

PERSUASION

by Jane Austen



THE AUTHOR

Jane Austen (1775-1817) was the seventh child and second daughter of an Anglican rector in a country parish in Hampshire, England. She had a happy childhood. She read widely, though she had little formal schooling, and she and her siblings delighted in writing and performing plays at home. At the age of twelve, she began to write parodies of popular literary works, and set her hand to her first serious writing project when she was nineteen. That project was an epistolary novel called *Lady Susan* which, while not a work of genius, was good enough to encourage her to keep writing.

Austen's novels evolved through years of writing and rewriting. In 1795, she began a novel called *Elinor and Marianne* that was finally published in 1810 as *Sense and Sensibility*. She started writing *First Impressions* in 1796; it was initially rejected for publication, but later saw print in 1812 as *Pride and Prejudice*. She began work in 1799 on a novel called *Susan* (not to be confused with her initial effort), which was published posthumously in 1818 as *Northanger Abbey*. She wrote three other novels as well - *Mansfield Park* (1813), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (published posthumously in 1818).

Her personal life was a happy but quiet one, consisting largely of her writing, along with the kind of country amusements - balls, parties, and teas - described in her novels. The family struggled financially between the death of her father in 1805 and the publication of her first novel in 1810. She never married, though in her late twenties she received a proposal from a local aristocrat named Harris Bigg-Wither. She accepted, but changed her mind the next morning. She always maintained a close relationship with her older sister Cassandra, though we know little of her private life, because not only did she guard her privacy very closely, but her family either censored or destroyed almost all of her correspondence after her death.

Jane Austen died in 1817 of what is now believed to have been Addison's disease. She knew she was dying, and raced against time and declining strength to finish *Persuasion*, the novel containing the character considered to be most like Jane herself - the plain but witty Anne Elliot. Her brother Henry arranged for the publication of her last two novels after her death. Only then did people become aware of the author of these popular works of literature - all the novels published during her lifetime had been published anonymously.

PLOT SUMMARY

The first chapter introduces the Elliot family - Sir Walter, a self-centered widower who is proud of his social status and a poor manager of his money, and his three daughters: Elizabeth, 29, who manages the household for her father and shares his social values; Anne, 27, the only sensible member of the family who is of course ignored by the others, and Mary, 23, a silly woman who is married to Charles Musgrove and has borne him two unruly children. The family estate, Kellynch Hall, is entailed to the male line, and will pass to a cousin, William Elliot, after Sir Walter's death. William is handsome, charming, and irresponsible, but at this point the family knows little of his foibles. The family's closest friends are Mr. Shepherd, a lawyer, and Lady Russell, a longtime companion of Sir Walter's deceased wife and also Anne's most trusted confidante.

One day, Mr. Shepherd advises Sir Walter that he must retrench on his expenses or he would risk losing his estate. Sir Water cannot believe that such a thing would be possible, nor can he imagine a single thing that might be pared from the family budget, despite Anne's suggestions for a more frugal lifestyle. Finally the decision is made to move to a smaller house in Bath and let Kellynch Hall in order to gain some income. Elizabeth, meanwhile, has befriended Shepherd's daughter, a widow with two children named Penelope Clay. She is outwardly charming, but has her own agenda in the relationships she cultivates. Shepherd then announces that he has found a tenant for Kellynch Hall - a wealthy and respectable naval officer named Admiral Croft and his wife. When the family discovers that Mrs. Croft's maiden name is Wentworth, Anne realizes that she may again be forced to encounter Frederick Wentworth. Almost eight years before, Anne, then nineteen, had met Frederick Wentworth when he was between naval assignments. They had fallen in love and contracted an engagement. They were discouraged in this, however, by the coldness of Sir Walter and the open opposition of Lady Russell, who argued that Wentworth had no fortune and no prospects of attaining one. Anne had reluctantly broken off the engagement, hurting Frederick in the process. He had immediately gone back to sea and accomplished all that his ambition had predicted, rising in rank and accumulating a substantial fortune. Anne, on the other hand, had regretted her decision every day since – even when Charles Musgrove had sought her hand before turning to her younger sister Mary. Since few knew of the broken engagement, however, Anne foresees no awkwardness in her future contacts with the Crofts.

Shortly thereafter, arrangements between Sir Walter and the Crofts are concluded and both families prepare for their changes in location. Sir Walter and Elizabeth say they have no need of Anne's presence in Bath to help with the new arrangements, and she is quite content to remain in the country. When Mary reports one of her frequent spells of illness – she is a hypochondriac and chronic complainer – and insists that Anne come to help her, the latter complies. Meanwhile, Elizabeth decides to bring Mrs. Clay with her to Bath, despite Anne's concern that the close proximity between the young and lively widow and her widowed father might be imprudent. Elizabeth scoffs at her concerns, however, and no more is said about the subject. Once she arrives at the home of Mary and Charles, Anne quickly revives Mary's spirits and the two go to visit Charles' mother and sisters, the spirited and flirtatious Henrietta and Louisa.

Anne soon settles in with the Musgroves, though she faces the constant problem of being placed in the middle of all sorts of family disputes, as each person, rather than airing complaints and grievances with the offending party, turns to Anne, airs whatever complaints may exist, then expects her to deal with them. Charles' parents host parties frequently, and these constitute the bulk of the amusement available in that part of the country. After the Crofts move into their new home at Kellynch Hall, Charles and Mary pay them a visit and find them to be most agreeable people. When

the Crofts return the visit, Anne meets them for the first time and is pleased with their amiable personalities. When they mention that Mrs. Croft's brother has recently married, Anne blanches, but calms down when she discovers that Frederick's brother is the new bridegroom. She quickly learns, however, that Frederick himself is soon to pay them a visit. Since Frederick had been the captain of the ship on which the dissolute Richard Musgrove had served before his premature death, the Musgroves are eager to meet him and convey their thanks for his care for their son.

In less than a week, Captain Wentworth pays a visit to Squire Musgrove and his family. Charles, Mary, and Anne are of course invited, but just before they embark, young Charles falls and dislocates his collarbone, forcing them all to remain at home. The Musgrove girls give glowing reports of the Captain's personality and inform Charles and Mary of another dinner the following night. Charles, realizing that his son is on the mend, insists on going, and Mary immediately begins to complain about being left home to nurse her son. Anne, who still fears meeting Frederick after all these years, volunteers to stay with the boy so Mary can go to the party. Again, the gathering goes well, leading to an invitation to go hunting the following morning. This time Captain Wentworth stops by the Musgrove home and he and Anne exchange a few brief pleasantries. After he leaves, however, she is convinced that there is no hope of renewing their prior relationship, and feels that she is justly rejected because of her weakness in casting aside a true love because of the advice of others. Meanwhile, the Captain has confided in his sister that he is seeking a wife, but wants one possessing "a strong mind, with sweetness of manner." He clearly has not forgotten Anne as much as she thinks he has.

During the weeks that follow, Frederick and Anne are often together at dinners and parties, but have no personal intercourse. Frederick, often called on to tell tales of his years at sea, is a big hit with the young ladies, while Anne stays in the background, playing the piano while the others dance. She remains convinced that he can have no remnant of feelings for her. Soon Frederick moves in with his sister and brother-in-law at Kellynch Hall, and in the days that follow speculation about budding romances occupies the attention of the younger generation. Would Frederick fall in love with Henrietta or Louisa Musgrove? The situation is complicated by the return of Charles Hayter, a cousin who had been a favorite of Henrietta. She now pays him little heed, however, in her preoccupation with the dashing Captain. One day, Frederick arrives at the cottage to find Anne alone with the recovering child. After a few awkward exchanges, Hayter enters, and he clearly has no love for the new man of the hour. Soon little Walter comes in and begins to make a nuisance of himself, despite entreaties from Anne and Hayter to behave. Frederick, however, removes the child and begins to play with him, and Anne struggles to understand the strong feelings this simple deliverance elicits in her.

As the courtship games continue, both Musgrove girls give most of their attention to Captain Wentworth - so much so that Charles Hayter withdraws from his daily visits - but Frederick, though kind and pleasant to both Henrietta and Louisa, seems to Anne to be in love with neither, though everyone in their little party thinks he must surely choose one of them for his wife. One day Charles and Mary, Captain Wentworth, Henrietta and Louisa, and Anne go for a walk. In the course of the excursion, Charles and Henrietta stop to visit the Hayter family while the others rest. As Anne sits by herself, she inadvertently hears Frederick and Louisa talking. During the conversation, Frederick praises Louisa's steadfastness and decisiveness (painful for Anne to hear because she had rejected him on the advice of others). Louisa then tells Frederick that Charles had proposed to Anne before marrying Mary, and that she had refused him on the advice of Lady Russell - a fact of which the Captain is unaware. Soon Charles and Henrietta return with Hayter in tow; he and Henrietta seem to have been reconciled. As far as Anne is concerned, this clinches the debate - Frederick will surely

marry Louisa now. On the way home, Admiral and Mrs. Croft pass by in their carriage and offer one of the women a ride. Captain Wentworth insists that Anne take the offered privilege, and helps her into the carriage personally. To Anne, this is evidence that, despite their strained relationship, he is still a kind and generous soul. As they travel home, The Crofts can speak of little other than their certainty that Frederick will marry one of the Musgrove girls.

Lady Russell is about to return from her trip away from home, and Anne looks forward to living with her rather than the tiresome Mary. She also is convinced that, since Lady Russell and Captain Wentworth, for some unaccountable reason, dislike one another, she will see much less of the Captain if she stays with her oldest and dearest friend. Before she can make the move, however, Frederick announces that he has found his old navy friend Captain Harville living in Lyme, scarcely seventeen miles away, and that they all must take a trip to visit him. Arriving in Lyme, they walk immediately down to the seacoast. Frederick soon joins them with Captain and Mrs. Harville and Captain Benwick, a shipmate of Wentworth who had been engaged to Captain Harville's sister Fanny, who had died tragically and left him in mourning. As they gather for dinner, Anne finds herself apart with Captain Benwick. She finds him shy but accommodating, and, finding he is a great reader, tries to encourage him by recommending books that might lift his spirits instead of the poetry that he is accustomed to reading.

The next morning, the young people decide to take a walk before breakfast along the shore, where they are soon joined by the Harvilles and Captain Benwick. While walking they pass a young gentleman who looks with approval at Anne. Later they inquire about his identity, only to find that he is William Elliot, their cousin and heir to Kellynch Hall. Mary believes that the encounter should be reported to their father, but Anne remembers that the two had experienced a falling out years earlier. Captain Harville and his wife then return home while the others decide to get one last look at the sea. Louisa had developed the habit of jumping off stiles into the waiting arms of Captain Wentworth on their walks in the country, and now she does the same from the retaining wall by the sea. He catches her, but she is so pleased that she insists on doing it again. Unfortunately, she jumps before Frederick is ready to catch her, hitting her head and knocking herself unconscious. Henrietta promptly faints and Mary becomes hysterical, while the men and Anne take the situation in hand, carrying her back to the Harville home and fetching a doctor. Initially, the plan is for Charles Musgrove and Anne to remain to care for Louisa, along with Mrs. Harville, who is an experienced nurse, and Captain Benwick, while the others return home to inform the Musgroves of the accident. Mary, always jealous of any recognition given to Anne, insists that she should stay while Anne returns home, however. The journey is made without delay, and Wentworth then hurries back to Lyme to check on Louisa's condition. Over the next two days, Anne proves to be the voice of reason and a calming influence among the Musgroves, while daily messages from Lyme indicate that Louisa is improving, but that her concussion will keep her laid up for quite a while yet. The entire Musgrove family then leaves for Lyme to be near Louisa, while Anne visits Lady Russell, after which the two of them call on the Crofts at Kellynch Hall. There, much to Anne's relief, she does *not* encounter Frederick.

By Christmas, everyone has returned home except for Louisa and Henrietta, while Frederick is off visiting his brother in Shropshire. News from Lyme is good as Louisa continues to improve, and the possibility exists that she might be able to travel in a few weeks. Charles Musgrove reports that Captain Benwick has been speaking much in praise of Anne (though Mary of course denies any

such thing and speaks of Benwick as an ill-bred man with whom no one would care to keep company). They also get word from Bath that William Elliot is staying there and has made several attempts to mend bridges with his family. As they all prepare to go to Bath after Christmas, Anne dreads the trip, but admits to herself some measure of curiosity with regard to her mysterious cousin.

Anne arrives in Bath with considerable trepidation, but is warmly received by her father and sister. She soon finds that they have not changed at all, as they are constantly preoccupied with boasting of their superior accommodations and the contacts they have established in the resort town and have no interest at all in hearing of Anne's experiences in Lyme. Talk soon turns to William Elliot, who has established contact with the family and sought to mend the bridges that had been broken so long ago. He has been polite and attentive, and the family has nothing but good to speak of his manners and conduct. Anne first believes that he intends to reestablish his attentions to Elizabeth, and Elizabeth apparently shares her suspicions. Before long Mr. Elliot himself arrives, and Anne is impressed with his ease of manner and the intelligence of his conversation. She soon finds herself enjoying Bath more than she could possibly have imagined. She is concerned, however, about the growing attachment of her father to Mrs. Clay, who has clearly set her cap for him. When Mrs. Clay observes that she is no longer needed now that Anne has arrived, both Elizabeth and Sir Walter insist that she stay because her presence is so much more valued than that of Anne. Lady Russell shares Anne's disgust with the behavior of Mrs. Clay and her father, but is mightily impressed with William Elliot. Anne enjoys his company more than anyone else in Bath, but still suspects that he might have ulterior motives for pursuing the relationship.

Soon Lady Dalrymple and her daughter arrive in Bath. They are of noble birth, and are distant cousins to Sir Walter. The families had lost contact a few years earlier, and Sir Walter is anxious to reestablish the relationship because of the potential it implies of being received in high society. Much to Anne's disappointment, Lady Russell and William Elliot agree. When they visit the Dalrymples, however, Anne finds them dull and uninteresting, with nothing to recommend them as superior in anything other than wealth and position. She has no desire to pursue the acquaintance, though her family continues to desire their company. Instead, she seeks out the company of a former schoolmate, one who had comforted her after the loss of her mother. Now an impoverished invalid, Mrs. Smith is confined to her rooms except when she takes the medicinal baths. She and Anne renew their old acquaintance, and soon look forward to their times together despite the sarcastic comments of Anne's family concerning her newest attachment. Lady Russell is the only member of Anne's circle who encourages her contact with Mrs. Smith. But Lady Russell also is actively pursuing her efforts to bring Anne and William Elliot together, since she has observed his continued efforts to seek her company. Anne, however, continues to have suspicions about his motives, thinking him just a bit too good to be true.

About a month later, Anne receives a letter from her sister Mary informing her that, not only is Louisa Musgrove greatly improved, but she has become engaged to Captain Benwick. Apparently the long convalescence under his daily care did wonders for both of them. Henrietta is also engaged to Charles Hayter, having gotten over her infatuation with Captain Wentworth. The handsome captain, moreover, seems to be taking all this in stride, caring little that his former admirers have turned their attentions elsewhere. She also hears that the Crofts are intending to spend some time in Bath. When they arrive, Anne seeks out the Admiral and is told that Captain Wentworth will also be coming to Bath. At this point all she can think about is that he is now free of any erstwhile

attachments. When he appears, however, their intercourse is awkward at best. One day the members of the group are out walking when it starts to rain. Lady Dalrymple's carriage is nearby, and she offers to take two of the girls home. Elizabeth insists that she and Mrs. Clay should take the offered lift, leaving Anne to find her own way home. William Elliot, who has been spending much time with the family, offers to procure her transportation, and she gratefully agrees. While he goes to fetch it, however, Frederick himself happens by and offers to walk her home under his umbrella. Though there is no doubt in Anne's mind whose offer she would prefer to accept, she goes off with William Elliot because he had asked her first.

Soon the members of the group are invited to a concert given for the benefit of one of Lady Dalrymple's benefactors. Anne enjoys music and so is determined to go, reasoning that the concert will be a nice break from the endless round of parties to which she has found herself committed without her consent. She is further encouraged to learn that Frederick will also be in attendance. At the concert, Anne has an opportunity to speak to Frederick, and is much encouraged by his disavowal of any attraction to Louisa Musgrove and his seemingly-offhand but meaningful comment that a genuine attachment to a woman of quality cannot and should not easily be discarded. She comes away from the conversation convinced that he still loves her. During the concert, William Elliot insinuates himself into the seat next to Anne and overwhelms her with flowery compliments. During intermission, she speaks again briefly with Frederick, but when Elliot interrupts their conversation, Frederick not only walks away, but leaves the concert altogether. She quickly perceives that he is jealous of the attentions she is receiving from William Elliot, for whom she cares nothing and with whom she is now thoroughly annoyed! Her dilemma now is how to communicate to him the fact that she reciprocates his feelings.

The next morning Anne goes to visit Mrs. Smith, and her friend demands to know all the gossip about the concert the previous evening. Anne obliges to some extent, but quickly finds that Mrs. Smith, through her usual channels, knows much more than one might expect. In particular, she is certain about the impending nuptials of Anne and William Elliot. Anne quickly disabuses her, and at that point Mrs. Smith opens her heart and tells her all she knows of her handsome cousin. The two had been close friends years earlier, when William had been on good terms with his family. He then had cared for nothing but money, rejecting Elizabeth and treating Sir Walter rudely while seeking a match with a wealthy but lowborn woman. In this he had succeeded. He and Mr. Smith had remained close friends, but William had been responsible for the serious financial reverses Smith had experienced, and thus for his widow's current poverty. He had even refused to arrange for her to profit from a family property in the West Indies because he refused to undertake the work required, as executor of the will, to secure its value for Mrs. Smith. She also explains to Anne that William, having lost his first wife, now valued both the family title and the fortune it involved, and was thus seeking to ingratiate himself – not only for the purpose of marrying Anne, but also in order to prevent the marriage of Sir Walter and Mrs. Clay, which would ruin all his hopes should it produce children. Anne decides that she needs to talk to Lady Russell about what she has learned.

Before Anne has an opportunity to talk to Lady Russell about her news, however, the Musgroves and their friends arrive in Bath. The interactions that follow include the news that Henrietta's marriage to Charles Hayter has been moved up because he has been offered a clerical living, and parties and trips to the theater are discussed and arranged. Meanwhile, the family continues to fawn on William, who unaccountably seems to be spending an unusual amount of time

with Mrs. Clay. The arrival of the Musgroves also brings Captain Wentworth into the family circle again, though he and Anne have only a few brief and awkward exchanges. The next day rain prevents her planned visit to Lady Russell, and again the family and friends gather in the morning. In the midst of trivial conversation, Anne is drawn aside by Captain Harville, who complains that Captain Benwick could have so soon altered his affections after the death of his fiancée. This initiates a discussion of the relative merits of men and women, especially with regard to their fidelity and perseverance in love. Unknown to Anne, her words are overheard by Captain Wentworth, who is in the process of writing a letter. When he leaves the room, he slips the letter to Anne, who reads there an open profession of his continuing affection for her. Her heart is filled with joy, and she determines to reciprocate as soon as possible. She decides to walk home to gather her thoughts. Charles Musgrove offers to accompany her, but on the way they encounter Frederick, to whom Charles delegates the task of seeing Anne home – much to the satisfaction of both. By the time the walk is over, misunderstandings of the past and present have been cleared up and they are engaged. At the end of the novel they marry, and are able to restore friendship with Lady Russell despite the central role she played in their initial separation. Though Anne is much happier with Frederick's relations than with her own, everyone is generally supportive of the match. Mrs. Clay, recognizing defeat, breaks ties with the family, and is last seen keeping company with William Elliot, who is still the heir of Kellynch.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Sir Walter Elliot - A self-centered nobleman who has fallen on hard times due to his own spendthrift ways, he is very proud of his social status but is willing to do nothing to maintain the economic well-being of his family.
- Elizabeth Elliot - Sir Walter's eldest daughter, age 29, she shares her father's values and lack of common sense.
- Anne Elliot - The plain middle daughter, age 27, she is the protagonist of the story. She struggles to get her father to see reason in running the household, is attracted briefly to her cad of a cousin William, and finally comes back to her true love, Frederick Wentworth.
- Mary Elliot Musgrove - The youngest of Sir Walter's three daughters, age 23, she has married the scion of a local noble family and given him two unruly children.
- Charles Musgrove - Mary's husband, he had originally courted Anne but married Mary after being rebuffed by her. He is a kindly and gentle man who refuses to get involved in his wife's schemes but pampers her shamefully.
- Lady Russell - A family friend of the Elliots who alone recognizes Anne's true worth; she, too, pays far too much attention to matters of social status. Her advice was responsible for Anne's initial rejection of Frederick Wentworth.

- William Elliot - The heir of Kellynch Hall, the Elliot estate, he is a careless playboy who romances Anne briefly in search of her money.
- Admiral Croft - He rents Kellynch Hall after the Elliots are forced to move. He is a kind and understanding man who is the means by which Anne becomes reacquainted with Frederick Wentworth, who is his wife's brother.
- Captain Frederick Wentworth - Mrs. Croft's brother and a successful sailor who has made his fortune in the navy, he had many years earlier been in love with Anne, but she had reluctantly turned him down on the advice of Lady Russell because of his lack of fortune. When he unexpectedly comes back into Anne's life, they interact awkwardly until both realize that they are still in love with one another, then finally marry at the end of the book.
- Mr. Shepherd - Sir Walter's lawyer, he advises him on financial matters, usually to no effect.
- Penelope Clay - Mr. Shepherd's daughter, she is a widow with two children who is befriended by Elizabeth and soon sets her cap for Sir Walter.
- Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove – Charles' parents, they are a pleasant country squire and his wife who do not stand on ceremony.
- Louisa Musgrove – The eldest Musgrove daughter, she is twenty, full of fun and high spirits and a notorious flirt.
- Henrietta Musgrove – Her younger sister, age nineteen, she is as flighty as Louisa.
- Charles Hayter - A beau of Henrietta Musgrove who becomes jealous when she begins to give her attentions to Captain Wentworth. Eventually she gets over her crush and marries her cousin and long-time suitor.
- Captain Harville – An old friend of Captain Wentworth, he has been seriously wounded in battle and is now living quietly in Lyme with his wife.
- Captain James Benwick – Formerly first lieutenant under Captain Wentworth and engaged to Captain Harville's sister, who had subsequently died, he takes care of Louisa after her serious fall and eventually falls in love with and marries her.
- Lady Dalrymple - A noblewoman who is a distant cousin of Sir Walter, she and her daughter vacation in Bath. Sir Walter and his household fawn on her, but Anne finds her arrogant and her daughter colorless.

- Mrs. Smith - A former schoolmate of Anne's, she is now an impoverished widow and invalid, but Anne prefers her company to that of her aristocratic relatives. She is a sensible woman who keeps in touch with the gossip of the town, and she is the one who warns Anne that William Elliot is an irresponsible rake and fortune-hunter.
- Mrs. Rooke – Mrs. Smith's nurse, and the source of most of her knowledge of the goings-on in Bath.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character.” (ch.1, p.2)

“Anne, with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way; - she was only Anne.” (ch.1, p.3)

“A few months more, and *he*, perhaps, may be walking here.” (Anne, ch.3, p.21)

“She did not blame Lady Russell, she did not blame herself for having been guided by her; but she felt that were any young person, in similar circumstances, to apply to her for counsel, they would never receive any of such certain immediate wretchedness, such uncertain future good.” (ch.4, p.24)

“She had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste.” (ch.6, p.40)

“With the exception, perhaps, of Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who seemed particularly attached and happy, (Anne could allow no other exception even among the married couples) there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved. Now they were as strangers; nay, worse than strangers, for they could never become acquainted. It was a perpetual estrangement.” (ch.8, p.54-55)

“She understood him. He could not forgive her, - but he could not be unfeeling. Though condemning her for the past, and considering it with high and unjust resentment, though perfectly careless of her, and though becoming attached to another, still he could not see her suffer, without the desire of giving her relief. It was a remainder of former sentiment; it was an impulse of pure, though unacknowledged friendship; it was a proof of his own warm and amiable heart, which she could not contemplate without emotions so compounded of pleasure and pain, that she knew not which prevailed.” (ch.10, p.80)

“When the evening was over, Anne could not but be amused at the idea of her coming to Lyme, to preach patience and resignation to a young man whom she had never seen before; nor could she help fearing, on more serious reflection, that, like many other great moralists and preachers, she had been eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would ill bear examination.” (ch.11, p.89)

“Her early impressions were incurable. She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still. She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped.” (ch.17, p.141)

“A man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman! – He ought not – he does not.” (Frederick, ch.20, p.162)

“We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions.” (Anne, ch.23, p.207)

“All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone.” (Anne, ch.23, p.210)

“If I was wrong in yielding to persuasion once, remember that it was to persuasion exerted on the side of safety, not of risk. When I yielded, I thought it was to duty; but no duty could be called in aid here. In marrying a man indifferent to me, all risk would have been incurred, and all duty violated.” (Anne, ch.23, p.218)

“I must learn to brook being happier than I deserve.” (Frederick, ch.23, p.221)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Jane Austen lived during the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812. Thus, her lifetime was marked by wars in which her nation fought both France and the United States. In what way does her final novel, *Persuasion*, reflect the patriotic feeling of early nineteenth-century Britain? Consider especially the descriptions of naval officers such as Admiral Croft, Captain Wentworth, and others.
2. Jane Austen, who grew up in a typical middle-class family, in her novels often ridiculed the pretensions of the British aristocracy. How is such biting satire visible in the last of her novels, *Persuasion*? Be sure to incorporate the author’s treatment of Lady Russell and the Dalrymples as well as the Elliots themselves.
3. In Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*, what character is best viewed as a foil to the weak and ineffective Sir Walter Elliot? Why do you think so? Defend your choice, not only by giving reasons to support it, but also by arguing why other potential candidates are not as suitable.

4. Jane Austen incorporated much of her own personality into the characters of some of her heroines, such as Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elinor Dashwood of *Sense and Sensibility*, and Anne Elliot of *Persuasion*. What do these heroines have in common? What do their common qualities tell you about what the author valued, both in herself and in other women? Be sure to support your argument with specific details from all three novels.
5. If Jane Austen's heroines are in many ways similar, her heroes are more diverse. Consider Fitzwilliam Darcy of *Pride and Prejudice*, Edward Ferrars of *Sense and Sensibility*, and Frederick Wentworth of *Persuasion*. What sets these leading men apart from one another? Consider both character qualities and the dynamics of their relationships with the heroines of the stories. Do they have any important characteristics in common?
6. Compare and contrast the handsome cads in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Persuasion*. What do Wickham, Willoughby, and William Elliot have in common? Do they have any important differences? If so, what are they?
7. In Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, the author contrasts Anne's friendship with Mrs. Smith with her family's desire to cultivate their aristocratic relations, the Dalrymples. Discuss the ways in which Austen uses this juxtaposition as a form of social criticism in the novel. Cite specific examples and quotations in answering the question.
8. Jane Austen once wrote of Anne Elliot, the protagonist of her last novel, *Persuasion*, as "a heroine who is almost too good for me." Do you agree with this assessment? Is Anne too good to be true, or do you find her uniform goodness of nature and character attractive? Cite specific incidents and quotations to support your argument.
9. One thing the novels of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens have in common is that, in many of them, everyone seems to want to marry the leading female character. For instance, in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot is sought out by Charles Musgrove, William Elliot, and Frederick Wentworth, while in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, Lucie Manette is courted by Charles Darnay, Sydney Carton, and even Mr. Stryver. Choose one novel from the pen of each author (you need not choose the two examples given) and use the two books to discuss the credibility of this frequently-used plot device.
10. As in several of her novels, the title of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* is significant. The novel seeks to answer the question of the extent to which a person should allow himself to be persuaded by the advice of others and how firmly one should maintain an independent mind. How does the novel answer the question? Does the author see value in both, or does she favor one mindset over the other? Support your analysis with specifics from the novel.
11. Parents in the novels of Jane Austen are often not portrayed in very flattering ways. Consider the characters of Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion* and Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. How do these foolish characters serve as important plot devices for the author? How do they serve as vehicles of social criticism?

12. According to Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, what makes an ideal marriage? In answering the question, consider not only the eventual relationship of the protagonists, but also examples of good and bad marriages scattered throughout the novel.
13. According to Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, what are the traits of a true gentleman? Consider matters of birth, fortune, and behavior as they are represented in characters throughout the story in answering the question.
14. Discuss the differences between appropriate and inappropriate forms of pride in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. What kind of pride does the author value, and what kinds are pictured as foolish? Cite specific examples, using people, situations, and quotations to support your analysis.
15. In Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot concludes that, while she was right to refuse marriage to Captain Wentworth in her youth, she was right to accept him the second time he proposed to her. What changed? Why does the heroine, and by extension the author, argue that Anne's behavior was right in both cases?
16. Discuss the growth of the protagonist in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. To what extent does Anne Elliot change from the beginning of the novel to its end? If she changes, what is the nature of the changes she undergoes? What causes these changes? If she doesn't, what are the indications that no fundamental change occurs in her character?
17. Novelists often build plots by using fortuitous coincidences. To what extent is this the case in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*? Choose three significant coincidences that drive the plot at various points and discuss their credibility. Does the reader find them believable, or do they seem like artificial intrusions? What does the answer to the question indicate about the narrative skill of the author?
18. Jane Austen never married, but marriage is at the center of everything she wrote. Her last novel, *Persuasion*, was called by one critic her "heart-rending final fantasy of the second chance." To what extent does the novel bear the earmarks of a fantasy? Did the author believe such a happy ending for a woman beyond normal marriageable age was really possible, or was she indulging in wishful thinking, imagining that her own spinster's life might yet bring marital bliss? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
19. Sigmund Freud argued in his discussion of what he called the Oedipus complex that young men have a hidden desire to kill their fathers and marry their mothers. All too often, young people define their lives through a desire to escape their parents. Consider the application of this idea to Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. To what extent are Anne Elliot's decisions driven by her desire to avoid becoming like her mother and avoid marrying someone like her father? Support your analysis with details and quotations from the novel.

20. In both Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility*, the reading of poetry becomes a catalyst for courtship. What does the author see in poetry – not that written by the suitor, but merely read – that makes it a suitable vehicle for romance? Do you agree? Why or why not? Use details from the two novels to support your conclusions.
21. Early in her writing career, Jane Austen was no friend of evangelical Christianity, as seen in her portrayal of buffoons such as Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*, but she became toward the end of her life much more positively disposed toward it. Some critics have argued that this acceptance of evangelical values explains the greater moral profundity of her later writings. Can you detect indications of evangelical morality and greater moral profundity in *Persuasion*, the last of her novels? Cite specific examples and quotations and give biblical support to demonstrate evangelical influence in the novel.
22. Charles Dickens is notorious for choosing names for his characters that signify something of their personalities or stations in life, but one rarely hears such assertions made concerning the writings of Jane Austen. One exception, perhaps, can be found in the two characters in the Austen canon that share the prosaic name of Smith. The name, assigned to Mrs. Smith, the best friend of Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, and Harriet Smith, the protégée of the protagonist in *Emma*, designates plainness, ordinariness – in short, people who are indistinguishable from the surrounding masses of society. Compare and contrast these two characters and comment on the extent to which Austen uses them as vehicles for her criticism of the social conventions of her era.
23. Discuss the concept of personal invisibility in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. Anne Elliot is described as invisible to the members of her family near the beginning of the novel, but she is not the only one (see, for example, the redoubtable Nurse Rooke, who obtains gossip easily because she is invisible to those she serves). Analyze how Austen uses such invisibility both as a plot device and as a source of social commentary. Be sure to cite specifics from the novel in your analysis.
24. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was originally titled *First Impressions*, and has much to say about the value and deceptiveness of depending on such things. Her most famous novel is not the only one to concern itself with first impressions, however. In her last novel, *Persuasion*, Austen describes her protagonist, Anne Elliot, in these words: "Her early impressions were incurable. She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still. She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped." Consider the role of first impressions in *Persuasion*. Has Austen changed her mind about their value? Why or why not?

25. Near the end of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot and Captain Harville engage in a discussion about the relative steadfastness of men and women in the realm of romance. Discuss the nature and content of their disagreement. With whose position does the author agree? Which one do you think is more accurate? Why? Support your conclusions from the novel and from other areas of your experience.
26. In Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, the author frequently refers to mirrors in connection with the character of Sir Walter Elliot. The obvious purpose of this is as an indication of his narcissistic personality. Discuss the self-centered egotism of Sir Walter, both as a plot device and as a form of moral criticism. In what ways does Austen contrast the patriarch with other characters in the story in order to bring into bolder relief the moral lessons she intends to teach?
27. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, Charles Dickens presents the reader with the character of Miss La Creevy, a painter of miniatures. Jane Austen, in one of her letters, likened herself to a miniaturist, referring to her books as "little bits (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush." What do you think she meant by this? Apply the analogy to Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. To what extent is the novel a thing of great beauty painted on an exceedingly small canvas? Use details from the novel to support your analysis.
28. To what extent may William Elliot in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* be considered a villain? Is he a one-dimensional cardboard creature whose every action and motive is nefarious in the extreme, or is he a realistic human being who, despite his sometimes-despicable dealings, is nonetheless justified in some of his actions, at least in the context of early nineteenth-century polite society? Evaluate the man who serves as a threat to Anne's happiness in terms of the realism and humanity invested in him by the author.
29. In a conversation with Captain Benwick in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot speaks of poetry as something "to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoy it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly." Do you agree? Why is poetry most dangerous to those sensitive souls who most enjoy it? Do you believe poetry is best tasted sparingly? Why or why not?
30. In Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Sir Walter Elliot and his daughter Elizabeth are clearly presented as snobs and are ridiculed for their attitudes. Consider, however, the attitudes of the protagonist. Is Anne Elliot a snob as well, albeit of a more moderate variety? In answering the question, pay particular attention to her attitude toward Mrs. Clay and her attempt to get into Sir Walter's good graces.

31. Is Jane Austen's *Persuasion* a Christian novel? The story says very little about religion or the church, and the only clergyman is Charles Hayter, a minor character, and not a terribly admirable one. In answering the question, consider the assumptions about man and society that the novel reflects as well as the moral universe it portrays. Be sure to use specifics to support your arguments.
32. In Christian circles today, much debate occurs over the role of women. The two sides of the debate are referred to as Egalitarians and Complementarians. Had Jane Austen been alive in the twenty-first century, with which group do you think she would have most sympathized? Why? Use details from her novel *Persuasion* to support your conclusion.
33. Jane Austen lived on the cusp between the Enlightenment and the Romantic Era. Some scholars have suggested that the arc of her writing career reflects a movement from one to the other in her thinking. They suggest that, while *Pride and Prejudice* shows the heroine making vital decisions on purely rational grounds and *Sense and Sensibility* shows the value of both reason and emotion, Austen's final novel *Persuasion* validates following one's feelings, even if they lead one in opposition to the wishes of one's family and the social values of the day. Do you agree with this assessment? Support your conclusion with details from all three novels.
34. Jane Austen often included weak father-figures in her novels. Compare and contrast the fathers in *Emma* and *Persuasion*. What do Mr. Woodhouse and Sir Walter Elliot have in common? In what ways are they different? Consider not only their character qualities, but also the ways in which they influence the lives of their daughters.
35. Jane Austen had a tendency to write her own personality - quiet, reserved, and self-denying - into her heroines, some more than others. How do these qualities define Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*? Compare and contrast the two with regard to their essential qualities. Be sure to include specifics from both novels.