

“You pierce my soul” Jane Austen!

Includes notes from Oxford course on “Jane Austen”

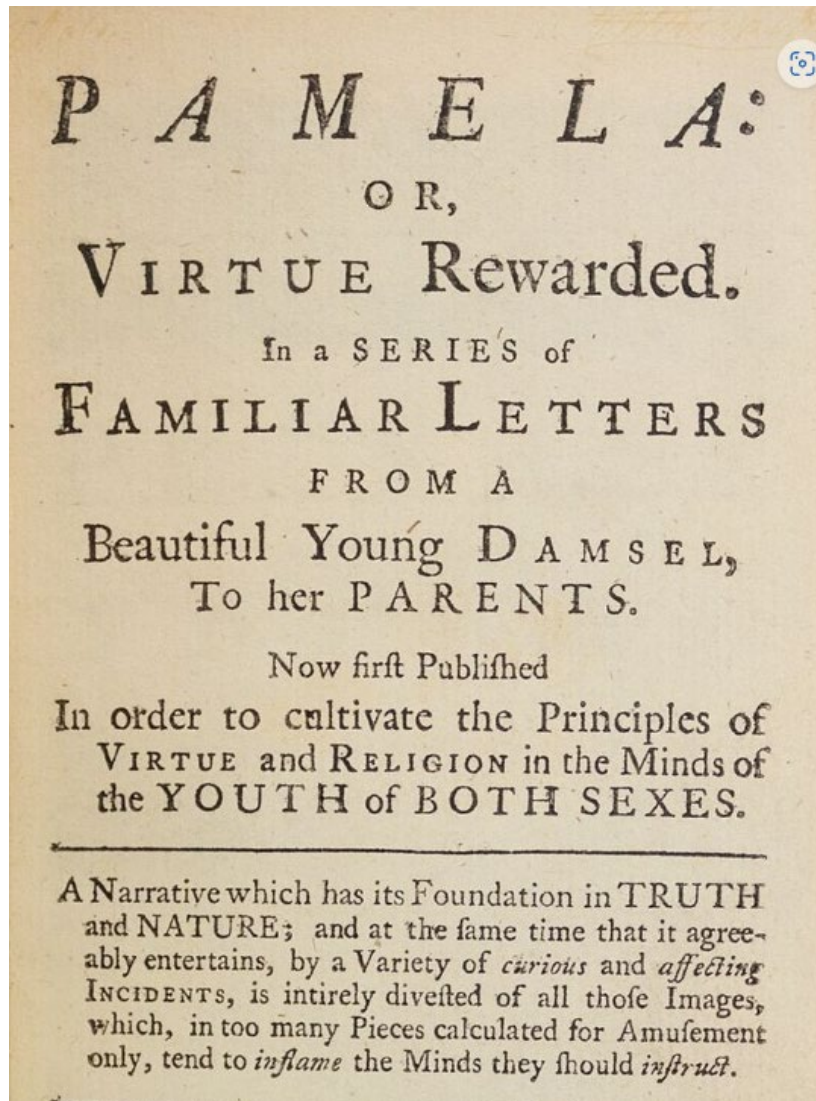
Emma Plaskett, Tutor

Rolling back to the 18th Century

- Age of satire: Hogarth, Swift, Fielding
- Rise of the novel; novels were bawdy, not considered literary. *Poetry was literary*. Poetry is a plot device in “Persuasion.”
- Notion of public spheres for men and private spheres for women
- Young men learn set rubric of education. A woman receives NO education, unless her father takes an interest.
- Women have “accomplishments” rather than an education
- Writing publicly as a woman, and making money as a writer, is scandalous
- If not married, being a governess was the only way for a woman to earn a respectable living. Being a governess is akin to slavery as a governess does not “fit” with the family or the servants. She has nowhere to go.

Women and the Literary Milieu

- “Conduct Manuals” – how to conduct yourself to get a husband of good standing and manners as a way to stay in society. Dr. Gregory’ manual had a section on “Being Ignorant.”
- Mary Wollstonecraft: education should be equal; focus on reputation undermines virtue. Manipulation is due to females being dis-empowered.
- Rise of circulating libraries – people have a freedom to choose what they read.



“Pamela”, or “Virtue Rewarded”

- Published in 1740 and the first novel of domesticity versus scandal
- Letters and journal entries that tell the story of a servant girl deflecting unwanted and inappropriate advances from her employer. He realizes her virtue and marries her.
- Second half of the novel is the new wife in her new position in upper-class society.
- Addressed domestic violence, male aggression, gender roles and class barriers.
- ***After “Pamela”, novels about courtship began to be written***

Jane Austen: Born in 1775

- She was well-educated as her father supplemented his income by teaching boys and had an extensive library. (Mr. Bennett)
- Oldest brother James was a clergyman (Mr. Elton, Mr. Collins, and Fredrick Wentworth's brother)
- Her brother Henry was in the military and brother Francis was a beribboned commander in the Navy (Captain Wentworth)
- Cassandra, older sister, protector, and companion (Elinor Dashwood)



Jane Austen: Lived in Chawton 1809-1817

- Her brother Edward was adopted by the Knights -- wealthy childless relatives and he inherited three estates. (Frank Churchill) After his wife **died**, he settled his sisters and mother in this nearby house in Chawton. (John Dashwood and his wife)



Jane Austen: Died in 1817

- Her admirer, Tom Lefroy, did not have enough money to marry her. He proposes when Jane is 27.
- Her six novels were published anonymously, “By a Lady”
- “Persuasion” was published posthumously
- Jane is buried at Winchester Cathedral, with no mention of her writing because *no one outside of the literary circle and family knew she was a novelist.*





- Lydia and Kitty Bennet
- Mrs. Elton
- Mr. Collins
- Mr. Woodhouse
- Sir Walter Elliott

Character Studies: We See Jane's Characters in Our Lives Today. Do you know a Mr. Collins?



Austen's Eight Themes

1. Education vs. Accomplishment
2. Parental Neglect
 - a. If a parent died, that parent is a paragon of virtue and love, now lost
 - b. Allows for conflict
 - c. Allows for development
3. Female Economic Vulnerability
4. Unequal Inheritance
5. Female Friendship/Rivalry
6. Courtship and Marriage
7. Sexual Double Standard
8. Familial Duty versus Personal Integrity

Courtship

- Women have to marry for economic security and a position of respectability
- Men have to marry to produce an heir.
- In between there is dancing. Jane was an enthusiastic dancer.
- If not married, being a governess was the only way for a woman to earn a respectable living.

Austen's brilliance

- Social commentary: Austen akin to Oscar Wilde. Focus on manners and propriety. Marry to gain respectability -- or perish .
- In “Emma”, “imaginist” form is used for the first time. Emma imagines all sorts of things. Her imagination **is** the action in parts of the novel.
- Social themes explored: the horrors happening outside of 18th century England (Slavery in Mansfield Park)
- If there is a scandal, it happens “offscreen” – known to main character second-hand. Examples?
- Devices of the arrival of a stranger or going on a trip
- Social cues and interpretation/misinterpretation
- The moments when the heroine moves from self-deceit to self-knowledge.
- Her books are modern: about interiority and psychology

“Persuasion” themes

Drawn from hallmarks of Austen novels

1. Inheritance and primogeniture
2. Female friendship/rivalry
3. Faulty parenting
4. Familial duty versus personal integrity
5. Choice of marriage partner
6. Decline of the landed gentry
7. Virtues of the Navy
8. Illicit sexuality (Mrs. Clay) and the sexual double standard

The Last Completed Novel

- “Autumnal” novel:
 - Austen is dying
 - Gentry is dying as industrialism rises
 - More maturity of character
 - Story starts in a place of regret, not hope
- Original Ending!
- Title changed by Jane’s brother Henry, which changes the framing of the story

Original Title: “The Elliotts”

- The word persuasion, and variants on the word (“persuade” or “persuadable” are used 225+ times in the novel.
- With Henry changing the title to “The Elliotts” – is he impacting the frame through which we view the novel?
- Would we feel differently about Lady Russell if the title was “The Elliotts” versus “Persuasion”?
- Other thoughts on the title?

Social Hierarchy

- Sir Walter's focus on rank
- Lady Russell's focus on rank
- Mary Elliott Musgrove's focus on rank
- Anne, a name alone amongst the Marys and Elizabeths in generations of Elliotts

Survival of the Fittest

- While written before Darwin, the novel is about adapting to survive:
 - Both Sir Walter and Captain Wentworth are stubborn and must be persuaded to change:
 - Sir Walter must retrench or face ruin
 - Fredrick Wentworth must give up his grudge and be persuaded to rekindle his relationship with Anne
 - Louisa Musgrove needs to adapt from being so foolish
 - Elizabeth Elliot cannot be persuaded from her pride. What will happen to her after Sir Walter dies?
 - Mr. Elliot had the taste to prefer Anne to Elizabeth

Brilliance of Secondary Characters

- Mr. & Mrs. Musgrove; text on loss of Tom Musgrove
- Hayters – young Hayter proving as most focused, ambitious, reliable of characters
- Mrs. Smith!!
 - The combination of her loss of social status and the “society” of her Nurse Rook allows her to provide Anne with information about Mr. Elliott
- The names!
 - Mrs. Clay – malleable. Adapts and shapes to the situation
 - Nurse Rook – like the chess piece, she can move around the entire board in a straight line

Lady Russell

- Novel begins with only Anne. No mother. Mother surrogate in Lady Russell
- Anne is a random appendage in the family. Only Lady Russell cares for her.
- While the advice was wrong, Anne feels she is right to take the advice of Lady Russell
- Lady Russell makes Anne believe that marriage will be to Frederick's detriment
- Lady Russell is not a good judge of people; rather she is very judgmental. In contrast, Anne is self-aware.
- Lady Russell ignoring Wentworth in Bath "I was looking at curtains"

Navy and the Hero: Captain Wentworth

- Navy:
 - Emphasizes meritocracy of the Navy – can go into the Navy and rise based on merit.
 - Men can rise socially through military, politics, and business. Women rise only through marriage
- Captain Wentworth:
 - He has a more gentlemanly demeanor than Sir Walter
 - His letter expresses what he wants. He dares to put his feelings on paper. Writing a letter, rather than professing verbally, allows Anne to reread.

Viewing the Rank and Humanity of Characters in "Persuasion"

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|------------------------|--|-------------------|--|---------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Social Rank | Vicountess Dalrymple | | | | | | | |
| | Sir Walter Elliott | | | | | | Anne Elliott | |
| | Miss Elliott | Mary Elliott Musgrove? | | | | Admiral Croft | Mrs. Croft Cap'n WW Harville | |
| | Mr. Elliott | | | | | Cap'n Bennick | | |
| | | | | Mr. Mrs. Musgrove | | | | |
| | Dickie Musgrove | | | | | | Henry Hayter | |
| | | | | | | | Mrs. Smith | |
| | | | | | | Nurse Rook | | |
| | Sensibility, Humanity, Authenticity | | | | | | | |
| | Where would you place Lady Russell in this Constellation of Characters? | | | | | | | |
| | Mrs. Clay? The Miss Musgroves? | | | | | | | |

She gloried in being a sailor's wife...

Why Not End with Kurt Vonnegut?

Eight Story Shapes

What Shape is “Persuasion”?

Man in Hole



The main character gets into trouble then gets out of it again and ends up better off for the experience.



Arsenic and Old Lace
Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle

Boy Meets Girl



The main character comes across something wonderful, gets it, loses it, then gets it back forever.



Jane Eyre
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

From Bad to Worse



The main character starts off poorly then gets continually worse with no hope for improvement.



The Metamorphosis
The Twilight Zone

Which Way Is Up?



The story has a lifelike ambiguity that keeps us from knowing if new developments are good or bad.



Hamlet
The Sopranos

Creation Story



In many cultures' creation stories, humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity. First major staples like the earth and sky, then smaller things like sparrows and cell phones. Not a common shape for Western stories, however.

Old Testament



Humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity, but is suddenly ousted from good standing in a fall of enormous proportions.



Great Expectations

New Testament



Humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity, is suddenly ousted from good standing, but then receives off-the-charts bliss.



Great Expectations with Dickens' alternate ending

Cinderella



It was the similarity between the shapes of Cinderella and the New Testament that thrilled Vonnegut for the first time in 1947 and then over the course of his life as he continued to write essays and give lectures on the shapes of stories.