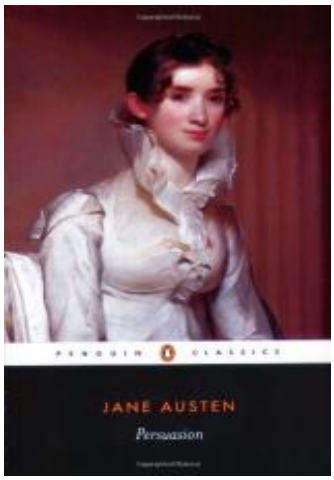
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Persuasion

by Jane Austen



About the Book

Persuasion was, like **Northanger Abbey**, published posthumously. It begins in the summer of 1814; peace has broken out; the navy is home. A vain and profligate widower, Sir Walter Elliot, is forced as an economy to let the family estate to an Admiral Croft, and move with his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, to Bath. A younger daughter, Anne Elliot, visits her delightfully whiny married sister, Mary, before joining them.

Many years before, Anne was engaged to Admiral Croft's brother-in-law, now Captain Frederick Wentworth. Her family's disapproval and the advice of an old friend, Lady Russell, caused her to cancel the match, but she is still in love with him.

Wentworth comes to call on his sister and begins a series of visits to see the Musgroves, the family into which Mary Elliot has married. This keeps him often in Anne's path. She must watch as Wentworth appears to wife-hunt among the Musgrove daughters, favoring Louisa. On a trip to Lyme, Louisa suffers a bad fall, from which she is slow to recover.

Anne joins her family in Bath, though they seem neither to miss her nor to want her. A cousin, the heir to her father's title, has been attentive to her oldest sister. When Anne arrives, he turns his attentions to her.

He is revealed by Anne's old school chum Mrs. Smith to be a villain. Louisa's engagement is announced, not to Wentworth, but rather to Benwick, a bereaved navyman who saw her often in Lyme. Wentworth follows Anne to Bath, and after several more misunderstandings, they marry at last.

Discussion Guide

1. Persuasion is Austen's last completed novel and was only published posthumously. It is often described as "autumnal," and sometimes as a work over which Austen's debilitating illness and approaching death has cast a pall. Do

you see Austen's own shadows in the book?

Would you describe it as a sadder book than **Emma**? Than **Mansfield Park**?

Austen's humor works, as always, throughout, but would you describe Persuasion as a funny book?

2. Is Anne Elliot Austen's most perfect heroine?

Do you like a perfect heroine?

3. Is Wentworth Austen's most perfect hero?

Are you persuaded that his entanglement with Louisa Musgrove was unintentional?

What do you suppose the impact of Anne's presence as spectator had on his attentions to the Musgrove girls?

4. There are three women in **Persuasion** about whom opinions wildly differ.

a. Mrs. Russell:
Is Mrs. Russell a true friend to Anne despite her occasional bad advice? How do you feel about her eagerness to match Anne with Mr. Elliot? (Does anyone feel sorry for Elizabeth when Mr. Elliot suddenly switches his attentions from her to Anne?)

b. Mrs. Clay:
Mrs. Clay is a destitute widow with no beauty, the sort of character that Austen, in other books, might be sympathetic to. Why is Mrs. Clay then such an unsympathetic character? What is so despicable about her hopes of marrying Sir Walter? Are you persuaded that Mr. Elliot could be bullied into marrying her?

c. Mrs. Smith:
Mrs. Smith is the most controversial character of all. Like Colonel Brandon in Sense and Sensibility she allows a friend for whom she professes to care to come perilously close to a disastrous marriage without saying a word to stop it. Did you find this forgivable in Colonel Brandon? Do you find it forgivable in Mrs. Smith? It is quite likely that Mrs. Smith's property in the West Indies included slaves. Were you picturing the restored and contented Mrs. Smith at the book's end as a slave owner?

5. Sir Walter Elliot believes that cold weather has an unfortunate effect on women's beauty. Do you agree? How about hot weather? In which weather do you personally look your best?

6. Mansfield Park is a book that seems to regret change, to value stasis, and the traditional. What about **Persuasion**?

What values do the men of the navy bring to the society of the book?

What value is placed on titles and the aristocracy?

Is the society of **Persuasion** in flux and if so does Austen approve of its direction?

7. In a particularly famous passage Anne Elliot says that men have had the pen in their hands when assigning strengths and weaknesses to the sexes. Now that the pen is in Austen's hands what does she use it to say about men and women?

8. Captain Wentworth has doubts about the marriage of Captain Benwick and Louisa Musgrove. How do you rate their chances of happiness? Will they be happier than Charles and Mary Musgrove?

9. In Bath Anne begins to believe that Wentworth still cares for her. Why can't she simply tell him she is uninterested in Mr. Elliot? Does this drive you nuts? Would you say something to him if you were Anne?

Is it still the man's job to pursue, the woman's to be pursued?

10. Are you as troubled as I am about the passages that refer to the death of Dick Musgrove?

11. Explain the title.

Author Bio

Though the domain of Jane Austen?s novels was as circumscribed as her life, her caustic wit and keen observation made her the equal of the greatest novelists in any language.

Born the seventh child of the rector of Steventon, Hampshire, on December 16, 1775, Austen was educated mainly at home. At an early age she began writing sketches and satires of popular novels for her family?s entertainment. As a clergyman?s daughter from a well-connected family, she had ample opportunity to study the habits of the middle class, the gentry and the aristocracy. At 21, she began a novel called ?The First Impressions,? an early version of PRIDE AND PREJUDICE. In 1801, on her father?s retirement, the family moved to the fashionable resort of Bath. Two years later she sold the first version of NORTHANGER ABBEY to a London publisher, but the first of her novels to appear in print was SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, published at her own expense in 1811. It was followed by PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (1813), MANSFIELD PARK (1814) and EMMA (1815).

After her father died in 1805, the family first moved to Southampton then to Chawton Cottage in Hampshire. Despite this relative retirement, Jane Austen was still in touch with a wider world, mainly through her brothers; one had become a very rich country gentleman, another a London banker, and two were naval officers. Though her many novels were published anonymously, she had many early and devoted readers, among them the Prince Regent and Sir Walter Scott. In 1816, in declining health, Austen wrote PERSUASION and revised NORTHANGER ABBEY. Her last work, SANDITION, was left unfinished at her death on July 18, 1817.

Austen was buried in Winchester Cathedral. Her identity as an author was announced to the world posthumously by her brother Henry, who supervised the publication of NORTHANGER ABBEY and PERSUASION in 1818.

Critical Praise

"These modern editions are to be strongly recommended for their scrupulous texts, informative notes and helpful introductions"

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