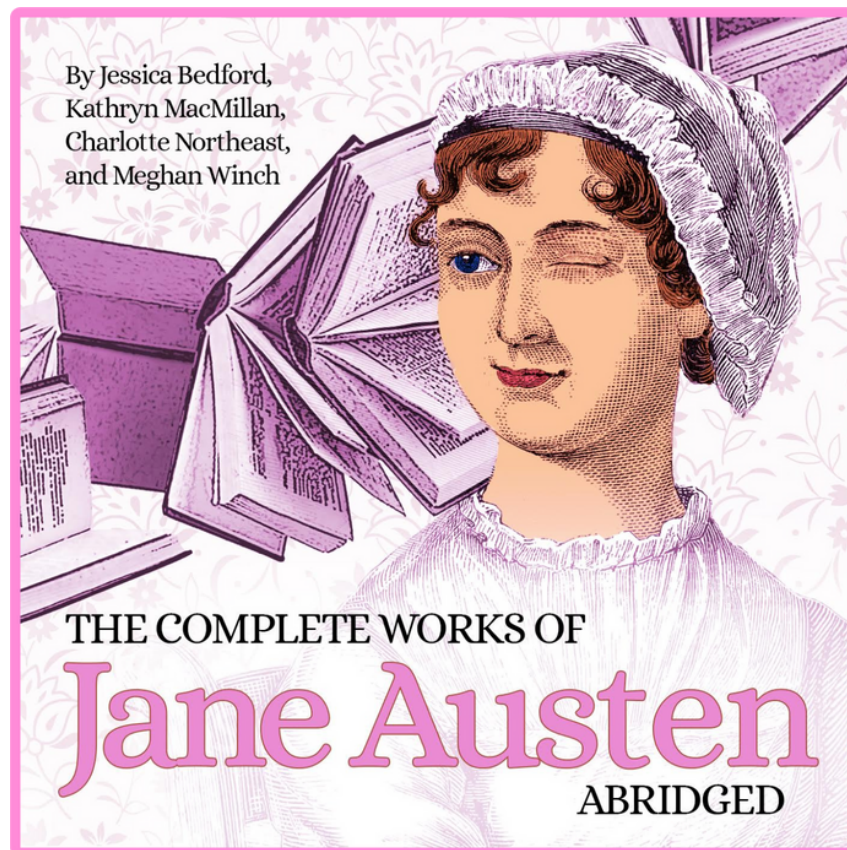


The Complete Works of Jane Austen (Abridged)

By Jessica Bedford, Kathryn MacMillan,
Charlotte Northeast, and Meghan Winch

A Dramaturgical Casebook



Director: KC MacMillan
Dramaturg: Liv Fassanella

September 27th-October 22nd

PLAYHOUSE 
ON PARK

Index

How to Misread Jane Austen.....	1
A Tour of Regency Fashion: Day and Evening Dress.....	8
Jane Austen, Political Symbol of Early Feminism.....	11
Jane Austen’s Mock History Book.....	14
The 10 Dos and Don’ts of Etiquette to Become a Lady in Regency England.....	16
What Do Jane Austen’s Novels Have to Tell Us About Love and Life Today?.....	25
Reading/Watching List.....	28



Selections from

How to Misread Jane Austen

By Louis Menand

“What would Jane Austen say?” is a fun game to play, but the truth is that we have no idea. For a writer of her renown, the biographical record is unusually thin. No notebooks or diaries survive. After Austen died, in 1817, her sister, Cassandra, destroyed or censored most of Jane’s letters to her, and after their brother Francis’s death his daughter destroyed all of Jane’s letters to him.

The letters that remain are not especially “Austenian,” and they can be a little hard-hearted and judgy, which does not match very well the image of Austen in the pious biographical sketch written by her brother Henry, shortly after her death, or in the memoir by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh, published more than fifty years later, which is mainly family oral remembrance, and in which she is “dear Aunt Jane.”

The novels are not much help, either. Besides the usual difficulties involved in trying to extract a moral from works of literature, there is the problem of Austen’s irony. She is not just representing characters in her novels; she is representing the discursive bubble those characters inhabit, and she almost never steps outside that bubble. She is always ventriloquizing. Virginia Woolf compared her to Shakespeare: “She flatters and cajoles you with the promise of intimacy and then, at the last moment, there is the same blankness. Are those Jane Austen’s eyes or is it a glass, a mirror, a silver spoon held up in the sun?”

Instead of asking what Austen is trying to tell us, we might ask what she’s trying to show us. But the answer to that seems to be: It depends on who’s looking. In her lifetime, Austen was popular with a certain class of readers, the fashionable and well-off, who enjoyed her novels, particularly “Pride and Prejudice,” as comedies of manners. They got the jokes, and you always feel good about an author when you are in on her jokes.

But Austen was hardly a best-seller, and by the eighteen-twenties her books were often out of print. The critical line on her, even from admirers like Sir Walter Scott, was that she was a miniaturist specializing in an exceedingly narrow sector of British society, the landed gentry.



Everyone agreed that she captured that world with astonishing precision; not everyone felt that it was a world worth capturing. “A carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden with neat borders and delicate flowers,” Charlotte Brontë described “Pride and Prejudice” to a friend. “I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant but confined houses.”

Queen Victoria was a fan (a taste, possibly the only one, she shared with B. B. King), and after the publication of Austen-Leigh’s memoir, in 1869, Austen enjoyed a revival. What had put off readers like Charlotte Brontë now became the basis of her appeal. Her books transported readers to a simpler time and place. They were escapist fiction.

Winston Churchill had “Pride and Prejudice” read aloud to him when he was recovering from pneumonia during the Second World War. “What calm lives they had, those people!” was his thought. “No worries about the French Revolution, or the crashing struggle of the Napoleonic Wars. Only manners controlling natural passion so far as they could, together with cultured explanations of any mischances.”

The suggestion that Austen might have had anything critical to say about those people would have spoiled the illusion. “She is absolutely at peace with her most comfortable world,” Virginia Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen, explained. “She never even hints at a suspicion that squires and parsons of the English type are not an essential part of the order of things.”

Still, there were readers who detected an edge. Woolf was one. “I would rather not find myself in the room alone with her,” she wrote. The British critic D. W. Harding, in 1939, proposed that Austen’s books were enjoyed “by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked; she is a literary classic of the society which attitudes like hers, held widely enough, would undermine.” The title of his essay was “Regulated Hatred.” Lionel Trilling, in 1955, called Austen “an agent of the Terror,” meaning that she is merciless in forcing us to confront our moral weaknesses.

Winston Churchill had “Pride and Prejudice” read aloud to him when he was recovering from pneumonia during the Second World War. “What calm lives they had, those people!” was his thought. “No worries about the French Revolution, or the crashing struggle of the Napoleonic Wars. Only manners controlling natural passion so far as they could, together with cultured explanations of any mischances.”

The suggestion that Austen might have had anything critical to say about those people would have spoiled the illusion. “She is absolutely at peace with her most comfortable world,” Virginia Woolf’s father, Leslie Stephen, explained. “She never even hints at a suspicion that squires and parsons of the English type are not an essential part of the order of things.”

Still, there were readers who detected an edge. Woolf was one. “I would rather not find myself in the room alone with her,” she wrote. The British critic D. W. Harding, in 1939, proposed that Austen’s books were enjoyed “by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked; she is a literary classic of the society which attitudes like hers, held widely enough, would undermine.”

The title of his essay was “Regulated Hatred.” Lionel Trilling, in 1955, called Austen “an agent of the Terror,” meaning that she is merciless in forcing us to confront our moral weaknesses.

Today, there are two Austens, with, probably, a fair amount of overlap: the recreational reader’s Austen and the English professor’s Austen. For the recreational reader, the novels are courtship stories, and the attraction is the strong women characters who, despite the best efforts of rivals and relations to screw things up, always succeed in making the catch. “Boy meets girl, girl gets boy” is the bumper-sticker version.

This category of reader presumably makes up a big part of the audience for the movie and television adaptations, a steady stream of entertainment product that shows no signs of slowing. Since 1995, there have been at least one screen adaptation of “Northanger Abbey,” two of “Sense and Sensibility,” two of “Mansfield Park,” two of “Persuasion,” three of “Pride and Prejudice,” and four of “Emma.” “Lady Susan,” a short epistolary novel Austen wrote when she was eighteen, was made into a movie by Whit Stillman in 2016, and last year Andrew Davies adapted Austen’s last novel, “Sanditon,” into a miniseries, even though she had finished only eleven chapters of it (about a fifth) before she died.

The English professor likes the strong women, too, and watches the adaptations (with a learned and critical eye). But the professor thinks that the novels are about things that people like Churchill and Leslie Stephen thought they leave out: the French Revolution, slavery, the empire, patriarchy, the rights of women.

Those subjects might not be in the foreground, but that’s because they were not inside the English gentry’s bubble. The slave trade was not something that ladies and gentlemen talked about—particularly if they had some financial connection to it, as several of Austen’s characters seem to. There are plenty of hints in the books about what is going on in the larger world. Those hints must be there for a reason.

But what is the reason? Do the novels have a political subtext? Since there are few signs of unconventional political views in the biographical record, one approach is to separate Austen from her novels—what she believed from what she wrote.

In “Jane Austen: Writing, Society, Politics” (Oxford), for example, Tom Keymer, who teaches at the University of Toronto, explains that Austen was a novelist “in whom an implicitly Tory world view is frequently interrogated or disrupted by destabilizing ironies and irruptions of satirical anger that are no less real for the elegance and wit of their expression.”

Literature professors love the notion of texts “interrogating” things; I am a literature professor, and I have certainly used that line. But, in this case, it feels like fence-straddling. It asks us to accept an Austen who is somehow simultaneously conservative as a person and subversive as a writer. Keymer says things like “The courtship plot that structures all six of Austen’s published novels, though sometimes held to imply her endorsement of a patriarchal status quo, is equally a means of exploring themes of female disempowerment.” It’s hard to see how the novels can be “equally” endorsements of patriarchy and criticisms of it.

Keymer doesn't mention Helena Kelly's "Jane Austen, the Secret Radical" (2016), but, in some respects, his little book, which is a somewhat cautious introduction to reading Austen, rather than a full-dress critical appraisal, could be thought of as a response to hers. Kelly, as her title suggests, has no trouble naming Austen's politics. Austen lived, after all, in an age of revolutions, and Kelly thinks that her novels are "as revolutionary, at their heart, as anything that Wollstonecraft or Tom Paine wrote." They just have to be read "the right way."

"The right way" means treating the brief glimpses Austen gives us of life outside her characters' social circles—and, once you start looking, you see them all over the place—as pieces of a puzzle that, when assembled, reveals what is really going on. Kelly makes a case, for example, that passing references in "Emma" to ditches and hedges, along with a scrap of conversation about relocating a public path, are meant to signal to us that Emma's neighbor and future husband, Mr. Knightley, is engaged in an aggressive campaign to enclose his land—that is, to fence it off in order to prevent local people from exercising the "rights of common."

This was the right to enter private land for specified purposes, such as grazing, fishing, foraging, gathering firewood, and so on, and for many people in rural England it helped make ends meet. Kelly cites the scholar Ruth Perry as calculating that access to private lands (as virtually all lands in England were) essentially doubled the income of farming families. Once those lands were legally enclosed, however, it became a crime to trespass on them. Kelly thinks that the poultry thieves who steal Mrs. Weston's turkeys at the end of "Emma" are meant to show us the economic damage being caused by Mr. Knightley's enclosures. Why else would Austen have put them in her story? The plot does not require turkey thieves.

Kelly's Mr. Knightley, in short, is a heartless landowner intent on building a private fiefdom. She thinks the reason he marries Emma is that he wants to absorb her property, one of the few parcels of land around Highbury he does not already own, into his estate. Keymer would not object to this line of interpretation, presumably—"implication, not explication, was Austen's way," he says—but would be reluctant to conclude that it means that Austen was a revolutionary.

In "30 Great Myths About Jane Austen" (Wiley Blackwell), two eminent Austen scholars, Claudia L. Johnson, from Princeton, and Clara Tuite, from the University of Melbourne, take on some of the characterizations of Austen in general circulation: "There is no sex in Jane Austen's novels," "Jane Austen was unconscious of her art," "Jane Austen's novels are about good manners," and twenty-seven more.

The book is not an exercise in pure debunking (as entertaining as that would have been), because Johnson and Tuite hold the view that although some of these myths—"Jane Austen disapproved of the theatre," for instance—are demonstrably false, many have become inseparable from the way Austen is read and received.

The scholars' point is that even mistaken assumptions about Austen reveal something in her work that is worth digging into.

The belief that Austen was hostile to the theatre comes from "Mansfield Park," whose plot turns on a private theatrical that the novel's prudish protagonist, Fanny Price, considers objectionable, because it permits people to simulate passions that, in real life, would be illicit. And Fanny proves to be right—one of the amateur actors later runs off with another man's wife, a woman he had flirted with when they were rehearsing, ruining her reputation.

But we know that Austen loved going to the theatre (she also loved to dance), and that she enjoyed composing and acting in private theatricals organized by her siblings—which makes for an interesting interpretive problem. What is Austen trying to show us about the theatre in "Mansfield Park"? And this turns out to be very hard to pin down.

Like Keymer, Johnson and Tuite are therefore sometimes led into critical impasses, points at which an interpretation can be argued either way. In a chapter on "Jane Austen was a feminist/Jane Austen was not a feminist," for example, they propose that "both elements of this myth are true and untrue." Maybe this is the best that can be said on the subject, but it is not a premise that gets us very far.

Johnson and Tuite think that the reason we keep running into conundrums like these is that readers project their own views onto Austen. Some readers want to see a feminist, and other readers prefer to see a writer who does not make it her business to question the status quo. "Because Austen herself is such a mythic, beloved figure," they explain, "many readers have tended to align her with their own yearnings, social outlooks, and dispositions."

Surely this is backward. Isn't it because Austen's texts are so indeterminate that she is beloved by people who come to her with different prejudices and expectations? And isn't her mythic stature produced by her writing, rather than projected by her readers? Isn't inscrutability part of the intention? That we don't know much about Austen from her letters (or from what we have of them) suggests that she didn't want people to know much about her, period.

All of Austen's novels are about misinterpretation, about people reading other people incorrectly. Catherine Morland, in "Northanger Abbey," reads General Tilney wrong. Elizabeth Bennet reads Mr. Darcy wrong. Marianne Dashwood, in "Sense and Sensibility," gets Willoughby wrong, and Edmund Bertram, in "Mansfield Park," gets Mary Crawford wrong. Emma gets everybody wrong. There might be a warning to the reader here: do not think that you are getting it right, either.

The people who read Austen for the romance and the people who read Austen for the sociology are both reading her correctly, because Austen understands courtship as an attempt to achieve the maximum point of intersection between love and money. Characters who are in the marriage game just for love, like Marianne Dashwood, in "Sense and Sensibility," are likely to get burned. Characters in it just for the money, like Maria Bertram, in "Mansfield Park," are likely to be unhappy.

What is exceptional about Austen as a novelist is that she tells us exactly how much money each of her characters has. She gives us far more information than Dickens, who was at least as obsessed with class and income as she was, or George Eliot. We know not merely that Elizabeth will be poor when her father dies.

We know precisely what her income will be: forty pounds a year. We also know why Elizabeth's prospects are so grim: because her father has neglected to plan for his daughters. He has almost no savings, and his property is entailed to the closest male heir—who happens to be the egregious Mr. Collins.

For British readers in the nineteenth century, these numbers conveyed very specific information. Most American readers today probably gloss over them. We don't know what it signifies to have x number of pounds a year. When we read, in "Emma," that "the charming Augusta Hawkins, in addition to all the usual advantages of perfect beauty and merit, was in possession of an independent fortune, of so many thousands as would always be called ten," we can tell there is a joke there, and we might even chuckle fake-knowingly, but we aren't in on it.

That's because we don't know what Austen's nineteenth-century readers would have known, which is that a fortune of ten thousand pounds represents the minimum point on the money curve. Those ten thousand pounds would be invested in government bonds with an effective rate of five per cent. And, if you had five hundred pounds a year and no dependents, you could live comfortably and did not need to work.

Most of Austen's characters who are on the marriage market want to do better than five hundred a year, of course. Augusta Hawkins needn't worry; in addition to her own fortune, she has her marriage to the local vicar, who has an income from tithes.

According to Ivan Nottingham, one of the people who have studied Austen and money, with a thousand pounds a year you could afford a comfortable life with a staff of three female servants, a coachman, a footman, a carriage, and horses.

The movie and television adaptations often make a point of showing us just how many servants are around all the time, although in the Keira Knightley "Pride and Prejudice," released in 2005, the financial condition of the Bennets is made to appear rather shabby. They are shown to live in a ramshackle house with chickens in the yard, and we see few servants. But the family in the novel is actually quite well off. They have a cook, a housekeeper, a butler, a footman, a coachman, horses, and two maids. The Bennets' problem is not a lack of assets; it's mismanagement.

Few female characters in Austen have the kind of money that Emma does. She has thirty thousand pounds, and along with her sister she will inherit the family house. Mr. Darcy's income is ten thousand a year. He is not the richest character in Austen. Mr. Rushworth, in "Mansfield Park," has twelve thousand a year. (Mr. Rushworth is also a complete chucklehead; he is the man Maria Bertram makes the mistake of marrying.) Those were very large incomes. They place Darcy and Rushworth in the top one per cent of households in Austen's Britain, even though neither man is a peer.

Where Charlotte Brontë and Leslie Stephen went wrong was in assuming that the world of the Woodhouses and the Knightleys, the Bingleys and the Bertrams, was Jane Austen's world, that she was writing about her own social circle. But Austen did not belong to that circle. She knew and observed people in it, of course, but her own family belonged to what is called the "pseudo-gentry"—families that lived like the gentry, had the gentry's taste and manners, and often married into the gentry, but depended on a male family member with a job to maintain their style of life.

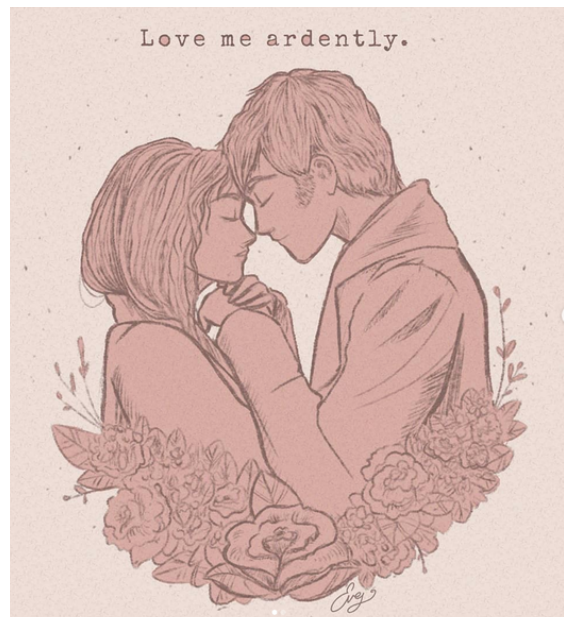
Austen's father, George, was the rector of two Anglican parishes, from which he earned, from the combined tithes, two hundred and ten pounds a year. To add to this extremely modest income, the family also sold farm produce, and George and his wife, Cassandra, ran a school for boys out of their house. In 1797, Claire Tomalin tells us in her biography of Jane Austen, the family bought a carriage; in 1798, they had to give it up. In 1800, the farm brought in almost three hundred pounds, but tithes fell, owing to a depression. The Austens, a family of ten, seem rarely to have broken the five-hundred-pound mark.

When clergymen died, the Church made no provisions for their families, and when George Austen died, in 1805, Jane, her sister, and her mother were left with enough capital to pay them two hundred pounds a year. Otherwise, they depended on contributions from the brothers; they lived in a small cottage on the estate of one brother, Edward. Jane's total income from the four books she published in her lifetime was six hundred and eighty-four pounds. Jane Austen was not "comfortable" in the world of her novels, because she did not live in that world.

Does this mean that she was pressing her nose against the glass, imagining a life she was largely excluded from? Or does it mean that she could see with the clarity and unsentimentality of the outsider the fatuity of those people and the injustices and inequalities their comforts were built on? We can only guess.



Art by Kate Zibas



Art by @thelovelytattered

A Tour of Regency Fashion: Day and Evening Dress

by Ammanda McCabe

The Regency Era (often given as 1812-1830, though the dates are flexible) officially began when the Prince of Wales became Regent of England after his father, George III, was declared insane.

This period was dramatically different from what came before it, Georgian decadence and excess, and from what followed, Victorian morality. The fashions, of course, reflected this change. In the eighteenth century fashions were highly elaborate, made of heavy brocades and satins with copious lace trim and quilted, beaded underskirts supported by a complicated infrastructure of hoops and panniers.



The entire confection would be crowned with elaborate wigs, tall feathers, and huge hats. By the 1790's, a radical change was in the air. The change was precipitated by the French Revolution and its "democratic" tenets. Noblewomen and their maids alike dressed in the new style as silks gave way to light muslins, clinging lines, high waistlines, and arm-baring sleeves. These new styles were classically influenced, modeled on the ideals of the Greek and Roman worlds that were aped by the Revolution.

Throughout the Regency, there were certain elements of fashion that remained fairly consistent. Necklines were low and wide, filled in for daytime with fichus, scarves, or chemisettes; a high waistline; a fitted bodice, and fitted sleeves, either short and puffed, elbow-length, or long. There were trends; waistlines went up and down, more elaborate trims came into vogue, especially at the hems and necklines of gowns, and medieval and Renaissance details became popular, especially in England. As always, the French tended to be more daring in their fashions!

DAY DRESS

In the early Regency (approximately 1797-1805), the most common style of dress for day wear was one that was very classic in feel and simple in style-- what we often think of today as "typical Regency". It was high-waisted with a wide neckline and rather long sleeves. Chemisettes (a style much like a modern dickey!) or fichus, often made of filmy fabrics, were used to fill in the neckline. Often there were no back fastenings; The two photos [I sent] were of the same dress, dressed up for evening and down for day. I made it from the La Mode Bagatelle Regency pattern (which can be bought at the Sense and Sensibility website). It's kind of expensive, about \$48, but you can make about 10 different dress styles from it, as well as a pelisse and spencer. Very authentic, too, but a bit hard to sew. a woman could simply pull the dress over her shoulders and tie up the drawstrings.

The term "chemise dress" was very descriptive of these dresses. (pictured on right) Early Regency dresses, even day dresses, also had trains, though this trend faded around 1805. Also after 1805, the longer, tighter sleeves began to give way to the shorter, puffed style. The drawstring fastening was often augmented by a hook or button in the back, at the neckline.



Waistlines continued to fluctuate, and around 1807-08 new, smooth bodices, not gathered but fitted with darts, began to emerge. Opera Gowns, from Ackerman's Repository of the Arts, 1810 Early styles of dress had skirts of classical simplicity with very little trim or embroidery. They were also quite narrow, with all the fullness gathered in the back with the train. In the 1810s, gowns started becoming more elaborate.

Tucks and flowers adorned hemlines. The English were especially fond of "Renaissance" details - ruffs, slashed sleeves, and lace (See the fashion plate on the left.). Heavier fabrics were needed to support these details, and silks and satins returned to vogue. By 1816, waistlines were at their highest, though often just a small band of fabric, and hems were at their most elaborate.

EVENING DRESS

Early Regency evening dress retained some eighteenth century richness, with colored silks and metallic trims, but the style was Classical, with high waists, narrow silhouettes and close-fitting, longer sleeves. A train was de riguer, as it was for day dress.

On the whole, evening fashion tended to resemble day dress styles. When trains disappeared for day dress, they became optional for evening. Waistlines raised and lowered; fabrics became simpler, then returned to more elaborate silks, satins, and velvets. Sleeves grew and became more gathered and puffed.

By 1815, the original classical simplicity of dress had all but vanished. Layered gowns (underdresses of silk or satin, often colored, and overdresses of sheer lace or gauze) came into vogue.

Hems were very elaborate, with artificial flowers, beadwork, lace and netting used. Ornamentation on the sleeves echoed that of the hems. (See fashion plate on the right). By 1825, the waistline approached the natural state, skirts were growing wider, and the fashion style of the Regency was ending. Soon it would give way entirely to the elaborate hoops and corsets of the Victorian age, sending fashion back full circle.



Jane Austen, Political Symbol of Early Feminism

On the Appearance of a Literary Icon at the First Women's Marche

By Devoney Looser

On June 13, 1908, suffragists took Jane Austen to the streets of London. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) held its Great Procession, a demonstration march and rally, in what would become known as a "new style." It was ordered, majestic, and artistic. An estimated 10,000 women representing 42 organizations participated, marching across London for an hour and a half to Royal Albert Hall, where speeches were given by the movement's high-profile leaders. The visual centerpiece of the march was "a thousand beautiful banners and bannerettes, each different, each wrought in gorgeous color and in rich material." Most of the banners used in the march advertised place names, as thousands of women had arrived in special trains from Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Hull, Birmingham, and Bristol, with representatives from America, France, Hungary, South Africa, India, and many other countries taking part as well. A significant albeit smaller number of the banners depicted "famous woman leaders and pioneers." It's on one of these banners that Jane Austen's name was blazoned.

Austen's name and image were used prominently in the street activism, political stage, and issue-oriented fundraisers of the women's movement's first wave, yet you'd never know it from our histories of her legacy. Histories of Jane Austen's critical legacy describe feminists of the 1970s and afterward with great care, but the political uses of Austen by suffragists have been almost entirely neglected in our Austen reception studies. A Virginia Woolf here, a Rebecca West there. There's little sense given in our literary histories of Austen's place among hundreds and thousands of Victorian and early 20th-century feminists—among an entire political movement across several continents. Putting Austen's suffragist champions back into the conversation about her legacy is not only right and just; it also reorients our sense of how Austen has been used for political purposes. We can't possibly understand political struggles over Austen in our own day without grasping just how long—and how loudly—debates over her and the political meanings of her writings have ranged.

Dating from the mid-19th century to the moment when women's suffrage was achieved in many industrialized countries by the end of the 1920s, first-wave feminist activists sought female role models in history. Austen was, for those purposes, a perfect fit. Where the men's club Janeites saw in Austen a safe, admirably domestic figure whose life and writings were often seen as without political intention, the suffragists' Austen was almost always cast as a rebel. The more accurate phrase for the way many suffragists imagined and used her may be "demure rebel." Amateur dramatizations of Austen drew on the tropes and ideas of the New Woman movement. Many of these dramatists were or would become suffragists. It's no surprise that they'd bring a strong, independent-woman-loving version of Jane Austen with them, from the amateur theatricals to the streets of London.

On that day in 1908, the marchers, nine out of ten of whom were female, represented “every class in society, from the highest (not Royal) to factory workers and working women of all grades, including domestic servants.” Among the professional women’s groups represented was the Women Writers’ Suffrage League (WWSL). This “very merry lot” wore signature red badges crossed with quills. Its impressive banner was designed by artist and member of the Artists’ Suffrage League, Mary Lowndes (1856-1929). The WWSL’s large banner was carried by at least three women: actress and playwright Cicely Hamilton (1872-1952), novelist and New Woman essayist Sarah Grand (1854-1943), and American actress and playwright Elizabeth Robins (1862-1952). The WWSL’s smaller bannerettes featured names from literary history, such as Maria Edgeworth, Fanny (Frances) Burney, and Mary Wollstonecraft. The stunning beige and reddish-brown banner commemorating Jane Austen featured a quill design, echoing the quills on the large banner and badges of the WWSL.

The banners used in the march were reportedly an awesome sight, creating a memorable event for participants and onlookers alike. “The striking sights of women’s suffrage activism, their spectacular actions, banners and symbols,” as a recent critic has put it, “made an immediate impression on public consciousness.” A witness reports that the crowd was “ready to scoff and jeer” but that “the flaming beauty of the procession smote them into a reverent silence.” Lowndes had designed the banners to do just that. As she wrote, poetically, “A banner is not a literary affair. . . . A banner is a thing to float in the wind, to flicker in the breeze, to flirt its colors for your pleasure, to half show and half conceal a device you long to unravel.” The banners of famous women were designed to be a moving spectacle. By all accounts, they were.

The very act of carrying them was also a spectacle. It apparently involved a significant feat of strength. Holding the banners for any distance walking, particularly in the strong wind said to be blowing that day, was challenging work. “The Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage,” leader Millicent Fawcett reports, “have volunteered help in the carrying of the banners,” but the plans called for “the young stalwarts among the women” to “bear their own burdens.” Novelist May Sinclair (1863-1946) is said to have “seriously hurt herself by carrying a heavy banner for many miles in a Suffragist procession,” perhaps on this very day.

“A witness reports that the crowd was ‘ready to scoff and jeer’ but that ‘the flaming beauty of the procession smote them into a reverent silence.’”

The stakes of letting the banners drop were high. One newspaper account makes this clear: “At one point the guiding cords of a banner broke away,” and “seeing the distress of the [female] bearer,” a spectator called out, “You want a man’s help.” The woman carrying the banner is said to have replied, “No, I don’t,” as she successfully “wrestled with the intractable folds of the flapping silk” and, as the reporter puts it, “shows that she did not speak in vain.”

Not everyone was impressed with such feats of female strength. As another periodical writer argues, “A woman who will walk five miles on a hot day and wave a banner all the time may be plucky, but the admirers of such pluck are not exactly deep thinkers, being, in short, persons whose intellects are of a mediocre caliber.” Not only exhibiting but just admiring female strength, for this writer, is a sign of intellectual

At the end of the march, the banners were placed carefully in Royal Albert Hall “in terraced ranks of raw and flaming color.” As reporter James Douglas put it in the *Morning Leader*, “The names wrought upon the delicate silk were the names of women whose power was the power of the intellect and whose strength was the strength of the soul.” The official program doesn’t reprint all of the names that were represented on banners, but it highlights several. After the banners of Vashti (called the first suffragist) and the “Three Great Queens” (Boadicea, Elizabeth, and Victoria), the next group advertised was the “Women Writers,” with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Jane Austen, George Eliot, and the Brontës chosen as representative. Austen was prominently listed on the banners and program.

Including Austen’s name among the Great Procession’s banner honorees had everything to do with what scholars have called “an acute awareness during the period of the weight of literary history and precedent against which they were struggling. . . Significant literary and historical figures were identified and appropriated in this revisionist phase.” Austen, despite having only recently achieved the designation of “significant” to literary history and women’s history, had quickly become one of the most frequently and prominently used “great women,” chosen to serve as an “effective role model” to the women’s suffrage movement. No doubt this is because of her wide appeal, across political lines and among both men and women.



Jane Austen Suffrage Banner, 1908, by Mary Lowndes. Courtesy of the Women’s Library at the London School of Economics.

Jane Austen's Mock History Book

by Emily Zarevich

“By a partial, prejudiced, and ignorant historian.” Who else but Jane Austen could start a book with such a cheeky line? Austen opens *The History of England* with these words, and she would just get funnier from there. “There will be very few dates in this history,” she warns her readers in her introduction. Anyone looking for a more serious historic text should look elsewhere. She was not writing to teach, but to express herself, in her own satirical way.

Austen was only fifteen years old when she wrote *The History of England* in 1791, but she was already finding her footing as a writer and sharp-witted social commentator. In her adolescence, the prospect of publication was not yet her ultimate goal. She was writing mainly as a form of self-amusement and for her family's private entertainment, which allowed her a high degree of freedom for developmental experimentation with form, style, and subject matter. She had multiple juvenilia projects in process, one of them a sarcastic history textbook that poked fun at the prevailing stiff approaches and attitudes towards recounting past events. According to Austen researcher Misty Krueger, “Many scholars have identified Austen's *History* as a parody of history writing, particularly that of Oliver Goldsmith's *History of England from The Earliest Times to the Death of George II (1771)* and his abridgement of those volumes (1774).” It's likely that Austen, having read the book as part of her rigorous self-education regime, put the dull tome down with a weary sigh and thought to herself, “I can do better.”

The History of England gives readers a mocking tour through the tenures of England's monarchs by a guide who isn't at all shy about which ones she prefers and which ones she finds distasteful.

Jane Austen, as per usual, was boldly opinionated towards her topic of choice, and uninterested in presenting romanticized versions of anyone or anything. *The History of England* gives readers a mocking tour through the tenures of England's monarchs by a guide who isn't at all shy about which ones she prefers and which ones she finds distasteful. “It would be an affront to my Readers were I to suppose that they were not as well acquainted with the particulars of this King's reign as I am myself,” she explains in her consideration of King Henry VIII. “It will therefore be saving them the task of reading again what they have read before, & myself the trouble of writing what I do not perfectly recollect, by giving only a slight sketch of the principal Events which marked his reign.”

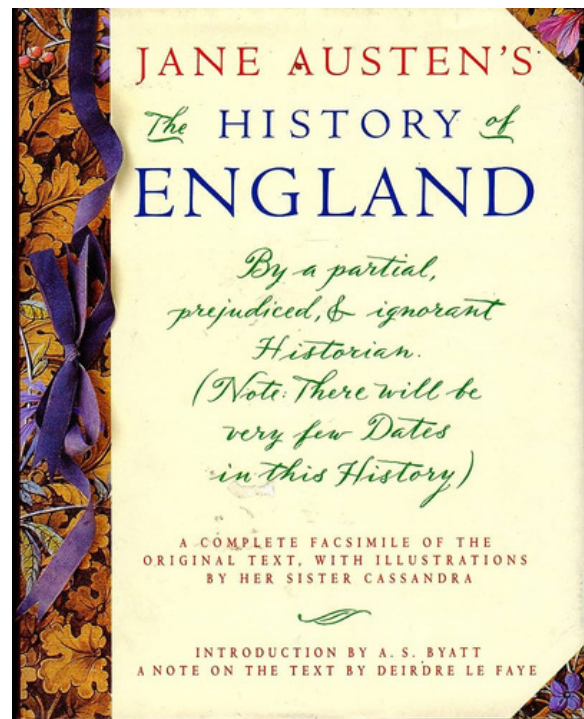
The young Austen had a particular interest in the vilified Stuart dynasty, and her work reflects the spirit of a rebellious young crusader seeking overdue justice for a cause. History had been violent and partisan to the Stuarts; Austen would reassemble their mutilated reputation with her writing without sacrificing her own sense of humor in the process.

“Austen offers her readers a multivalent, multimodal text that encompasses parody and historiography, yet engages with the with the traditions of martyrology and vindication, or defense,” notes Krueger.

Austen’s earnest efforts were most devoted to Henry VIII’s daughter Elizabeth I and her execution of her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots. Austen points an accusatory finger at Elizabeth’s advisors for allowing her “to bring this amiable Woman [Mary] to an untimely, unmerited, and scandalous Death.” When Austen labelled herself as “partial and prejudiced,” she meant it. Wholeheartedly.



British Library Add. MS 59874
Copyright © The British Library Board



An early copy and a modern copy of Jane Austen’s History of England

Selections from

The 10 Dos and Don'ts of Etiquette to Become a Lady in Regency England

By D.G. Hewitt

“A woman’s reputation is as brittle as it is beautiful,” notes Elizabeth Bennett in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, a classic of Regency-era England. Indeed, being a woman in these times was far from easy. Of course, ladies of the upper and upper-middle classes didn’t have to worry about ending up in the poorhouse or struggling to feed their children. However, even wealth and social standing were no guarantees that a lady would enjoy a fine reputation. Instead, a lady’s reputation was based largely upon how she behaved herself, both in public as well as in the privacy of her own home.

As anyone who has ever read a Jane Austen novel (or watched a TV or movie adaptation of one) knows, there were strict rules to follow when it came to matters of etiquette and decorum. For their part, gentlemen were expected to behave in a chivalrous but aloof, even cold, manner. However, it was the ladies who had the most rules to follow. Indeed, there were rules for almost everything, from walking down the street to eating and dancing, and failure to stay within the lines of decency could stain a lady’s character for good. Since a Regency-era lady’s reputation could determine her future – including her chances of a good marriage – most were careful to keep up-to-date with the latest thoughts of proper etiquette. And, thankfully for the historian, some of the many etiquette guides published between 1800 and 1825 still exist today, allowing us a glimpse into this fascinating period.

So, here are ten of the rules a lady in Regency England needed to follow if she wanted to maintain a good reputation among her peers:

DO stand straight and walk tall

In the many etiquette manuals of the time, whole sections were often devoted to how a lady should move – or even how they should stay still. And, while some rules were very complex, and indeed sometimes contradictory, when it came to sitting and walking, it was quite straightforward: keep it elegant, refined and, above all, keep it ‘ladylike’.

Above all, the Regency era was obsessed with correct posture. This meant keeping your back straight at all times. While sitting up straight and walking tall was expected of gentlemen too, this was especially important for women. As the manuals of the time noted, a well-bred young lady should move with 'grace and ease', appearing the epitome of elegance even when walking from one room to the next or heading to the market in the morning. In order to achieve this ideal, many young ladies used a backboard. These were single pieces of wood, to run up the back, with leather straps to keep them in place. Obviously, with a plank of wood strapped to your back, you were guaranteed to sit up straight at all times.

Ironically, the idea of 'naturalness' was highly promoted during the latter years of the Regency era in particular. Moving away from the rigid bodices and corsets of the past, the fashions of the time promoted free-flowing gowns. Again, however, often backboards were hidden underneath such feminine fashions. Or, more commonly, bad habits such as slouching or even natural 'deformities' like a curved spine, were 'corrected' during childhood and early adolescence so that a lady looked as she should when she came out in society and was ready to court.



DON'T talk like a man

A well-bred woman in the Regency era needed to tread a fine line between being polite, but not being too familiar or, heaven forbid, overly-friendly or flirtatious. Failing to stay within the boundaries of acceptable social intercourse could have serious consequences and call into question a lady's manners or even her character.

According to historians of the time, a lady was to behave with 'courteous dignity' at all times. She was expected to treat both acquaintances and strangers alike with equal grace and good manners and, if engaged in conversation, she could talk on a wide range of topics – though, of course, explicitly expressing an opinion was largely frowned upon. Feminine humor was acceptable, but outbursts of laughter or outward displays of emotion were most certainly not. Above all, any hint of vulgarity was strictly forbidden. Only men could make rude jokes or laugh loudly, and even they could only do so when in the company of other men or, at most, of women of ill-repute.

The rules for social interactions and conversation in the street were equally as strident as they were for behind closed doors. For instance, a lady should never be seen standing and talking on the street. If she met a friend or acquaintance and wished to converse, then they were expected to walk and talk. One other major no-no of the Regency era was to 'cut' someone. Indeed, even to be accused of 'cutting' could prove to be a major strain on your character. But this didn't mean stabbing someone! Instead, cutting in this context meant simply failing to acknowledge the presence of someone you had previously been introduced to socially. A gentleman was certainly not allowed to cut someone. Ladies did, however, have a bit more leeway. Only a woman could ignore someone else, but only if they had strong justification for doing so. As you can imagine, just walking down a busy street could be a social etiquette minefield!

DON'T be afraid to faint

These days, fainting with shock due to a crude or vulgar comment would be regarded as an overreaction and evidence of being far too sensitive. But in the Regency era, it was, the historians tell us, actually quite a common occurrence. Moreover, fainting was considered an appropriate, even understandable, reaction for a lady to have when confronted with foul language or even bad manners. Indeed, such events could – and very often were – seen as a case of the vapours', requiring gentlemen to help a lady onto a fainting couch and then pass a small jar of vapours under her nose to revive her.

Such shows of weakness were not to be frowned upon, and even the most mature of ladies would feel no shame in ‘coming over all faint’. Consider Mrs. Bennet in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, for example. The matriarch of the family is shown to regularly be in need of a lie-down and ‘the vapors’, often fainting at the slightest hint of stress or bad news.

In reality, however, the women of the Regency era weren’t quite so over-sensitive and thin-skinned. Instead, they would often have a good reason for feeling faint. Backboards and tight-fitting corsets made breathing difficult and could, understandably, also cause light-headedness. And even if the ladies of Regency England were overly-sensitive, according to some academic studies, this was only to be expected. Women like Mrs. Bennett would have grown up stifled by rules and unable to assert their independence.



DON'T be alone in the company of a gentleman

When it comes to mingling with the other sex, the rules for ladies in the Regency era was simple: Don't! Put simply, if a lady was unmarried and under the age of 30, she was never to be seen in the company of a man without a chaperone present. And, of course, it goes without saying that a lady should never, ever call at a gentleman's house unless she needs to speak to him about a professional or business matter – and even then, a chaperone must be present.

What's more, a lady would not only be frowned upon – and become the subject of much gossip – if she strolled through town in the company of a gentleman to who she was neither related nor married to, she would also be frowned upon for stepping out alone. Indeed, a lady of good repute was expected to always step out in the company of another lady or, failing this, with a male relative or, at worst, a servant. There were only two occasions where this unwritten rule was relaxed: firstly, when walking to church on a Sunday morning and, more generally, when taking an early morning constitutional stroll in the local park or around the block.

Historians of the Regency era note, however, that, as the years passed, this rule became a bit more relaxed. Of course, there would always be gossip and rumors if a man and woman were spotted in each other's company without a chaperone present. However, towards the end of the period, it became increasingly more acceptable for ladies to go out alone, even into town. Evidence of this can be found in the novels of Jane Austen, where the female protagonists – depicted as progressive, ground-breaking women for their time – routinely go out without having a male watch over them.



DO wait to be introduced to someone

Introductions were a complex business in the Regency era and breaking from the accepted norms would be a massive breach of etiquette. And, as might be expected, introductions between members of the opposite sex or indeed between two people of different social standing, would be especially complex.

Quite simply, it was not the done thing to simply go up to a stranger and start talking to them – no matter how dashing a gentleman might be. Instead, a lady needed to wait until she was formally introduced to a person before they could start to interact socially. Usually, introductions were made by the ‘man of the house’. At other times, elderly – and respected – matrons, mothers, local parsons or their wives, might introduce people. Some individuals or even whole families prided themselves on their abilities to serve as the go-between and set people up, allowing them to interact with one another without causing a scandal.

As a rule, an introduction could not be made without the express permission of the people involved. Moreover, if one person enjoyed a higher social rank than the other, then he or she needed to give their consent to having a lower-ranking stranger introduced to them. A person of a higher rank could simply decline an invitation to an introduction, no questions asked! To shun such an opportunity was not regarded as rudeness but rather accepted as the ‘done thing’. In comparison, a lower-ranked individual, and in particular a lady, introducing themselves to a gentleman without permission or a go-between (think of the scandal the uncouth Mr. Collins causes when he introduced himself to his superior Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*).

Even once a lady had been introduced to another female or to a gentleman, strict societal rules still applied. At no point must a lady refer to a gentleman by his first name. Instead, she must call him by his family name or, where applicable, by his title. Additionally, just like in period dramas and historical movies, upon meeting, the lady was expected to bow at the shoulders slightly, while a gentleman was expected to greet a lady with a modest, not exaggerated, bow from the waist.

DON'T dance with the same man more than twice

In the Regency era, public houses (or pubs) and clubs were off-limits to women, or at least to well-bred ladies. As such, a dance represented the best opportunity to catch up with acquaintances, make new friends and potentially even meet a future husband or wife.

However, dances were no social free-for-all. Instead, they were highly regulated affairs, with chaperones and, in many instances, a 'Master of Ceremonies' overseeing proceedings and ensuring that the rules of propriety and decorum were maintained – especially by the ladies present!

At a dance, a lady could simply not ask an unknown gentleman to waltz with her, no matter how handsome he looked. Rather, the pair needed to be formally introduced before they could take to the dancefloor. Fortunately, Masters of Ceremonies performed this useful function. Indeed, if a lady arrived at a ball where she had not been introduced to any of the men previously, she would automatically seek out the MC and he would ensure that she had partners to dance with over the course of the evening. And, while there was a rule that two ladies could not dance together, this was often overlooked. After all, with many gentlemen away fighting in the Napoleonic Wars, there was not always a 50/50 gender split at dances, as Jane Austen herself noted on several occasions.

Once the dancing has started, there were even more rules to follow. In *Etiquette of the Ballroom*, an 1815 bestseller by Thomas Wilson, ladies are advised that clapping or any outward displays of emotion or enthusiasm are strictly prohibited. Similarly, stopping a dance before the music has stopped or even leaving the ballroom before all the dances have ended, was regarded as a sign of ill manners. And, perhaps most important of all, a lady was judged on the number of times she danced with a man. One dance was to be expected. Two dances in one night would suggest that the gentleman wished to get to know the lady better. And three dances with the same chap on the same night? That would ensure the lady got a bad reputation for being over-familiar and would surely see her put on the black list for future balls.

DO remember your manners at a dinner party

Just like dances, dinner parties were complex social events with their own specific set of rules. Breach the etiquette and you not only risked embarrassing yourself in front of your peers, but you might also find yourself with a reputation for being uncouth, with invitations suddenly drying up. Luckily, as with most things in the Regency era, it was relatively simple for a lady to do what was expected of her. Above all, the key was to keep quiet, let men take the lead and not to get ideas above your station! If you were the hostess, then you would sit at the head of the table, with the (male) guest of honour to your right. The rest of the seating plan was up to the host or the hostess, though it was generally the thing to ensure men didn't sit next to their wives.

Additionally, when possible, men and women should be evenly distributed around the table. And, of course, it goes without saying that both a lady and a gentleman should dress for dinner. To arrive in day clothes would be regarded as a sign of utmost disrespect.

Dinner parties during the Regency era were as long as they were complex. Anything from between five to 25 courses were served, though the evening always started with a bowl of soup. According to the etiquette guides of the time, a lady must never refuse soup. If she wasn't hungry or simply didn't like the dish, it was considered far politer to simply toy with her food than to leave it completely untouched. If she was hungry, then soup should always be sipped from the side of a spoon, never from the tip. And, of course, the soup should be consumed silently. Slurping was regarded as the height of bad manners for a lady!

As the evening progressed, servants would bring new dishes, with cut meats being the main course. A gentleman was permitted to serve himself and those around him. However, he would never fill a lady's plate too much. Neither should a lady ask for too much. After all, a big appetite was seen as being unladylike. Once her plate was full, a lady was expected to eat a little bit of everything at once. For instance, an ideal forkful would consist of a morsel of meat, a sliver of potato and a single pea. This could be washed down with wine; there was no rule against women drinking alcohol. However, a lady would never ask for wine, she would wait to be offered it. And even then, she should limit her intake lest she is judged for drinking like a man.

After dinner, of course, the ladies were expected to retire to a special 'withdrawing room', leaving the chaps free to enjoy talk and conversation. Even in the company of other ladies, a hostess would never take obvious pride in her dinner party. Instead, she should remain silent, allowing her guests to compliment the quality of the food and company. Attempting to break with this convention was a serious social faux-pas, and indeed would remain so for many decades after the Regency era had come to an end.

DO keep your hands to yourself!

As you might expect of such a tightly-wound society, touching was largely to be avoided. Or, if not avoided at all, then there were strict rules as to what was acceptable and what wasn't. And, of course, these unwritten societal rules were particularly relevant for ladies. Above all, failing to act properly could harm your reputation and, more importantly, could even seriously damage your chances of gaining entry into 'high society' and enjoying the many social – and economic – benefits this entailed. So, what were the rules on touching other people?

For a well-bred lady, even shaking the hands of a gentleman could be seen as being overly familiar. Indeed, handshakes were largely confined to gentlemen, and even then, a man would only shake the hands of a peer of similar social rank, never with a superior or – heaven forbid! – a servant. To get around this, ladies were permitted to gently squeeze the hand of a man she had already been introduced to, though the etiquette handbooks of the time warned against excessive displays of affection.

Between women, the rules were a bit more relaxed. Sisters were permitted to kiss one another on the cheek. A lady might also kiss a female acquaintance or friend briefly on the cheek. Again, however, such open displays of familiarity and affection were to be confined to women of the same social rank. At the same time, a lady may permit a man to put her shawl around her shoulders or help her on and off a horse. She might even offer him her hand to kiss. But lingering touches or overly-passionate hand kisses would most definitely become the subject of gossip.

DO keep quiet about any extra-marital affairs

The Regency Era wasn't as stuffy as some accounts might portray it as being. The big cities of England, and in particular London, were growing and modernizing quickly. And this, of course, meant that there were many vices for a gentleman to enjoy, including drinking, gambling and meeting with women of 'ill repute'. A lady was not only expected to steer well clear of such decadent activities but was, moreover, fully expected to pretend they didn't even exist. As strange as it might sound, women of the time were to feign ignorance about all 'male activities', however much this might hurt her, or simply inconvenience her.

For instance, ladies were, as a rule, to avoid walking or driving their carriages down certain streets in London. St James's Street, home to several gentleman's clubs, was strictly off-limits. Similarly, Piccadilly was seen as potentially corrupting for delicate ladies, so the 'fairer sex' was advised to stay away. Any woman seen walking down either thoroughfare without a male chaperone accompanying her should expect to be the subject of much malicious gossip, with her character called into question.

But it wasn't all bad. For their part, husbands were expected to ensure that his extra-curricular activities remained completely separate from his marriage. To bring scandal upon a lady was the height of ungentlemanly behavior in Regency England. Furthermore, for their part, a lady could take a gentleman lover, so long as she had first given birth to a child – and thus, provided her husband with an heir (and, ideally, with two children, or 'an heir and a spare'). It goes without saying, however, that any affairs should be conducted completely discreetly, so a lady should choose her extra-marital lovers extremely carefully indeed.

What Do Jane Austen's Novels Have to Tell Us About Love and Life Today?

by Adam Kirsch and Anna Holmes

Each week in *Bookends*, two writers take on questions about the world of books. This week, Adam Kirsch and Anna Holmes discuss what Austen's work says now, 200 years after "Emma" was published.

Adam Kirsch

One way to come to grips with the foreignness of "Emma" — a foreignness that is too easily obscured by its fame and the overly cozy reputation of its author — is to think about all the things we expect from novels but will have a hard time finding in its pages. A short list would include: physical descriptions of people or places; any activity performed to earn money; current events, or almost any sense of a world beyond the village of Highbury; and anyone motivated by evil or cruelty. To readers uncharmed by Austen — and there have always been at least a few — all these absences add up to sterility. That was Emerson's word in his notorious journal entry: "I am at a loss to understand why people hold Miss Austen's novels at so high a rate, which seem to me vulgar in tone, sterile in artistic invention, imprisoned in the wretched conventions of English society, without genius, wit or knowledge of the world. Never was life so pinched and narrow."

To the transcendentalist mind, Austen is mired in the empirical; and Emerson's objection should not be too quickly dismissed. For it points the way to what is, after 200 years, the most striking thing about "Emma": the way it accepts its world, rather than rebelling against it. Modern literature, after all, is a literature of dissatisfaction. Why are things the way they are? Why am I the way I am? Why are we here? These are the kinds of questions we find in, say, Tolstoy, and which make him the paradigmatic "serious" novelist. Emerson thought that Austen wasn't serious because such questions didn't interest her.

This is not to say that Austen believes that the world Emma Woodhouse lives in is perfect, or that the people in it are especially virtuous or even likable. Take Emma's father, the hypochondriacal Mr. Woodhouse, who can't abide the thought of anyone going outdoors or eating without imagining dire consequences for their health. Austen plays Mr. Woodhouse's idiosyncrasy for laughs — like other comic characters in the novel, or in Shakespeare's plays, he is funny because he is so self-consistent, because he can always be counted on to think and say the same things.

Yet it is easy to imagine that in the hands of a different writer, Mr. Woodhouse would be a villain: the domestic tyrant whose egotism ruins the life of his daughter. To Samuel Butler, Mr. Woodhouse would be an argument against the institution of the family.

Dostoyevsky might gladly imagine someone putting a hatchet in his head. Such possibilities do not emerge in “Emma” because it is a comedy — which means, for Austen, a story in which the world finally gives everyone what he or she deserves. This is most obvious when it comes to marriage. There are several marriages in the novel, and each one is “right,” in both socioeconomic and personal terms. The richest people in the story, Emma and Mr. Knightley, are also the most perceptive and have the best judgment; the poorest, Harriet Smith and Robert Martin, are unpolished but virtuous and well intentioned.

The idea that social life is just — on the marriage market and elsewhere — is the greatest fiction in Jane Austen, and the one that makes her happy endings possible. Ideologically, this makes “Emma” a highly conservative novel. (It is not coincidental that the only really unlikable people in the book, Mr. Elton and his snobbish bride, are the ones who threaten the class structure of Highbury with their upward mobility.) But it is also the key to her wonderfully intimate imagination of happiness. Few books make the reader as happy as “Emma,” because few depict so well the joy of being understood, the way Mr. Knightley understands Emma Woodhouse. For all of Austen’s heroines, it is this sense of being truly seen, of marrying a man who loves them as they really are, that is the great reward. The institution of marriage, like the novel itself, has changed greatly since Austen’s time; but as long as human beings long for this kind of mutual recognition and understanding, “Emma” will live.

Anna Holmes

Although frustrations and fears, miscommunications and misreadings, inflated egos, social jockeying and the privileging of female youth still persist, the situation has improved considerably with regard to love and relationships — especially for women.

This is not to say that the characteristics of courtship in Jane Austen’s era are in need of renunciation: I’m not convinced, for example, that modern methods of human interaction — say, showing off on Instagram or rat-tat-tatting away on sites like OkCupid — are really any better than the epistolary intrigues and conversational country strolls of the early 19th century, at least those depicted in her books. I also believe there is something — a lot, actually — to celebrate in the ways that Austen’s novels, particularly “Emma,” offer insight into the revolutionary changes for women that have taken place over the two centuries since publication. Such changes include a growing economic independence that has freed them from the pressures to seek both financial stability and long-lasting love in the form of one perfect person.

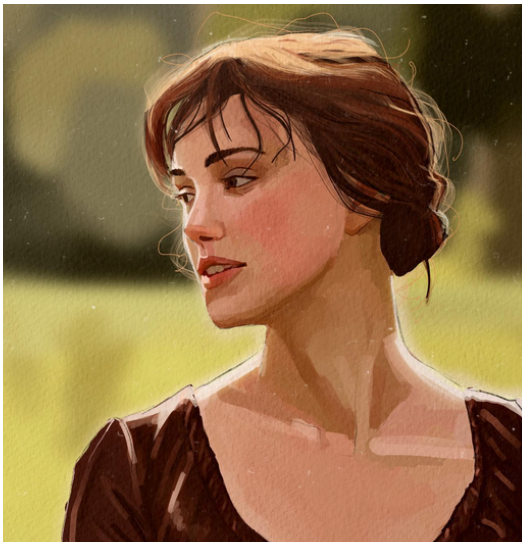
For those unfamiliar with the story, “Emma” concerns a beautiful, talented and clever young woman with a penchant for meddling in the private lives of friends and foes alike. She especially loves playing the role of matchmaker, though she herself has no desire to enter into marriage. And who can blame her?

The men around her are a middling bunch, and thanks to the attentions and fortune of her wealthy father, to whom she is also strongly attached, she is sufficiently secure, economically and emotionally.

It's fair to say, then, that "Emma" — the novel and the character — anticipates how profound a role the large-scale economic independence of women would later play in altering the nature of relationships and marriage. Fewer women are marrying, and many are marrying older. (Emma does eventually marry, at the ripe old age of 21.) "I don't know that Austen could have envisioned a world in which marriage was in no way compulsory," Rebecca Traister, the author of the forthcoming book "All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation," told me. "I think the temptation when we read Austen can be to romanticize it, but in fact the world she's skewering is one of enormous constriction for women, a world that is, thankfully, unrecognizable to us now in a lot of ways."

In addition to reflecting how women's economic autonomy creates freedom in other areas of their lives, Emma Woodhouse is a powerful example of a woman who puts herself first, placing a greater value on her needs and desires than on those of many of the men around her. Embedded within Austen's comedy of manners is the subtle but sustained assertion that women should concentrate less on whether they are worthy of a potential suitor and more on whether a potential suitor is worthy of them.

"Emma perceived that the nature of his gallantry was a little self-willed," Austen writes of Frank Churchill, a young man engaged in an apparent campaign to win Emma's hand. "Had she intended ever to marry him, it might have been worth while to pause and consider, and try to understand the value of his preference, and the character of his temper; but for all the purposes of their acquaintance, he was quite amiable enough." It's a small but striking and instructive demonstration, the careful way Emma appraises the character of the various men who jockey for her attentions and those of the women around her. We could all learn from her example.



Art by Dunja



Art by Flo Minowa

Watching/Reading List

Things to read and watch if you love the world of Jane Austen!

Movies/Shows

- *Clueless* (1995)
- *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001)
- *Becoming Jane* (2007)
- *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2016)
- *Modern Persuasion* (2020)
- *Love and Friendship* (2016)
- *Sanditon* (2019)
- *Fire Island* (2022)
- *Austenland* (2013)
- *The Jane Austen Bookclub* (2007)
- *Bridgerton* (2020-present)
- *The Lizzie Bennett Diaries* (2012)



Books

- *Among the Janeites: A Journey Through the World of Jane Austen Fandom* by Deborah Yaffe
- *Jane Austen, Game Theorist* by Michael Suk-Young Chwe
- *Jane Austen at Home* by Lucy Worsley
- *The Jane Austen Project* by Kathleen A. Flynn
- *Eligible* by Curtis Sittenfeld
- *The Austen Escape* by Katherine Reay
- *Jane of Austin: A Novel of Sweet Tea and Sensibility* by Hillary Manton Lodge

