

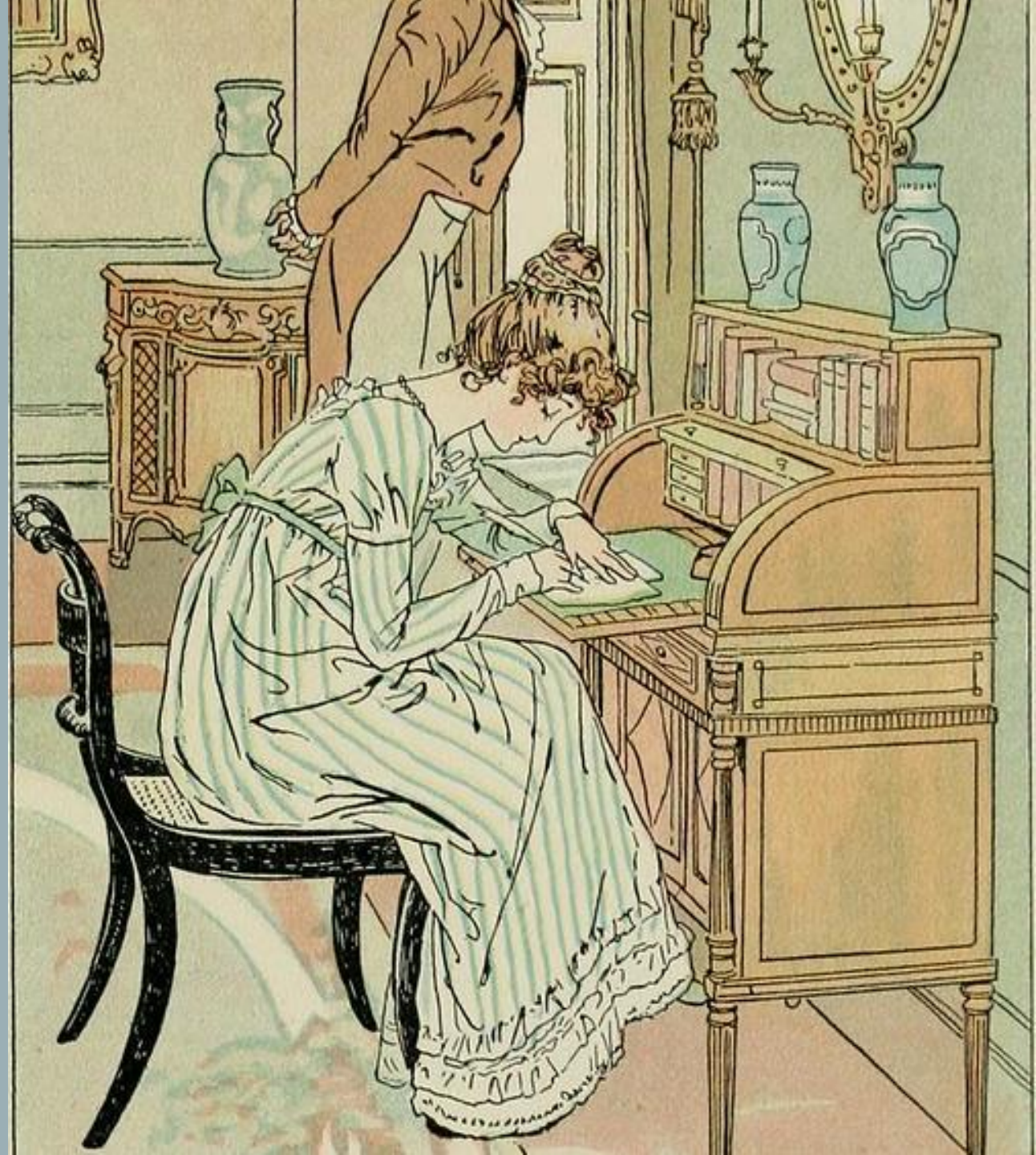


P E R S U A S I O N

ADAPTED FOR STAGE BY MELISSA LEILANI LARSON

BASED ON THE BOOK *PERSUASION*, BY JANE AUSTEN

DRAMATURG'S NOTE:
A WOMAN'S WORLD



Jane Austen is one of the most well known, beloved, and respected female writers of the Regency era, and her stories have been adapted into dozens of theatrical, film, and radio productions spanning centuries. Her books are known for containing complex and interesting female protagonists, women that were not only witty and charming, but also deeply flawed. Austen only wrote six novels in her relatively short life, all of which share a general theme of women navigating their lives through the thick and rigid social structure of the 18th century in pursuit of love and friendship.

She wrote happy novels, not to say that they are without pain, her characters are held back by the trauma of their pasts or their current social and economic status, but always seem to overcome all odds in the end. Her novels showed brightness and happiness at a time when England desperately needed something to feel happy about.

Austen begins the last chapter of her novel *Mansfield Park* with the line “Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery” a line which I believe encompassed her writing style and the stories she wanted to tell. In a world where women were not able to control most aspects of their financial and personal lives, Austen regained control of the narrative, bringing life and humanity to her characters while not shying away from the injustices of women and their social stations.

I believe this adaptation, written by the brilliant Melissa Leilani Larson, stays true to the spirit of the original text, showcasing each character with elaborate human experiences from the lowest lows to the highest highs, while also being incredibly funny and clever. Throughout this study guide you’ll find information on the life of Jane Austen as well as the social customs of the 18th century that contributed to creating the conflicts within this play that will hopefully help you as the audience understand these characters more intimately.

-Sage Peacock, dramaturg

JANE AUSTEN'S
LIFE AND WORK

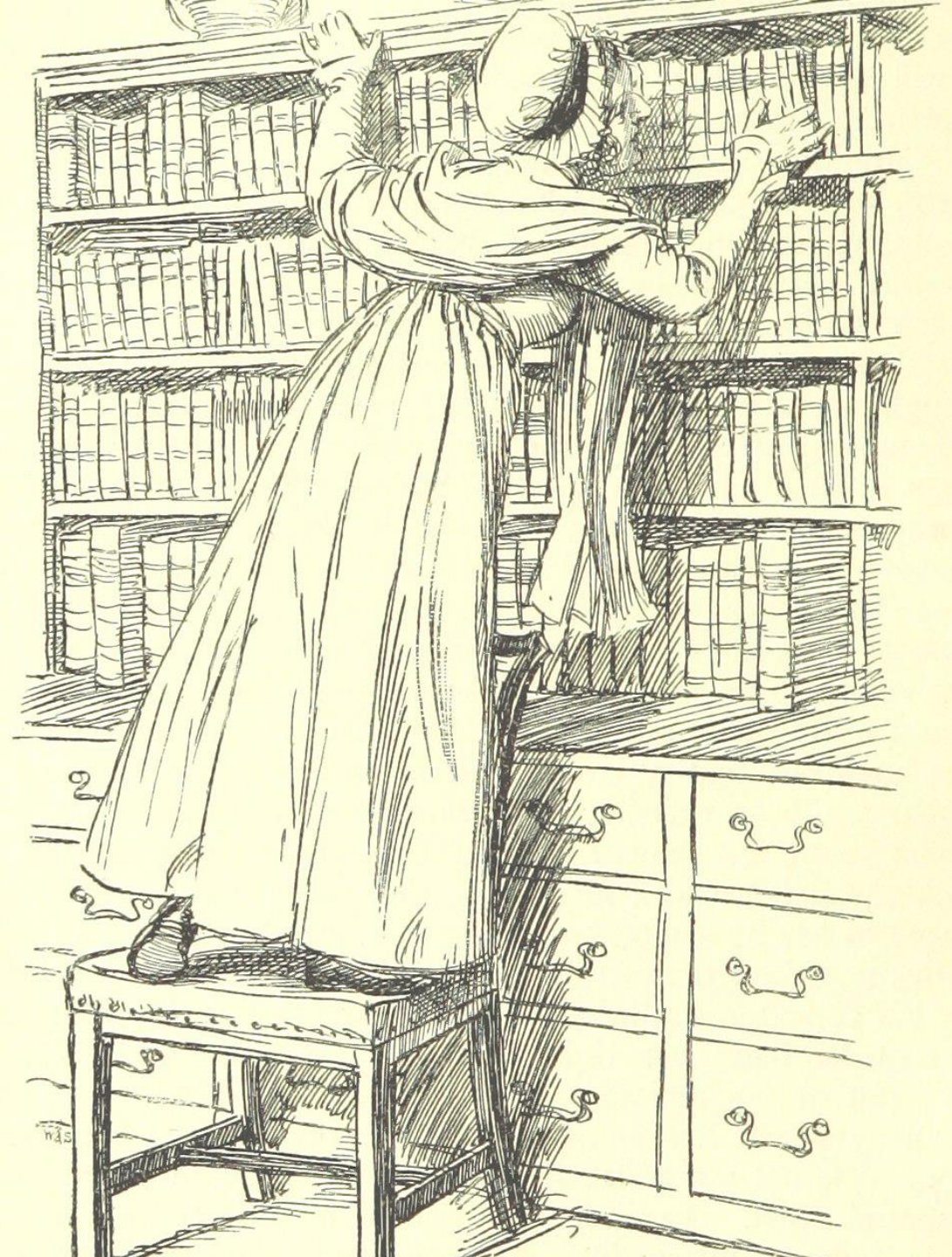


Image: Northanger Abbey: and Persuasion

“HE AND I SHOULD NOT IN THE LEAST AGREE, OF COURSE, IN OUR IDEAS OF NOVELS AND HEROINES. PICTURES OF PERFECTION, AS YOU KNOW, MAKE ME SICK AND WICKED.”

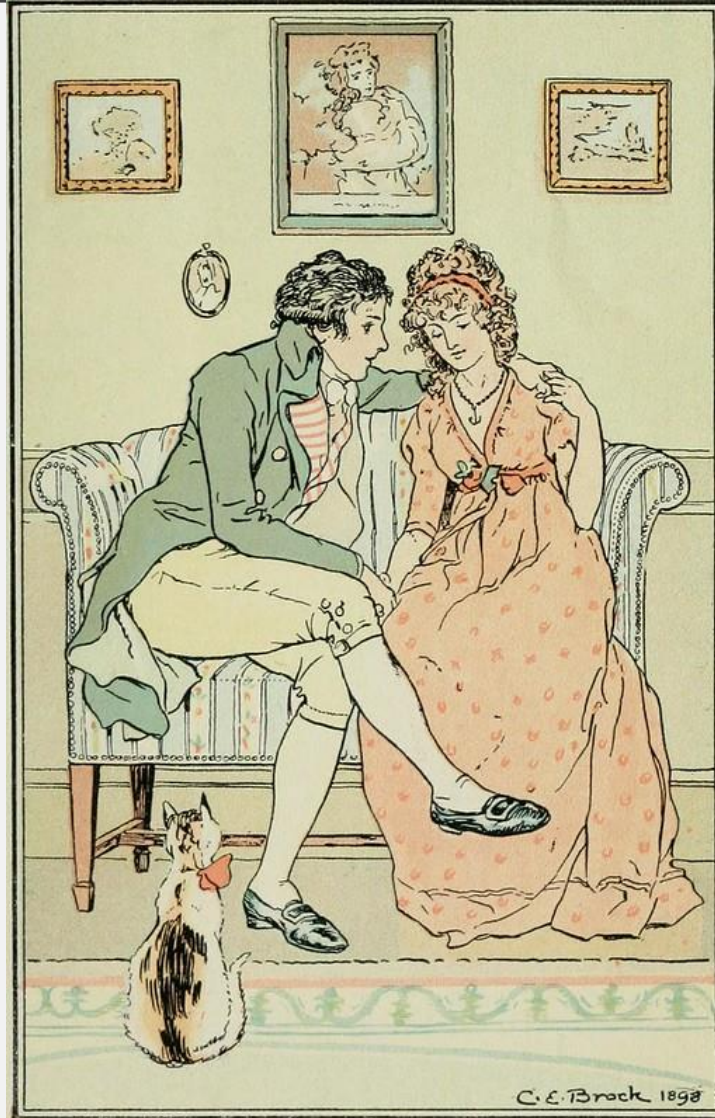


Image: *The Novels and Letters of Jane Austen*

- Jane Austen was born December 16, 1775 in Steventon, Hampshire, England
- She was the 7th of 8th children
- Grew up in a home that fostered creativity, with unlimited access to a fully stocked library, and all the tools to develop a well rounded imagination
- She was extremely close with her only sister, Cassandra. Most of what we know about Austen's personal life comes from very detailed and sassy letters between the two sisters
- Jane never shied away from sharing what she really thought about her neighbors, friends, and suitors, with the kind of candor found only between two best friends/siblings

"MRS. B. AND TWO YOUNG WOMEN WERE OF THE SAME PARTY, EXCEPT WHEN MRS. B. THOUGHT HERSELF OBLIGED TO LEAVE THEM TO RUN ROUND THE ROOM AFTER HER DRUNKEN HUSBAND. HIS AVOIDANCE, AND HER PURSUIT, WITH THE PROBABLE INTOXICATION OF BOTH, WAS AN AMUSING SCENE."



Image: *The Novels and Letters of Jane Austen*

C. E. Brock 1898.

“I CANNOT ANYHOW CONTINUE TO FIND PEOPLE AGREEABLE;
I RESPECT MRS. CHAMBERLAYNE FOR DOING HER HAIR WELL,
BUT CANNOT FEEL A MORE TENDER SENTIMENT. MISS
LANGLEY IS LIKE ANY OTHER SHORT GIRL, WITH A BROAD
NOSE AND WIDE MOUTH, FASHIONABLE DRESS AND EXPOSED
BOSOM. ADM. STANHOPE IS A GENTLEMAN-LIKE MAN, BUT
THEN HIS LEGS ARE TOO SHORT AND HIS TAIL TOO LONG.”

While Austen wrote six novels about love and marriage, she herself never married, although she had a few romances that we know of. In 1795 Austen met Tom Lefroy, who we know from her letters to Cassandra, was a man of great interest to her. But after several balls attended together, it is suspected that Lefroy was sent back to Ireland by his family in an effort to separate the two lovers because they didn't believe Jane to be a suitable match given that she had no dowry. Her heartbreak over the forced separation carried with her for many years, similar to Anne and Wentworth's situation and heartbreak featured here in *Persuasion*.

During her life, Austen could not publish under her name as she was an unmarried woman- so she chose the tagline "By A Lady"



'He looked surprised, displeased, alarmed.'

In 1802 she met Harris Bigg-Wither, who after several encounters, proposed to Jane, which she accepted. Although the relationship was not meant to last, as Jane called off the engagement the very next day. The reason for the split we can only speculate as many of her letters from around that time were burned after Austen's death, but historians believe she accepted out of duty and security, but refused out of a lack of love between the two.

JANE AUSTEN DIED ON JULY 18TH, 1817 OF AN UNKNOWN ILLNESS THAT IS SPECULATED TO HAVE BEEN ADDISON'S DISEASE OR DISSEMINATED TUBERCULOSIS. IN HER LIFETIME SHE PUBLISHED FOUR NOVELS, *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*, *EMMA*, *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*, AND *MANSFIELD PARK*. AFTER HER DEATH HER BROTHER HENRY AND SISTER CASSANDRA PUBLISHED *NORTHANGER ABBEY*, THE FIRST NOVEL SHE WROTE, AND *PERSUASION*, THE LAST NOVEL SHE WROTE.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS OF THE 18TH CENTURY



“AIM AT PERFECTION, OR YOU WILL NEVER REACH TO AN
ATTAINABLE HEIGHT OF VIRTUE.” - LADY PENNINGTON
*AN UNFORTUNATE MOTHER’S ADVICE TO HER ABSENT
DAUGHTERS*



Social customs during the Georgian and Regency era of England were incredibly strict by today's standards and an unwillingness to follow these social rules would result in the social ostracizing of the offending party which could affect their relationships, job status, and living situations.

Men were generally expected to be gentlemanly, aloof, and educated, while women were expected to be lively, virtuous, and have a “gentleness of spirit” as John Gregory wrote in *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*. Conduct books such as these were quite popular at this time and were even read by Jane Austen herself. These books helped create rigid rules followed by country folk and city dwellers alike.

CONDUCT RULES OF THE 18TH CENTURY

- Gentleman must rise when a woman enters the room
- Visitors must stay no more than 30 minutes as to not overstay their welcome
- Any letters men write must be written on plain paper
- Shake hands with your right hand while your left hand removes your hat
- Do not offer someone a chair you were just sitting in
- When leaving a party you must talk to the hostess and compliment her
- Gentlemen are not to brag or boast about their superior station or finances
- If you are visiting in the afternoon, you must arrive between 3pm and 6pm
- If someone uses foul language or you're in a stressful situation, it is appropriate for ladies to faint to show their distaste.
- Women cannot be alone with men unchaperoned, unless walking to church together or taking a walk in the park.
- Women may kiss their friends on the cheek, permitted that they are of the same social rank, but are not to show overt attention to men
- You could visit someone of a lower station than you, but cannot visit a higher station without a proper invitation
- You can only promenade in Hyde Park between 5pm-6pm
- While eating dinner you can only talk to those on your immediate left or right

WHERE IN THE PLAY DO YOU SEE
CHARACTERS INTENTIONALLY
BREAKING THE SOCIAL RULES?

WHAT SOCIAL NORMS DO WE HAVE
TODAY THAT SEEM ODD OR
OUTDATED?

BALLS AND DANCES WERE INCREDIBLY POPULAR DURING THIS TIME
AS IT WAS ONE OF THE FEW SOCIAL OUTINGS WOMEN WERE ALLOWED
TO ATTEND.

THESE ALSO HAD STRICT RULES THAT WERE ENFORCED BY THE
“MASTER OF CEREMONIES”, A ROLE THAT BECAME QUITE POPULAR IN
BATH WHERE OUR PLAY TAKES PLACE.

ONCE IS STANDARD, TWICE MEANS THERE IS A POSSIBLE ROMANTIC
CONNECTION, BUT THREE TIMES IS OFF THE TABLE.

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