Porter, *Bodies Politic*.

Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body*.

Questions to Consider

1. The word *valetudinarian* is used but once in Austen's fiction. What does the word mean, whom does it describe, and do you think the term is significant to understanding all of her novels?
2. What was putrid fever, and why were people in Austen's day afraid of it?

AFTER 1817: AUSTEN'S GROWING POSTHUMOUS FAME

Lesson 20

When Jane Austen died on July 18, 1817, it was a terribly sad event, though not an unexpected one. As Jane's health was deteriorating, her brother Henry had chosen to shift professions once again. He became a clergyman and, this time, met with professional success. But arguably his most profound impact on the world was one short piece of writing about his sister Jane. It carried the title "Biographical Notice of the Author," and it was written in late 1817. When he revisited it in 1833, it was retitled "Memoir of Miss Austen." With this brief essay, Henry became Jane Austen's first biographer, only five short months after she died. His words laid the groundwork for his sister's growing posthumous fame, which this lesson examines.

Immediately After Austen's Passing

- Two versions of Austen's obituary were published in newspapers in the weeks after she died. One describes her merely as having been the daughter of Reverend George Austen of Steventon. That was a perfectly conventional form of brief obituary then, of a length and sort used even for the famous.
- But another published version of the obituary says more. It describes the recently deceased as Jane Austen, daughter of Reverend George Austen and as the "authoress of *Emma, Mansfield Park, Pride and Prejudice*, and *Sense and Sensibility*." This longer obituary was reprinted in newspapers as far away as Boston in 1817.
- Immediately after her death, Jane's family members were unabashedly and publicly memorializing her as a writer. This obituary first declared Austen to be the author of her four anonymously published novels. It also means that the frequent claim that Austen's authorship was first "revealed" to the public in Henry's "Biographical Notice," prefixed to *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, is inaccurate.
- The obituary in July was the first revelation. But Henry's biographical notice, published in December 1817, five months after Jane's death, had a far more profound impact, as might be expected.

Henry's Notice

- Henry's biographical notice begins with an almost Gothic and melodramatic series of sentences. He notes that the public has been entertained by the author of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma* but that the "hand that guided that pen is now mouldering in the grave." As a result, he hopes "a brief account" of Jane Austen will be read with "a kindlier sentiment than simple curiosity."

Two Common Myths

Two common myths about Jane Austen are that her family didn't want her to be known as a writer and that few people read or knew her novels before 1870. Both are false.

- The style of the notice jibes with the fact that Henry had just become a clergyman. Many parts of it read as a eulogy or a sermon. However, Henry's description of his sister is over-the-top in its claims and tone.

- "Short and easy will be the task of the mere biographer" of Jane Austen, he says. That's because, as he sees it, "A life of usefulness, literature, and religion, was not by any means a life of event." This claim set up a myth that's been handed down to this day—that Austen lived a boring life in which nothing happened.

- Henry's insistence on his sister's small, unobjectionable life might be best grasped as part of a public relations campaign. In presenting Jane as entirely polite and modest, he might have been attempting to prevent the critics from expressing their usual ire toward upstart female novelists. He asks the public to view her as feminine, humble, and proper, possibly so that she wouldn't be criticized as masculine, ambitious, or risk-taking.

- At least one statement Henry makes is demonstrably untrue. He says his sister "never uttered either a hasty, a silly, or a severe expression." Thanks to his use of *never* here, we need just one example to poke a hole in his claim. There are dozens of examples of things she uttered in her letters and writings that might be judged hasty, silly, or severe.

- For example, in a private letter to her sister Cassandra, Jane included a piece of unfortunate neighborhood news. Jane reports that "Mrs. Hall of Sherbourn was brought to bed yesterday of a dead child, some weeks before she expected, owing to a fright."

- Then she added a line of cruel comedy to explain both the stillbirth and the fright. "I suppose," Jane writes, Mrs. Hall "happened unawares to look at her husband." This may be an instance of all three of the flaws that Henry Austen disavows as part of the character of his sister, Jane: hasty, silly, and severe.

- Henry preferred to shine a light on things other than his sister's satirical wit. He emphasizes her being attractive, pleasant, and well read. But this is not his highest value of her either. As he concludes, "One trait only remains to be touched on. It makes all others unimportant. She was thoroughly religious and devout."

- Henry ends by telling his readers that his sister's "opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church." Again, this may well have been true. But it's an interesting

choice for describing what the world now thinks of as one of its greatest novelists in English and a master of comedy, irony, and social criticism.

- For most of us, *devout* isn't the first word that comes to mind when describing the main features of her fiction. We don't usually associate devotion with the comic, the ironic, or the critical. A relevant question is if Henry could have been trying to head off any criticisms of Austen's depictions of defective clergymen, for her sake or his own. It's a telling final line for a novelist's biographical notice.

Reviews and Recognition

- After *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were published with Henry's biographical notice prefixed to them, a few reviews came out lamenting Austen's death and lauding her fiction. A notable, positive one was published by the theologian Richard Whately, later Archbishop Whately, in 1821, so perhaps Henry's groundwork in advocating for Austen's Christian principles was successful. Whately declares that "Miss Austen's work may be safely recommended." The keyword here seems to be *safely*.

- Austen's name was also making its way into popular magazines. The first published piece of Austen-inspired fiction dates to 1823, just six years after her death. It was by someone writing under the pseudonym Jane Fisher. It features Austen as a character and was published in *The Lady's Magazine*, a popular periodical of the time.

- Austen had achieved moderate success during her lifetime, in the 1810s. But in the decades after her death, she began a gradual ascent to literary superstardom.

- By the 1820s, "Miss Austen" began to be mentioned in the newspaper and magazine lists of the great women novelists of the era, alongside other notables, such as Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane and Anna Maria Porter. Austen also started to be mentioned alongside the great male novelists of the day, too, including Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and especially Sir Walter Scott.

- Scott, who outlived Austen by 15 years, had anonymously declared himself an appreciator of her fiction. He also recorded in his private journal in 1826 that he'd read *Pride and Prejudice* for the third time and found it "very finely written."

- He begrudgingly admits the extent of Austen's talents, declaring her "involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with." Scott contrasts his own literary powers with hers, revealing that he sees Austen outdoing him in exquisiteness and authenticity.

Written Responses to Austen

- In 1828, a reviewer complained that many novelists of the day were guilty of "plagiarisms of Miss Austen." Among those who might be seen as copying her—or writing in response to her—were James Fenimore Cooper and Jane West.
- Fenimore Cooper's first anonymously published novel in 1820 was titled *Precaution*, and it echoes many parts of Austen's *Persuasion*. It begins with a nobleman whose financial irresponsibility creates obstacles for his three daughters. Cooper set out to write this novel after declaring to his wife that he thought he could outdo Austen. Few today think he managed it.
- Other writers responded directly to Austen's plots. Jane West's last novel, *Ringrove*, from 1827, took up elements of the characters and scenes in Austen's *Emma* and rewrote them, changing their treatment of social class.

The 1830s

- It was in the 1830s that Austen's fame really took off. Then, her novels were republished as a set in England and America, to steady sales. Reissuing her novels in that decade significantly furthered her reach and popularity, at home and abroad.
- It also led to the first time that all of Austen's novels were illustrated. These illustrations emphasized the stories' Gothic and melodramatic scenes and their focus on female-female intimacy.
- These 1830s editions were part of Richard Bentley's Standard Novel series. In 1832, Bentley purchased the copyright to five of her six novels from Henry and Cassandra Austen, and he paid them £210. (Bentley purchased the sixth, *Pride and Prejudice*, from its previous publisher.)

Shorter Works and Mentions

It wasn't only her full-length novels that made Austen a literary star. Austen had a growing fan following throughout the 19th century based on her work in excerpts and in adaptation of all kinds, as well as through continued mention in newspapers and magazines.

- This marked the end of the Austen family's financial interest in Jane's novels. Bentley got a bargain. Austen's novels were never again out of print. A flurry of editions, from expensive to cheap, appeared over the next decades.

Praise and Detractors

- Other authors held Austen in high regard. Novelist Mary Russell Mitford admired Austen's fiction. It's quite possible that she wrote that 1823 piece of fan fiction in *The Lady's Magazine*, purporting to be by Jane Fisher.
- Novelist Maria Edgeworth had some laudatory things to say about Austen's *Persuasion,* although she didn't like its first 50 pages. The rest of the novel she found exceedingly interesting, natural, and admirably well done.
- Austen had famous detractors, too, including Charlotte Brontë and Mark Twain. Brontë faulted Austen's novels for a lack of passion. Mark Twain's insults include a gruesome line about wanting to dig up Austen's corpse and beat her over the skull with her own shin bone. He may have exaggerated his hatred to needle his literary friend, William Dean Howells, who revered Austen.
- There were many others who revered her. Historian and essayist Thomas Babington Macaulay was an enormous fan. He writes in his journal about Austen's *Northanger Abbey* being the "work of a girl" "not more than 26" and declares her a "wonderful creature." He says she's worth more than all of Dickens and Pliny together.
- Macaulay suggested in the 1850s his wish for a biography and a monument erected to Austen's memory. The first monument to her didn't appear until 1872, in Winchester Cathedral.

A Biography

- It was Austen's family members who made it happen, with the profits from the first full-length biography of Austen. That biography was written by Austen's nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, in 1870. His book, *The Memoir of Jane Austen*, gave the world for the first time a visual representation of what the author looked like.
- For its frontispiece illustration, at the beginning of the book, there was an engraving of a newly commissioned portrait. This was a touched-up version of the small watercolor version of Jane's face, drawn by her sister Cassandra, discussed at the beginning of this course.
- Other kinds of touchups were involved in Austen-Leigh's 1870 *Memoir of Jane Austen*, too. He describes "Aunt Jane" in ways that are very similar to Henry Austen's 1818 memoir, making her out to be safe, sweet, and unambitious.

Austen's Letters

- Austen-Leigh's memoir was widely reviewed and sold well. Then, a dozen years later, in 1884, Austen's great-nephew, Edward Hugessen Knatchbull-Hugessen, who was by then known as Lord Brabourne, published the first edition of Austen's private letters.
- These letters hadn't been known to exist before, even, apparently, in some branches of the Austen family. They gave the literary world the first glimpse into Austen as a correspondent.
- Most readers were disappointed by what they found. The letters focused on everyday problems, sometimes trivial ones. It would take many years before Austen's letters came to be more widely appreciated.

Dramatizations

- The first dramatizations of Austen's fiction happened in late 1895, but once her stories had made the transformation, their popularity took off. Much of their exposure was thanks to the pioneering efforts of actor and drama teacher Rosina Filippi.
- She wrote and acted in the first dramatic adaptation of Austen for the professional stage, in 1901. It was called *The Bennets: A Play Without a Plot*, loosely based on *Pride and Prejudice*. It wasn't a commercial or critical success.

AFTER 1817: AUSTEN'S GROWING POSTHUMOUS FAME

- However, Filippi's earlier book, *Duologues and Scenes from the Novels of Jane Austen*, from 1895, was immensely successful and went through several editions. Her scenes were particularly popular in emerging girls' schools.
- The suffrage movement, seeking women's right to vote, often took up the figure of Austen for its cause. Austen was turned into a character in a famous suffrage play from 1909, *A Pageant of Great Women*. Her name was among those paraded on a banner in London's streets in a famous 1908 women's rights march.
- At the same time, one of Jane Austen's collateral descendants, Florence Austen-Leigh, held a leadership role in an anti-suffrage organization, advocating that women not be granted the right to vote. In political debate, Austen has been claimed by liberals and conservatives alike, with her own politics notoriously difficult to pin down.
- It remains a challenge to settle these longstanding arguments about who Austen really was or what her works ought to mean. However, continuing disagreements and investigations prove that her afterlife has become as complex and compelling as her novels.

Suggested Reading

Austen, "Biographical Notice."

Austen-Leigh, *Memoir of Jane Austen*.

Filippi, *Duologues and Scenes from the Novels of Jane Austen*.

Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers, 1786–1945*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did Henry Austen and James Edward Austen-Leigh set the stage for the first understandings of Austen's life? What facts did they offer, and what myths did they initiate or extend?
2. How was Jane Austen's work and image used by the early women's suffrage movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and how do you think that usage shaped her evolving posthumous fame?

LADY SUSAN: AUSTEN'S MERRY WIDOW

Lesson 21

The year 1870 saw publication of the first full-length biography of Jane Austen's life, *The Memoir of Jane Austen*, by her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh. The following year, Austen-Leigh made the decision to bring into print some of his aunt's unpublished writings, including *Lady Susan*. This lesson focuses on that work.

Background on *Lady Susan*

- When Austen's nephew prepared for the press a second edition of his *Memoir of Jane Austen*, he—or perhaps he and his publisher—made an important decision. They added some previously unpublished fiction from Austen as an appendix.

- The manuscript of *Lady Susan* is there described as having been "locked up" in Austen's desk and safeguarded after her death by her niece. That niece, Lady Knatchbull, was the cousin of the *Memoir* writer. It's not clear at what point she revealed that she had some of their aunt's unpublished fiction in her possession.

- The part about Austen's locking away these writings may be a truth or an exaggeration, but it does seem to be the case that Austen had kept back a number of her unpublished writings for some years. One of these manuscripts was the short novel, or novella, that we now know as *Lady Susan*.

- *Lady Susan* is a remarkable epistolary novella. Epistolary fiction is fiction that's composed of letters. Epistolary fiction was a very popular 18th-century literary form. It's believed Austen began the novels that would eventually become *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* in an epistolary format. *Lady Susan* uses that form across its 41 letters, followed by a brief conclusion by an omniscient narrator.

- The manuscript begins, "Letter 1: Lady Susan Vernon to Mr. Vernon." It is dated December, but with no year. From that first letter, we're introduced to the 35-year-old widow at the center of the story. Much of the novella is told in her voice, through her letters.

- Lady Susan writes to her family, friends, and suitors. Her letters are interspersed with those of her family members and friends. Those letters are to her and to each other, but they are mostly about her. Through these letters, we learn that Lady Susan is a captivating widow with a married lover, a nearly grown daughter, and no money to speak of. Her power, in other words, is in her ability to attract men.

- She's described as the most accomplished coquette in England, a distinguished flirt. She is one who is not happy with "honest flirtation" but with the kind of flirtation that "aspires to the more delicious gratification of making a whole family miserable."

Lady Susan as a Character

- In the first letter, Lady Susan invites herself, almost unannounced, to be a houseguest at her brother-in-law's home. She's telling him that she'll be arriving to stay with him almost immediately and for several weeks.

- We learn that Lady Susan hasn't even yet met Mr. Vernon's wife, Mrs. Catherine Vernon. This is an exceptionally rude slight. Soon after that, we learn that that's because Lady Susan had been against their marriage. Now she's arriving on their doorstep and pretending that none of it ever happened.

- In fact, Lady Susan is coming to visit her brother and sister-in-law for two reasons. One is that she's nearly broke. Her husband has been dead for less than a year, and he left her financially unprovided for. The other is that Lady Susan has been suspected of cavorting with her married lover, Mr. Manwaring, so she's had to leave the previous estate where she's been a long-term guest.

- The icing on the cake is that she's not even bringing her teenage daughter, Frederica, with her on this visit to her brother- and sister-in-law. Instead, Lady Susan is dropping off Frederica at a girls' boarding school in London, which, as she reveals in a letter to a friend, she's entirely unable to pay for. Lady Susan's plans are to force her daughter to marry a wealthy young idiot, Sir James Martin, and thus to secure her daughter's, and her own, financial future.

- The whole plot revolves around her seeking pleasure and profit by turns, by trying to get others to do her bidding or by following her own whims. It might be easier to hate her if she didn't have such a lively voice in writing, and if she weren't so often funny. Here, for instance, is Lady Susan describing to a friend her feelings for her brother-in-law: "I really have a regard for him, he is so easily imposed on!"

- Lady Susan views marriage as an entirely economic bargain for a woman. In the end, after being found in a compromising position with her married lover, Lady Susan saves her reputation by marrying the wealthy idiot she once intended as a husband for her daughter, Frederica.
- Frederica, having resisted marrying the idiot, instead marries Catherine Vernon's brother, Reginald De Courcy, a man whom Lady Susan had once managed to wrap around her little finger. Lady Susan at one point considered marrying Reginald, despite—or because of—his resistance to her charms.

Analyzing the Character

- Lady Susan is a master at telling people what they want to hear and getting them to believe her lies. She's highly deceptive, and she likes to be in control.
- If Lady Susan were a male politician, we might even admire a little of her Machiavellian genius—or fear it. She understands the system, exploits its weaknesses, and gets what she wants. She is exceptionally strong and smart and admits that she has a freedom of spirit. She declares, "I am tired of submitting my will to the Caprices of others."
- However, the reality is that, for a widowed woman like Lady Susan, there were actually few paths to social or economic power: What else did she have to trade on than her looks, charm, intelligence, and sexuality? We might say that, although there were other options available for a woman like her in the real world at this time, there weren't other good options.
- The most acceptable way for a widow without money to make a living was in an economically advantageous second marriage. We might see it as understandable that she'd capitalize on that pursuit, in conjunction with pursuing her own "pleasures." Or we might see her deception, even in difficult circumstances, as unequivocally evil.
- What's clear is that Lady Susan has a personal attractiveness that makes her look far younger than her years, a charisma that shows the experience she's gained, and a confident power with words. Her sister-in-law describes Lady Susan as a woman who's able to make black appear white.
- As Lady Susan is written on the page, she could be described as a heroine, a villain, or both. It's muddled. She's a character that many readers find simultaneously captivating and horrifying.

The Ending of *Lady Susan*

- Even the conclusion of *Lady Susan*, which brings her adventures to a hasty end, leaves things in a moral gray area. The voice in the conclusion shifts to a late-introduced, omniscient, all-knowing narrator. The narrator delivers this line after Lady Susan marries the wealthy young idiot:

  > Whether Lady Susan was, or was not happy in her second choice, I do not see how it can ever be ascertained, for who would take her assurance of it, on either side of the question?

- The omniscient narrator eventually concludes, "The world must judge from probabilities; she had nothing against her but her husband, and her conscience." Readers already know Lady Susan's faulty husband and her nonexistent conscience, so we might say that the probability is that she's miserable. But on the other hand, the probability may be that she's pursuing her own profits and pleasures in a new, remarried key.

- Critics have not known what to do with *Lady Susan*'s ambiguous ending. As a piece of writing, some see it as a failure. They call it rushed, and they say they leave the text with the feeling that the concluding moral is sloppily tacked on.

- However, this course proposes that the ending is an intentional literary act, composed at a time when a great deal of polite fiction was expected to have a neat moral lesson to tie together all of the loose ends of the story. The ending of *Lady Susan* may be seen as a comic send-up of that fictional formula. Austen's equivocal ending may not suit one's own pleasures as a reader, but that's because it's meant to upset expectations.

Austen's Inspiration

- *Lady Susan* was written, in all likelihood, when Austen was in her 20s. Some believe it may have been started in the 1790s, before she began her six major novels. They see this text as a bridge between her teenage writings and her later novels, but that's only an educated guess.

- We do know that the story was likely revised and definitely recopied sometime around or after 1805, when Austen was around 30 years old. The paper that Austen used to recopy the story has a watermark—that is, a stamp

visible in the weave of the paper—that indicates the sheet on which it was written was manufactured in 1805.

- Austen was clearly working with a popular character type from drama and fiction, the merry widow. The merry widow is usually thought of as a character who casts doubt on the institutions of masculinity by seeking to subvert patriarchal structures, although in many stories, she's put back in her place by the end.
- Another literary predecessor for Lady Susan may be the powerful, evil female character from *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, the Marquise de Merteuil. It was published in 1782 and is known in English as *Dangerous Liaisons*.
- It's also possible that Austen was inspired by women she knew in her own life. One was her brother's wife, her cousin, the widowed Eliza. She was also known as Comtesse de Feuillide and was a notorious flirt and captivating woman.

Critics on the Character and Work

- Some would distance Austen from Lady Susan as a character. James Edward Austen-Leigh, the first editor of *Lady Susan* in 1871, is quick to do so. He describes it as "scarcely" a story "on which a literary reputation could have been founded." He calls it "too slight to stand alone" and suggests that "it cannot diminish" her reputation as a writer.
- In contrast, there are critics who see Austen and her character Lady Susan as having a lot in common. They see the whole of *Lady Susan* as a significant work that offers a sophisticated understanding of Austen's fictional method and her self-concept as an author.
- Those critics compare Lady Susan as a character, who is a masterful manipulator of men, to the efforts of great novelists, who are master manipulators of readers. In this reading, Austen's powers as a writer of fiction mirror Lady Susan's powers as a seductress.
- Regardless of how one approaches this work, *Lady Susan* deserves its due as a different kind of literary accomplishment among Austen's writings. It's also Austen's longest-surviving work of completed fiction that exists in manuscript form. The manuscript is now held in the collection of The Morgan Library & Museum in New York.

Annotated Suggested Reading and Viewing

Austen, *Jane Austen's Manuscript Works*.

Knuth, "Lady Susan: A Bibliographical Essay."

Stillman, dir., *Love and Friendship*.

A free facsimile and transcription of *Lady Susan* is available on the website Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts, reachable here: https://janeausten.ac.uk/index.html. If you'd prefer a print, edited, and annotated version, this course recommends Broadview Press's *Jane Austen's Manuscript Works*, edited by Linda Bree, Peter Sabor, and Janet Todd. Whit Stillman's film *Love and Friendship* is an adaptation of *Lady Susan* and makes for an interesting watch, after reading the text.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think Lady Susan is meant to be understood as a heroine, a villain, or both?
2. To what extent do you think Jane Austen, as an author, is wielding her power like Lady Susan, seeking to have consideration and esteem follow from her command of language?

SANDITON AND AUSTEN'S UNFINISHED FICTION

Lesson 22

When Jane Austen died, she left behind a number of writings in manuscript. Two were completed novels: *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, published together as a set, five months after her death. One was a novella, *Lady Susan*, considered in a previous lesson. There were other manuscripts as well, including two works of fiction in an unfinished state.

The first, *The Watsons*, was likely abandoned a dozen years before she died. Made up of just five chapters, it's often described as a study for her later fiction. The second work of fiction that was left unfinished, *Sanditon*, is this lesson's subject.

Background on *Sanditon*

- *Sanditon* was begun in January 1817, when Austen had already taken ill. Over the next three months, despite her illness, she completed 11 chapters and started a 12th. Then the story was set aside, in March 1817, as her condition took a turn for the worse. She was apparently never able to return to it.
- For six decades after Austen died, the public had no idea she had left behind any unfinished work. In the 1870 memoir of her life, there was a brief mention made of the story we know as *Sanditon*. Nephew and editor James Edward Austen-Leigh called it simply "The Last Work," because it had "received no name," or no title, from Austen herself.
- The manuscript wasn't printed for the first time until 1925, more than a century after Austen's death. Then, it was titled "Fragment of a Novel" by its editor R. W. Chapman. But on the spine of the book was printed the word *Sanditon*.
- Chapman notes in his introduction that Austen family tradition had called it *Sanditon*. There's also some evidence that the family had once referred to it as *The Brothers*. But *Sanditon* is the title that stuck. Therefore, we now refer to the story by the name of the place that its story features—the fictional, fledgling spa town named Sanditon.

Setting Up *Sanditon*

- The story of *Sanditon* opens dramatically. Its first scene involves a carriage accident. This is how it begins:

  > A gentleman and a lady travelling from Tunbridge towards that part of the Sussex coast which lies between Hastings and Eastbourne, being induced by business to quit the high road and attempt a very rough lane, were overturned in toiling up its long ascent, half rock, half sand.

- Toiling up this long, rough ascent, the gentleman and lady's carriage overturns. The injuries are minor, but the carriage itself is heavily damaged. That opening scene may be said to serve as metaphor for the character of Mr. Tom Parker. He's both literally and figuratively rolling ahead, into risky new business dealings, without attending to the bumps in the road.

- The accident has some fortunate outcomes, too. It brings together its passengers, the gentleman and lady introduced to us as Mr. and Mrs. Tom Parker, with a large family called the Heywoods. The Heywoods live near the road where the Parkers' carriage accident occurs. It's the Heywoods who rush to offer help to the Parkers.
- We soon learn that Tom Parker is one of the investors in the town of Sanditon. It's described as one of many newly built spa towns then cropping up along the seashore. These towns were fashionable with tourists and with investors.

Charlotte and the Town

- The story of *Sanditon* moves forward after the Parkers' carriage is repaired and Mr. Parker's sprained ankle is healed. The Parkers return to the road to head home. But as a gesture of gratitude to the Heywoods, they take along the family's eldest daughter, Charlotte Heywood, age 22.
- The rest of the action takes place in the town of Sanditon itself. We're often led to see its features and its people through the outsider Charlotte's eyes. Many readers view Charlotte as the unfinished story's probable heroine.
- It's crucial, too, that Sanditon is presented almost like a character in the text. The town of Sanditon is called Tom Parker's "second wife and four children" and "hardly less dear, and certainly more engrossing," so it's presented as if it were almost a person.

- To describe a town as a wife, job, and legacy is to expect a great deal from a place. However, the clear-headed Mr. Heywood, Charlotte's father, a traditional landowner, sees tourist traps as economically bad, because he says they drive up prices for goods and make the leisure-seeking poor lazier.
- His view is meant to provide an alternate view to Mr. Parker's being so gung-ho for Sanditon, but it doesn't mean it's any more sensible. In fact, it's also selfish.
- Mr. Heywood doesn't want the growing domestic tourism industry to force him to pay more for the things he buys or to have trouble hiring the working-class laborers he relies on. Both he and Tom Parker pretend that what's good for them personally must be what's good for the country economically. This is fiction, but it's based in actual economic issues of Austen's time.

Other Characters

- Tom Parker's siblings also appear in the novel. Much remains unanswered about *Sanditon* because of its unfinished state. There's even debate over which character Austen meant for her hero.
- Most critics agree that Tom Parker's brother, Sidney Parker, seems the most likely candidate. Tom Parker describes Sidney to the young Miss Heywood as "a very clever young man" who "lives too much in the world to be settled; that is his only fault." In the unfinished novel, we see very little of Sidney.
- The other Parker siblings are given a bit more space to unfold in the fragment. They are Tom's sisters Diana and Susan Parker, women in their 30s, and their younger brother Arthur Parker, who's not much above 20. All three are invalids—although the narrator leaves us thinking that they fancy themselves ill more than the reality of their conditions warrant.
- We might call them hypochondriacs. Tom Parker describes his sisters Diana and Susan as having "weaker constitutions and stronger minds than are often met with, either separate or together."
- Arthur, it's said, is "almost as great an invalid as themselves" and "so delicate that he can engage in no profession." But when we finally meet Arthur, it's in a scene in which he's shown to have an enormous appetite for rich foods.

- He drinks copious amounts of hot chocolate and sneaks more butter onto his toast when no one is looking. Charlotte Heywood notices that "Arthur was by no means so fond of being starved as they could desire, or as he felt proper himself."

- This is a brilliant description of a self-conscious, would-be invalid, as described by an author who was herself just then under treatment by doctors. As Austen wrote this, it's likely that she was having to listen to theories from everyone around her—including doctors, friends, and family members—about what was wrong with her and what she should try to do, eat, or take for a possible cure.

Miss Lambe

- The character whom many have found the most intriguing one in *Sanditon* is the mixed-race heiress Miss Lambe. She is a young woman who comes to Sanditon with a guardian, in search of better health. We see very little of her in the fragment, and we never hear her speak.

- But even before she arrives in Sanditon, she's speculated on as if she's a commodity herself. First, she's described as a young lady of immense fortune, then as a young West Indian of large fortune, and then as a young West Indian of large fortune in delicate health.

- With each description, the story adds one more detail for the reader to form a mental picture of her, by age, wealth, origin, and embodiedness. When she arrives in Sanditon, two more sentences further describe her. Miss Lambe is called "about seventeen, half mulatto, chilly and tender." She had "a maid of her own, was to have the best room in the lodgings, and was always of the first consequence in every plan."

- At age 17, Miss Lambe is younger than most of Austen's heroines, although slightly older than those minor characters who are vulnerable and taken advantage of in some way. She seems positioned to be a major part of the story.

- The description of her being "half mulatto" is a phrase that suggests that Austen wants us to understand Miss Lambe as descending from one Black and three white grandparents. But it also makes clear that Miss Lambe is defined by the one Black one.

- The scholar Victoria Baugh has discovered how rare describing someone as "half mulatto" was at this point in the English language, when Austen was doing so in *Sanditon*. It seems that Austen was very unusual among authors in putting the phrase to work. The question that critics have asked, as interest in *Sanditon* has grown, is why Austen would employ that phrase.

- One answer is that Austen was, like other privileged members of 19th-century British culture, half-blind to the ways in which the term and her character serve to limit and dehumanize. One critic with this perspective has referred to *Sanditon* as showing us the "silence of Miss Lambe," echoing the title of the contemporary horror film. In this reading, Austen's Miss Lambe is an un-thoughtful creation, born out of its author's racial privilege.

- But others have seen something more progressive. It's interesting that Austen chooses to make Miss Lambe an heiress and therefore a desirable wife. The story didn't continue far enough for us to see how the greedy social climbers in *Sanditon* would treat a mixed-race heiress.

- Miss Lambe isn't just wealthy. She's the wealthiest young woman in the story, with a maid of her own and the best room. She's of the "first consequence" in every party she's in. That status would seem poised to reveal the hypocrisy of limited, biased attitudes toward wealth then and how they might trump the culture's otherwise limited, biased attitudes toward race.

- This course posits that Austen was seeking to highlight injustice and mistreatment based on race and gender, rather than unthinkingly adding to it. Of course, her intentions and her results may not necessarily line up. There's no saying she succeeded.

Medical Treatments

- Both a contraption known as a bathing machine—used for sea bathing—and a cure described as "asses' milk" are recommended as treatments for Miss Lambe. A bathing machine was a small house or shed on wheels. It made it possible for a bather to change privately into a bathing costume.

- The bathing machine could be brought by servants, or hired help, directly into the water. After changing clothing, the bather would be assisted out of the shed by the servant and led down a built-in set of stairs to enter directly into the water.

- Retreating from the water meant going back up the stairs and changing immediately into warm, dry clothing. Both men and women might use a bathing machine, but given the strictures for modesty put upon women, they were especially important for wealthy females. Bathing was done as a single-sex activity, even in the sea.

- Given that *Sanditon* starts off with a carriage crash, it's easy to imagine that something might have gone very wrong, too, with the bathing machine, had she continued the story. Austen liked to mirror these kinds of happenings in her other books, with one scene reflecting on the other. However, this theory is speculation.

- Asses' milk, too, is a very interesting detail for Austen to have dropped into the text for us to parse. Asses' milk—the milk of donkeys—was an actual medical treatment in this era. It had figurative associations, too. And an ass, then, as now, had meanings that included donkey, buttocks, or a foolish person.

- We're told that the wealthy and awful grand dame of *Sanditon*, Lady Denham, plans to try to foist asses' milk off on Miss Lambe as a treatment, because she presumes that the young woman will be consumptive. By that, Lady Denham means that Miss Lambe is likely to have the symptoms of consumption—what we now call tuberculosis, a lung disease. Lady Denham is playing amateur doctor and perhaps trying to sell a product.

- Miss Lambe's guardian rejects it, saying that Miss Lambe didn't have the "smallest symptom of a decline or any complaint which asses' milk could possibly relieve" and was in any case "under the constant care of an experienced physician" whose "prescriptions must be their rule." Both of these characters seem far too confident here.

- But Lady Denham is particularly suspect in pretending to have something to protect Miss Lambe. It's implied that her real motivation is financial. She seems to treat Miss Lambe like a commodity.

- She wants to marry her off with her nephew. Austen's text shows Miss Lambe being made into an object, whether to cure, marry, or fleece. Lady Denham and others would no doubt have attempted to fleece Miss Lambe had the story continued. Therefore, it's possible that Miss Lambe was poised to expose the evils of those in Sanditon who are doing the objectifying.

Annotated Suggested Reading and Viewing

Austen and Todd, *Jane Austen's "Sanditon."*

Gerzina, *Black London*.

PBS/MASTERPIECE, *Sanditon*.

White, *Jane Austen in the Context of Abolition*.

A free facsimile and transcription of *Sanditon* is available on the website Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts, reachable here: https://janeausten.ac.uk/index.html. If you'd prefer a print, edited, and annotated version, this course recommends *Jane Austen's "Sanditon": With an Essay by Janet Todd*. The PBS/MASTERPIECE series *Sanditon* imagined how the book might have proceeded.

Questions to Consider

1. The town in the story is named Sanditon, and the novel fragment begins with an accident on sand and rock shape. How do those facts shape your sense of what this story is, and might be, about?
2. Miss Lambe, as the only mixed-race character in Austen's fiction, is noteworthy. What do you make of her name, or of the descriptions of her as chilly, tender, and half mulatto, after having heard more about the history and context of these terms in the lesson?

AUSTEN'S RELATIONS: FROM FAMILY TO FANDOM

Lesson 23

This lesson investigates how Jane Austen's collateral descendants influenced her writing, as well as how she galvanized generations of Austen family relatives who were themselves writers, publishers, and public figures. It also considers the phenomenon of non-relatives referring to Austen as if she were family, through the wider use of the name Aunt Jane and the subsequent growth of the fan label Janeite. These traditions, which began a century and a half ago, continue to the present day.

Austen's Immediate Family

- Austen came from a large and non-landowning English family. She was the daughter the Reverend George Austen, a clergyman and schoolteacher. She began writing at an early age. We have reason to believe her father was supportive of his daughter's creative efforts. He's said to have tried, unsuccessfully, to help get her fiction published in the 1790s by seeking a publisher for *First Impressions*, an early draft of *Pride and Prejudice*.

- Jane's mother, Cassandra Leigh, was descended from a more economically and socially powerful family. The Leighs had landowners among their ranks, as well as writers and authors. The young Jane Austen was aware that her mother's cousin, Cassandra Leigh Cooke, anonymously published her historical novel, *Battleridge*, as "By a Lady of Quality." Jane's mother also left behind some unpublished poetry.

- Two of the Austens' sons also became published authors—her brothers James and Henry Austen. They wrote for and edited the humor magazine *The Loiterer*. It ran weekly in Oxford for 60 issues, in 1789 and 1790.

- James Austen went on from Oxford to become a clergyman like his father. He was also a poet who preserved two volumes of his poetry in manuscript. Among them is a poem to his sister Jane, whom he cheekily describes as the "reputed" author of *Sense and Sensibility*. In his poem, James calls his sister's character a union of sense and sensibility and therefore a winning combination of the characters Elinor and Marianne.

- Jane's economically fortunate brother, Edward—who was adopted by the wealthy Knight family—wrote and preserved two travel journals from his tour of Europe. He captures the sights he saw in Switzerland, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands with succinct, descriptive prose.

- Two other Austen brothers did even more traveling than Edward Knight, as part of their military duties. Jane's naval brothers, Francis and Charles, also kept years of substantial, although often merely functional, diaries. Charles's diary suggests he was an avid reader of popular novels. There's also evidence of his pride in Jane in the decade after her death.

- Henry may have been the sibling who had the greatest impact on Jane's career during her lifetime, as well as after it. He frequently helped Jane in her dealings with

publishers. He arranged for his "man of business" to act as Jane's agent. Additionally, he was the author of the well-known biographical notice of Jane in 1818.

- When he expanded that memoir of his sister for republication in 1832, his name was advertised in the newspapers as the memoir's author. By this time, Henry had become a clergyman. He published a book and several pamphlets of sermons in the 1820s.
- His second wife, too, published religious works, under the name Mrs. Henry Austen. Any argument that Jane's family was against a woman signing her name on her books is weakened by Mrs. Henry Austen's byline.

Cassandra

- Jane's closest sibling relationship was with her sister Cassandra. Their mother is said to have joked, "If Cassandra were going to have her head cut off, Jane would insist on sharing her fate."
- Cassandra painted portraits of her sister, the only ones affirmed with certainty to be Jane. Cassandra also completed portraits of other family members. And she drew imaginary portraits of famous historical figures for the pages of Jane's juvenile work, "The History of England."
- Cassandra wrote charades, as did many in the Austen family. A charade then was a kind of word puzzle or riddle. Rather than acting out the syllables, charade writers describe these syllables in verse. Readers would then attempt to guess the answer by figuring out each syllable described in the riddle.

A Family of Writers

- Austen's 161 surviving letters show that she understood and appreciated that her family was made up of writers. She corresponded with some of them about fiction writing, including the niece who became Anna Lefroy, and the nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, who became her memoirist.
- Aunt Jane offered them support and advice. She is said to have advised her young niece to read more and write less, at least until age 16—a piece of advice that seems to recommend the opposite of what Jane herself did.

- The Austen family continued down a literary path after Jane's death. For example, Austen-Leigh privately published a work of recollections showing his love of hunting. Her great-nephew Lord Brabourne famously wrote dozens of volumes of fairy tales for children, as well as histories for children and conservative political pamphlets.

Collateral Descendants

- Within two generations, Jane Austen's large family became exponentially larger. She was one of eight children. Four of her siblings had children themselves, for a total of 33 nieces and nephews. Then those nieces and nephews begat 101 collateral descendants—great-nieces and great-nephews. That family became geographically diffuse, living on at least three different continents.

- It's clear that those numerous collateral descendants were perfectly aware of their famous aunt. Some used her name to market their own writings or undergird their own public lives.

- It wasn't only the Austen men who advanced the reputation of their famous aunt or great-aunt, and their own reputations, using her name. James Austen's daughter, Anna Lefroy, published a short story, "Mary Hamilton," in 1834. She didn't sign her own name to the work but used the byline "a niece of the late Miss Austen."

- Her story appeared in a literary magazine called *The Literary Souvenir*, and Lefroy, in writing it, took some inspiration from both *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*. Anna Lefroy also wrote but never published an incomplete continuation of Jane Austen's unfinished final work, *Sanditon*. Lefroy and her daughters published more than a dozen children's stories, with religious and moral themes.

- Other branches of the Austen family nurtured female authors, too. A daughter of Jane's naval brother, Francis Austen, began to publish novels as "Mrs. Hubback, late Miss Austen." Her novels were advertised in the 1850s as by the niece of the celebrated Miss Austen. Hubback family descendants kept up that Jane Austen-inspired work, publishing the biographical book *Jane Austen and Her Sailor Brothers* in 1906.

- Edward Knight's branch of the Austen family had many writers. His daughter, the diarist Fanny Knight, became Lady Knatchbull.

Her son, Lord Brabourne, the politician-baronet who first published Jane Austen's letters, is the one who published dozens of volumes of fairy tales. He had a Cambridge University-educated daughter who also published fairy tales and pursued social activism for the arts and women's education.

Aunt Jane and Janeites

- By the early 20th century, writers who weren't related to Jane Austen at all were referring to her affectionately and familiarly as Aunt Jane. The writer Constance Hill was one of the first and most prominent to do it, in her bestselling travel book, *Jane Austen: Her Home & Her Friends*, from 1902.
- The phenomenon of Aunt Jane is an odd one. There are very few authors whom we refer to like this, in familial terms. It was and is somewhat unusual. There's definitely a bit of benign sexism involved.
- Speaking of Austen as an aunt has had some unintended negative effects. It's allowed some readers to dismiss her as a lightweight author. But it may also have had some positive outcomes, too. For one, it may have allowed her and her fiction to seem more familiar and approachable and therefore expanded her mass readership.
- The split in nomenclature—between Jane and Austen—may be a part of what led to the wider adoption of the word *Janeite* in the late 19th and into the 20th century. *Janeite* is a term that remains in use today. It refers to Austen's appreciators or fans.
- The novelist Rudyard Kipling published a short story with the title "The Janeites" in 1924. But the word *Janeite* dates back at least to 1894, when it appeared in George Saintsbury's introduction to a prized and deluxe reprint edition of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Appreciating Jane

- Groups of British and American Janeites worked together to put up plaques in her honor at Chawton Cottage, where Austen lived and worked, and in Winchester Cathedral, where she's buried. Some appreciators, however, thought monuments were too unladylike a thing for Austen or not sufficiently aligned with what they saw as her modest feminine spirit.

- Perhaps that's also why it took until 1940 for the first organized Jane Austen Society to be founded, in England. That group worked to purchase and then to open to the public the home in which Austen lived in the last years of her life—Chawton Cottage. Few of the objects originally found in her home could be found by that late date, but the museum opened nonetheless in 1949.
- It was made possible by a donation from a couple who sought to honor their late son, Philip John Carpenter, a young soldier who had been killed in World War II. Chawton Cottage is now known as Jane Austen's House and welcomes thousands of visitors each year.
- The nearby Chawton House was one of the homes in which Jane's brother Edward Knight lived during her lifetime. Chawton House was eventually leased by later descendants of the Knight family to an American tech magnate, Sandy Lerner. She turned it into a library and study center.
- Today, it, too, is a museum devoted to Austen and women's writing. It places a special emphasis on the Knight family's having once had a library, by which Austen had gained access to books.

Joan Austen-Leigh

- At several points in Austen's afterlife, these physical spaces of her life, her Janeite fans, and her collateral descendants converged. None is perhaps more important than the late Joan Austen-Leigh and her activities in the 1970s. Joan Austen-Leigh, who died in 2001, was the great-great-granddaughter of Jane Austen's nephew and memoirist, as well as a novelist, playwright, and author-society visionary.
- Austen-Leigh, a Canadian, wrote a play to celebrate the 1975 bicentenary of Jane Austen's birth. In the preface to her play, *Our Own Particular Jane*, Joan describes how, in each generation, members of her family have written about their famous ancestor. It prompts Austen-Leigh to reflect on "the weight of generations looking over my shoulder."
- But Joan Austen-Leigh created something new and important, despite the weight of those generations. She cofounded the Jane Austen Society of North America, or JASNA, in 1979. JASNA stands today as one of the world's largest author-appreciation societies.

- It now has more than 5,000 members and an annual meeting that has attracted sellout crowds of nearly a thousand participants. It includes lectures, workshops, bookstalls, tea, and a ball, with costumes optional. The organization also runs a scholarly journal called *Persuasions*.

Suggested Reading

Lane, *Jane Austen's Family*.

Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*.

Yaffe, *Among the Janeites*.

Questions to Consider

1. How did Austen come to be referred to as Aunt Jane, and in what ways did this nickname shape her reputation and following?
2. What is the history of the term *Janeite*, and what do you think of it as a label, in comparison to those used for other categories of appreciators and fans?

POP AND POPULARITY: AUSTEN'S ENDURING FAME

Lesson 24

This lesson documents some twists and turns of Jane Austen's popular reputation in the 20th and 21st centuries. It examines several of the most influential 20th- and 21st-century adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, for screen and stage. However, keep in mind that there's never one simple explanation for why an Austen adaptation becomes or stays popular.

The Past View

- Jane Austen is a hot property in today's popular culture. To many, she and her characters are better known from film and television adaptations than from the original novels. Not long ago, that situation set off alarm bells among college professors and the literati, some of whom lamented the attention and set out to safeguard Austen's reputation for greatness. They advocated for keeping her as far away as possible from mass media of all kinds.
- One fear was that Austen's place in the so-called Great Tradition of literary history could be at risk, thanks to what was wrongly seen as a "new" tendency to popularize her stories, after 1995. Another fear was that all of the enthusiasm, or souvenirs, or fun might take away from the rigor needed to study a "serious" author.
- In both cases, the implication was that Austen's reputation was being "polluted" by late-20th-century pop culture. Fortunately, that contentious moment seems now to be largely in our cultural rearview mirror.

The Lake Scene

- In 1995, the BBC's six-part television adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* made the fictional hero Mr. Darcy a household name—and actor Colin Firth a star. A famous scene has Firth's Darcy dive, partially clothed, into a cold lake, to take a sexually frustrated swim.
- The scene then cuts to Darcy walking back to his great house at Pemberley. He's perfectly wet and impossibly appealing when he runs into Elizabeth Bennet. Sparks fly for the on-screen couple and, it seems, for millions of viewers afterward.
- In Austen's original 1813 novel, there's no hint of a swim in the lake and no wet-shirted viewing of the hero. Firth's scene was dreamed up by BBC screenwriter Andrew Davies. He has since claimed that he alone created the first sexy Darcy, which is not the case.
- Davies, whatever he might claim, can't be credited with that invention. However, those 1995 viewers certainly went wild over Davies's sexy rewriting of the character. It catapulted Mr. Darcy and Firth to superstardom.

- The lake swim scene has been copied countless times and rewatched by millions of people. It may, as a result, have left some with the mistaken idea that Austen's novels are most important as stories of pent-up sexual desire.

- However, Firth's performance arguably did more to expand Austen's fan base than has any other 30 seconds of film in the past generation. His performance has brought countless readers to the original novel. Firth's Darcy has also taken on a life of its own.

- Some said that the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice*, unlike the safe, nostalgia-driven televised Austen adaptations that came before it, was frothy, beefcake escapism. But that doesn't seem to capture the full scope of reasons for its popularity.

- It may point to the hunger of 1990s audiences for different kinds of masculinities on small and big screens. Mr. Darcy certainly stole the show in the BBC *Pride and Prejudice*. Jennifer Ehle's performance as Elizabeth Bennet is, rightly or wrongly, much less often commented on.

- The features of the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice* that most endured demonstrate that audiences must have been seeking stories of heterosexual men who were physically strong and openly desirous of smart, witty women. These men were also polite, respectful, and sensitive, as opposed to war-mongering or gun-toting. The year 1995 also saw the release of the films *Braveheart* and *Die Hard with a Vengeance*. The BBC *Pride and Prejudice* was a different kind of pop culture option.

Darcy's Context: 1935

- We can learn a great deal about Firth's performance by seeing it in the context of the surprisingly long history of three-dimensional Darcys who came before him. The most successful adaptation of Austen to be brought to the 20th-century stage was the 1935 *Pride and Prejudice* by Helen Jerome. It was a play seen by hundreds of thousands, and perhaps as many as a million, theatergoers worldwide in the 1930s. It traveled from New York to London and beyond, and it had a long performance history thereafter.

- Helen Jerome's *Pride and Prejudice: A Sentimental Comedy in Three Acts* took the theater world by storm in the years before World War II.

It was the first Austen adaptation with a big budget, serious set designs, props, and costumes. Jerome's play was remarkable for turning its Elizabeth into a weeping, weaker heroine than she was in Austen's original.

- Jerome eliminated some of Elizabeth's caustic wit. The plot did more to shame her. Jerome's play also lowered the number of Bennet sisters from five to three, dispensing with Kitty and Mary. This was not a play that moved the dial forward on its era's attitudes toward equitable gender roles. If anything, it served to roll them back.

- The play deemphasized Austen's explorations of female independence. This may have been done to make room for Mr. Darcy. Helen Jerome's innovation was giving the character far more center-stage time and narrative space than the original novel did. Cast as Darcy in Jerome's play was an English actor named Colin Keith-Johnston.

- He was a respected British actor, known for playing Hamlet as a snarling, violent smoker. Off stage, Keith-Johnston had been the younger paramour of Tallulah Bankhead. Casting him as Darcy was casting a cad who loved tussling with strong women.

- Jerome's script and Keith-Johnston's performance demonstrate that the history of transforming Austen's Darcy into a sexy heartthrob doesn't date back to 1995. It dates back to 1935. Perhaps it was considered safer and more palatable to use a female-authored story to deliver scenes depicting men's explicit but admirable sexual desires.

Darcy's Context: 1940

- The next iconic Darcy was Laurence Olivier. Olivier, known as a brilliant Shakespearean actor—an actor who excelled at highbrow parts—was also the first to play an Austen hero on the big screen. That occurred in MGM's 1940 film version of *Pride and Prejudice*. The film grew directly out of Jerome's play. It advertised itself as that.

- Olivier as Darcy was cast alongside Greer Garson as Elizabeth Bennet. Garson plays Elizabeth as a happy-go-lucky flirt, shopping alongside her sisters for a husband. And the film advertised itself to audiences with the ridiculous tagline "Five Gorgeous Beauties on a Mad-Cap Manhunt!"

- Darcy, however, in striking dramatic poses and weightily delivered lines, is the center of the film. The MGM version was directed by Robert Z. Leonard and based on a cowritten screenplay by science fiction writer Aldous Huxley and screenwriter Jane Murfin. Huxley was brought in at the last minute as a script fixer and apparently put back in scenes and dialogue from Austen's original novel.

- The film was created as part of a larger attempt to address criticisms that Hollywood's 1930s films weren't family-friendly enough. There were attempts to make the 1940 *Pride and Prejudice* film even more family-friendly than the original.

- For instance, clergyman Mr. Collins was transformed into a librarian, because according to the Motion Picture Production Code, members of the clergy couldn't be portrayed as comic characters or villains. And the film also turns the awful Lady Catherine de Bourgh into a kindly fairy godmother.

- The film had many false starts, including a long line of failed screenwriters and rejected scripts. Some failed scripts turned it into a screwball comedy.

- Although some critics may claim that the 1940 film version of *Pride and Prejudice* was made as war propaganda, to try to get Americans to support the British and join the fight in World War II, that's not true. The production files and rejected scripts do not at all suggest that interpretation as likely.

- It does seem likely that Hollywood and MGM set out to modernize and update Austen's novel, and to use it as a vehicle that would echo and repeat previous family-friendly commercial successes on screen. Olivier was cast as Darcy, coming off of his success as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. Garson was cast as Elizabeth, because she'd just been a success in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*.

- Their subsequent roles in *Pride and Prejudice* were seen as continuing the spirit of those roles, in a new key. It was about bringing in dollars and audiences, not a Hollywood plot to turn Americans into Anglophiles for the purposes of fighting Hitler.

- The 1940 film enjoyed a decades-long run of pop culture dominance in Austen adaptation. It had an even more significant run than Jerome's 1935 play. It was eventually broadcast on television. It was also theatrically rereleased in the early 1960s.

More Recent Works

- In the 1990s, when Colin Firth was cast as Darcy, Laurence Olivier still loomed very large over the character. It's said that Firth was concerned about taking the role of Darcy for that reason alone. Now Firth has enjoyed decades as an iconic Darcy.

- Firth also famously played another Darcy-inspired role—one that poked fun at his status as the iconic Darcy. It was in the film version of Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*. The *Bridget Jones* films are highly Austen-intertextual—that is, they draw not only on Austen's original texts but on other adaptations of Austen.

- *Bridget Jones's Diary* features Hugh Grant as a Mr. Wickham–like cad, despite his previously having played Edward Ferrars in Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*. But the film's most brilliant casting was making Colin Firth its hero, Mark Darcy.

- There's much in *Bridget Jones* that serves as a winking riff of the original Austen novel and of the BBC's 1995 adaptation. That's unsurprising, as the novelist Fielding and the BBC screenwriter Davies helped write *Bridget Jones*'s script.

- In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, audiences actually witnessed the same phenomenon that happened with the 1935 and 1940 versions of Austen's story. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, in the 2001 film version, did for the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice* what the 1940 screenwriters did for the 1935 play by Jerome.

- In each case, new adaptations of Austen were created of previously successful Austen adaptations, which were themselves adaptations of Austen's original. Both the 1940 MGM film and the *Bridget Jones* film were presented to audiences as fun-loving, humorous, and crowd-pleasing romps.

- They're best enjoyed by audiences who understand not only Austen's original text but the adapted versions that come just prior to theirs. This suggests a fan base that has a desire for repetition in a new key.

- That idea of repetition in a new key is relevant to another important innovation in 21st-century Austen adaptations—the significant trend of transporting the original story into new subgenres and cultural contents. The new subgenres have included mystery, with P. D. James's *Death Comes to Pemberley*, and horror, with *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. But the new cultural contexts for Austen are crucial and wide-ranging.

- One of the best-known adaptations to move Austen out of a British setting is the 2004 film *Bride and Prejudice*. It transforms Austen's story into an English-language Bollywood musical, including dialogue in Hindi and Punjabi.

- Directed by Gurinder Chadha, *Bride and Prejudice* moves the story to present-day India, England, and California, renaming the Bennet family the Bakshi family. The film embraces, criticizes, and sends up British colonial relationships. *Bride and Prejudice* is also significant for its putting back into the film the sort of social criticism of gender roles and the economics of marriage that had been set to the side, or ignored, in many previous 20th-century adaptations.

Diverse Retellings

- In the 2010s, *Pride and Prejudice* enjoyed countless iterations, a number of them remade to feature more diverse communities than former versions. Ibi Zoboi's novel from 2018, *Pride*, is set in an Afro-Latino community in Brooklyn. Soniah Kamal's 2019 novel *Unmarriageable* is a *Pride and Prejudice*–inspired novel set in contemporary Pakistan. Sonali Dev's novel of the same year, *Pride, Prejudice, and Other Flavors*, features an Indian American surgeon who falls for a multiracial British chef.

- Diverse retellings of Austen's story extended to film and television as well. The 2017 film *Before the Fall* cast two men as its Elizabeth and Darcy. The 2019 A&E TV movie *Pride and Prejudice Atlanta* featured an all-Black cast. Joel Kim Booster's *Trip* reimagines *Pride and Prejudice* in a modern-day rom-com set on Fire Island. Meanwhile, contemporary rewritings of Austen's stories regularly appear in the annual lineups of the Hallmark Channel's dozens of Christmas movies.

- As Austen's work has morphed into each iteration, she has managed to hold onto a rock-solid reputation for literary greatness, alongside impeccable pop-culture cachet. As a result, Austen's memorable characters and seemingly timeless stories appear well poised to be handed down to next-generation viewers and readers, who will inevitably create a different vocabulary and form new communities around which readers and viewers may congregate.

Suggested Reading

Johnson, *Jane Austen*.

Looser, *The Making of Jane Austen*.

Troost and Greenfield, *Jane Austen in Hollywood*.

Questions to Consider

1. Colin Firth's performance as Mr. Darcy in the 1995 BBC series *Pride and Prejudice* has become larger than life. In what ways has it happened? How does his interpretation of the character change once you know more about the longer history of Darcy as a sex symbol?
2. What do you think of the divide between a "town" and "gown," or academic and popular, Jane Austen? Do you see evidence of its breakdown, or its continuation, in the present? What do you think the future holds for Austen as a pop culture icon and a literary great?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Austen, Jane. *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*. 8 vols. Edited by Janet Todd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

———. *Emma*. 4th ed. Edited by George L. Justice. New York: W. W. Norton, 2012.

———. *Jane Austen's Letters*. 4th ed. Edited by Deirdre Le Faye. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

———. *Jane Austen's Manuscript Works*. Edited by Linda Bree, Peter Sabor, and Janet Todd. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012.

———. *Mansfield Park*. Edited by John Wiltshire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

———. *Northanger Abbey*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Grogan. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002.

———. *The Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen*. 3rd ed. Edited by R. W. Chapman et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

———. *Persuasion*. 2nd ed. Edited by Patricia Meyer Spacks. New York: W. W. Norton, 2012.

———. *Sense and Sensibility*. Edited by Devoney Looser. New York: Penguin Deluxe Classics, 2017.

———. *Teenage Writings*. Edited by Kathryn Sutherland and Freya Johnston. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2017.

Austen, Jane, and Janet Todd. *Jane Austen's "Sanditon": With an Essay by Janet Todd*. London: Fentum Press, 2019.

Barchas, Janine. *The Lost Books of Jane Austen*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bautz, Annika. *Jane Austen: "Sense and Sensibility"/"Pride and Prejudice"/"Emma."* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Byrde, Penelope. *A Frivolous Distinction: Fashion and Needlework in the Works of Jane Austen*. Bath: Bath City Council, 1979.

Byrne, Paula. *Belle: The True Story of Dido Belle.* New York: Harper Collins, 2014.

———. *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things.* New York: Harper Collins, 2014.

Clery, E. J. *Jane Austen: The Banker's Sister.* London: Biteback Press, 2017.

Collins, Irene. *Jane Austen and the Clergy.* London: Hambledon Press, 1994.

Copeland, Edward, and Juliet McMaster, eds. The *Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Cowie, Leonard W., and William Doyle. *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Davidoff, Leonore, and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Davidson, Hilary. *Dress in the Age of Jane Austen: Regency Fashion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.

Davidson, Jenny. *Reading Jane Austen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Fergus, Jan. *Jane Austen: A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991.

Filippi, Rosina. *Duologues and Scenes from the Novels of Jane Austen*. London: J. M. Dent, 1895.

Fullerton, Susannah. *A Dance with Jane Austen: How a Novelist and Her Characters Went to the Ball.* London: Frances Lincoln, 2012.

Gerzina, Gretchen. *Black London: Life Before Emancipation*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Harris, Jocelyn. *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression: Jane Austen's "Persuasion."* Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2007.

Hume, Robert. "Money in Jane Austen." In *The Cambridge Companion to "Emma,"* 52–67. Edited by Peter Sabor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Johnson, Claudia Durst, ed. *Issues of Class in Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice."* Detroit: Gale Cengage, 2009.

Johnson, Claudia L. *Jane Austen: Cults and Cultures*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

———. *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Johnson, Claudia L., and Clara Tuite. *30 Great Myths About Jane Austen*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020.

Jones, Hazel. *Jane Austen & Marriage*. New York: Continuum, 2009.

Jones, Vivien. *How to Study a Jane Austen Novel*. 2nd ed. Baskingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997.

Kaplan, Deborah. *Jane Austen among Women*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Keymer, Tom. *Jane Austen: Writing, Society, Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Knox-Shaw, Peter. *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Knuth, Deborah. "Lady Susan: A Bibliographical Essay." In *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, 215–224. Edited by Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000.

Lane, Maggie. *A Charming Place: Bath in the Life and Times of Jane Austen*. Avon: Millstream Books, 1988.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lane, Maggie. *Jane Austen's Family: Through Five Generations*. London: Robert Hale, 1984.

Le Faye, Deirdre *Jane Austen's "Outlandish Cousin": The Life and Letters of Eliza de Feuillide*. London: British Library, 2002.

———. *A Chronology of Jane Austen and Her Family*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

———. *Jane Austen: A Family Record*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Looser, Devoney. *The Making of Jane Austen*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

Mahony, Stephen. *Wealth or Poverty: Jane Austen's Novels Explored*. London: Robert Hale, 2015.

Mandal, Anthony. *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*: *The Determined Author*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Miller, D. A. *Jane Austen, or, The Secret of Style*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Porter, Roy. *Bodies Politic: Disease, Death, and Doctors in Britain, 1650–1900*. London: Reaktion Books, 2001.

Raff, Sarah. *Jane Austen's Erotic Advice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Roberts, Warren. *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1979.

Sabor, Peter, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to "Emma."* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Selwyn, David. *Jane Austen and Leisure*. London: Hambledon Press, 1999.

Southam, B. C. *Jane Austen and the Navy*. London: Hambledon Press, 2003.

Stone, Lawrence. *Road to Divorce: England, 1530–1987*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Sutherland, Kathryn. *Jane Austen's Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Todd, Janet, ed. *Jane Austen in Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Tomalin, Claire. *Jane Austen: A Life*. New York: Vintage, 1997.

Troost, Linda, and Sayre Greenfield, *Jane Austen in Hollywood*. 2nd ed. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000.

Valancourt Books editions of the seven "horrid novels": *Castle of Wolfenbach*; *Clermont*; *The Mysterious Warning*; *The Necromancer, or The Tale of the Black Forest*; *The Midnight Bell*; *The Orphan of the Rhine*; and *Horrid Mysteries*.

Valenze, Deborah. *The First Industrial Woman*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Vickery, Amanda. *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

———. *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

White, Gabriel. *Jane Austen in the Context of Abolition: "A Fling at the Slave Trade."* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Wilson, Cheryl. *Literature and Dance in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Jane Austen to the New Woman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Wiltshire, John. *Jane Austen and the Body: "The Picture of Health."* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Yaffe, Deborah. *Among the Janeites: A Journey Through the World of Jane Austen's Fandom*. New York: Mariner, 2013.

IMAGE CREDITS

Page	Credits
7	British Library/flickr/Public domain.
15	American Libraries/Internet Archive/Public domain.
28	British Library/flickr/Public domain.
31	Internet Archive Book Images/flickr/Public domain.
38	The British Library.
43	The British Library.
46	The British Library.
54	The British Library.
61	Internet Archive Book Images/flickr/Public domain.
69	The British Library.
77	The British Library.
84	Internet Archive Book Images/flickr/Public domain.
97	The British Library.
114	The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1959. www.metmuseum.org.
118	Yale Center for British Art.
126	American Libraries/Internet Archive/Public domain.
126	Yale Center for British Art.
127	American Libraries/Internet Archive/Public domain.
128	American Libraries/Internet Archive/Public domain.
130	American Libraries/Internet Archive/Public domain.
134	Yale Center for British Art.
157	Philadelphia Museum of Art Library/Internet Archive/Public Domain.
164	Philadelphia Museum of Art Library/Internet Archive/Public domain.

Background and design elements

Olga Vasilyeva/iStock/Getty Images.
Cloudniners/DigitalVision Vectors/Getty images.
katyakatya/iStock/Getty Images.
Mariabo2015/iStock/Getty Images.
ricorico/iStock/Getty Images.
Tetiana Lazunova/iStock/Getty Images.
mashakotcur/iStock/Getty Images.
Ekaterina Romanova/iStock/Getty Images.